Article

Post-Custodialism for the Collective Good: Examining Neoliberalism in US – Latin American Archival Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections at the University of Texas at Austin applies post-custodial archival methods in pursuit of a new vision of digital archival practice and the transnational construction of historical memory. This work seeks to develop a practice for digital archiving that enables the redistribution of resources while centering communities as contributors and owners of their own documentary heritage. Although LLILAS Benson has successfully built partnerships and continues to manage widely recognized collections using a post-custodial model, the anti-colonial framework through which this work has been understood does not fully account for the power imbalances at play. Using Cifor and Lee's survey of neoliberalism in the archives as a launching point, this article considers how neoliberalism has shaped post-custodial practices at LLILAS Benson, focusing on ideas and practices of labor, digitization, and the common good. Through this analysis, the authors describe not a static set of methodologies, but rather an ongoing process of learning, unlearning, and restructuring in pursuit of a collective good.

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2015, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections held a symposium to celebrate the launch of the newly established Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI), an online digital repository for materials relating to the history of human rights in Latin America. [1] The symposium brought together librarians and researchers at the University of Texas with representatives from Latin American partner organizations for roundtable conversations "on documenting armed conflict and human rights, documenting the African diaspora in the Americas, and new visions for the use of archival materials in scholarship and community activism." [2] It was characterized by a shared optimism about the potential of post-custodial digital archives to enable a new vision of digital practice and the transnational construction of historical memory. As we approach five years since the launch of the LADI platform, we use this article to reflect on the implementation of this model and think critically about the role of colonial and neoliberal thought in our ability to successfully fulfill this vision. [3]

LADI is one of a number of initiatives at LLILAS Benson that utilizes the post-custodial model of archival collection. Through this model, LLILAS Benson establishes contractual partnerships with smaller, limited-resourced institutions with archival holdings, including community archives and non-profit organizations based in Latin America. The institutions maintain custodianship over the original materials and intellectual rights over digital copies, while LLILAS Benson provides training, funding, and support to produce and preserve digital surrogates, and creates online access to the collections. Designed to be mutually beneficial, this model strives to "[democratize] the

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[1] This article was produced through a collaborative writing process led by Hannah Alpert-Abrams, with significant and meaningful contributions from all three authors. The work also benefited from feedback from the Archives and Social Justice Reading Group at The University of Texas at Austin. LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections is made up of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, an academic center that is part of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Benson Latin American Collection, a library and special collections that is part of the University of Texas Libraries.

[2] "Post-Custodial Archiving Project Concludes with Workshop and Symposium," *University of Texas Libraries: Announcements*, November 9, 2015. Retrieved from https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/benson/announcements/post-custodial-archiving-project-concludes-workshop-and-symposium.

[3] First person here refers to the named authors of this paper. Though none of us were involved in the early stages of post-custodial archiving at LLILAS Benson, we have all been affiliated with LLILAS Benson as students since 2015. We took up our full staff positions as part of the Digital Initiatives unit between July 2017 and January 2018.

power dynamic of archives" by reframing LLILAS Benson as digital stewards and collaborative partners rather than simply custodians.[4]

Post-custodial initiatives at the University of Texas incorporate a justice-oriented mission and an anti-colonialist ethic.[5] The first intentionally post-custodial project, the Human Rights Documentation Initiative, sought to preserve video and born-digital materials belonging to the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center (KGMC) in Rwanda. As the project team explained, the post-custodial model was chosen by LLILAS Benson because it allowed KGMC to memorialize the Genocide by maintaining custody, while supporting the KGMC's mission to educate Rwandans against genocide ideology by providing broader access to the collection.[6] This model is particularly effective in the context of human rights collections, where international intervention can be politically useful.

The post-custodial model further serves LLILAS Benson by helping to correct for the long history of colonialist collecting practices in transnational librarianship.[7] Colonial models of archival acquisition have been defined by the extraction of documentary heritage from affiliated communities, and its concentration in colonial centers such as England, Spain, France, and, later, the United States. This is the model that informed the University of Texas' early acquisitions of Latin American materials, which began in 1921. While library and archival practices have changed significantly since those early days, the work of undoing the legacy of our colonial past is ongoing. Post-custodial projects can serve as a response to this history: another early project, the *Primeros Libros de las*

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[4] Christian Kelleher, "Archives without Archives: (Re)Locating and (Re)Defining the Archive Through Post-Custodial Praxis," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1.

[5] See: Christian Kelleher, T-Kay Sangwand, Kevin Wood, and Yves Kamuronsi, "The Human Rights Documentation Initiative at the University of Texas Libraries," *New Review of Information Networking* 15 (2010): 94-109; T-Kay Sangwand and Kent Norsworthy, "From Custody to Collaboration: The Post-Custodial Archival Model at the University of Texas Libraries" (presentation, The Texas Conference on Digital Libraries [TCDL], Austin, TX, May 8, 2013), https://tdl-ir.tdl.org/handle/2249.1/66973; Christian Kelleher, "Archives Without Archives."

[6] Kelleher, Sangwand, Wood, and Kamuronsi, "The Human Rights Documentation Initiative," 102.

[7] In this discussion, we use the terms "colonial" and "anti-colonial" to describe our practice. We define "colonialism" as the act and the systems of subjugation of one group of people by another. "Anti-colonial" refers to an ideology opposing colonialism and its ongoing legacy. "Postcolonial" refers to the study of the ongoing legacy of colonialism and imperialism. "Non-colonial" is defined here as not being colonial in structure. We do not use the term "decolonial" to situate our discussion because we do not incorporate repatriation models in our digital initiatives. As we understand it, repatriation functions as a core aspect of indigenous decolonial thought and thus does not directly manifest itself in our current work.

Américas, was explicitly framed as a digital repatriation effort that would return documentary heritage to affiliated communities in the form of digital surrogates.

Through the post-custodial model, we have sought to develop a practice for digital archiving that would enable the redistribution of resources while centering communities as contributors and owners of their own documentary heritage. This is a work in progress: as Kelleher writes, "Archival principles such as provenance, order, custody, value, authenticity, and standardized systems of arrangement and description may fail to serve the interests of disadvantaged individuals and communities. When not critically tested, such principles have the potential to become agents of hegemony."[8] But the effort to correct for the colonial ideology underpinning our praxis is work that LLILAS Benson staff engage in daily.

We have begun to identify certain areas, however, where the framework of colonialism does not fully explain the power imbalances at play in the creation of digital records through transnational partnerships. In Cifor and Lee's survey of neoliberalism in the archives, we recognized a gap in the way we approach our current post-custodial model.[9] Neoliberalism, which 'seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market,' is insinuated in our work in a number of ways."[10] For example: while Usonian (US) custodianship of Latin American materials is a legacy of colonialism, our efforts to develop new ownership models has depended on the neoliberal concept of information as a commodity.[11] While the redistribution of resources through grant-funded initiatives is perceived as anti-colonial, our reliance on short-term and contractual labor is neoliberal. These contradicting realities parallel a larger history in Latin America, where neoliberal interventions on the part of the United States have taken advantage of the political and economic legacy of colonialism in the region in order to exploit resources and labor, often under the guise of aid. They are made complicated by the fact that many of our post-custodial collections document these very same interventions.

We believe that the work of post-custodialism, much like social justice, is less a static set of methodologies than an ongoing process of learning, unlearning, and restructuring.[12] As part of this work, in this article we propose a model of post-custodial

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8 Kelleher, "Archives Without Archives," 17.

9 Marika Cifor and Jamie A. Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique: Opening Possibilities for Addressing Neoliberalism in the Archival Field," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, No. 1 (2017).

10 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

11 We take the term Usonian, which means "of the United States," from José Buscaglia-Salgado, *Undoing Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xviii.

12 See Ricardo L. Punzalan and Michelle Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (January 2016): 25-42. The authors cite both Wendy Duff and Verne Harris in their discussion of social justice as process, with Duff writing

archiving that actively seeks to be both anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal. We begin by tracing the anti-colonial and neoliberal ideologies that have informed the post-custodial model as it is currently understood. We then consider post-custodial practices at LLILAS Benson in order to explore the ways that neoliberalism has shaped our ideas about labor, digitization, and the common good. In each case, we identify points where our archival practice has unwittingly aligned itself with a longer history of neoliberal exploitation. We also identify sites of anti-neoliberal practice and thought.

        Our analytic approach comes primarily from our experience as archival practitioners based in the United States working with post-custodial collections. We draw on the plurality of geographical, epistemological, and methodological approaches characteristic of research in the archival multiverse.[13] Within that framework, 1) we focus on archival practices in North and Central America, 2) we depend on a Eurocentric conception of archives and cultural memory as defined by Anne Gilliland, and 3) the collections that we describe are primarily made up of alphabetic texts, photographs, and printed images.[14] Our methodology combines critical theory with close reading and historical analysis.

        We have all served as staff members within the Digital Initiatives unit at LLILAS Benson: Hannah Alpert-Abrams was a postdoctoral fellow, David Bliss is a digital archivist, and Itza Carbajal is a metadata librarian. We are not experts in the study of neoliberal ideology or its implementation in the United States and Latin America, though we all have some training in post-colonial and decolonial theory. Given our roles and areas of focus, we begin with the archives. It is through daily archival practice that the ethical choices which determine our relationship to global ideologies are made.

PART I: POST-CUSTODIAL, ANTI-COLONIAL, NEOLIBERAL

The Post-custodial Paradigm

When Gerald Ham coined the term "post-custodial" in 1981, he was naming a new era of archival practice triggered by the spread of electronic media and machine-readable

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"Social justice is always a process and can never be fully achieved" (Punzalan and Caswell, "Critical Directions," 26).

[13] Sue McKemmish, Anne J. Gilliland and Andrew J Lau, *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2016).

[14] Anne J. Gilliland, "Archival and Recordkeeping Traditions in the Multiverse and Their Importance for Researching Situations and Situating Research," in McKemmish et al., *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2016), 31-73.

documentation.[15] In the subsequent decades, a community of anglophone scholars based primarily in the U.S. and Australasia refined this argument to articulate what would come to be known as the post-custodial paradigm. Ham and others, including Margaret Hedstrom, Ann Pederson, David Bearman, and Terry Cook, argued that in the age of electronic records creation, the continuous custodianship of material objects can no longer be the focus of archival practice. Instead, it becomes necessary to decenter custodianship by shifting what was traditionally considered archival labor onto record creators. For Ham and others, this became an opportunity to reimagine the role of the archivist in creating, appraising, preserving, and describing electronic records.[16]

It is hard to read the early post-custodial writing, published during the same decades that saw the early implementation of neoliberal policy in the United States, without noting how neoliberal ideology insinuates itself into the post-custodial paradigm. Neoliberalism "requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace.[17] The commodification of information, and the valuing of technologies that enable it, is therefore fundamental to the proliferation of neoliberalism. Commodification manifests itself in the treatment of information as a good that can be packaged and sold, a practice that in turn alienates information from the processes surrounding the communal production and transmission of knowledge.

In early descriptions of the post-custodial era and paradigm, theorists grappled with their role in the commodification of information. Ham's article, for example, ends with a celebratory commentary on the role of the businessman in controlling

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[15] Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 3 (July 1981): 207-216.

[16] For early articulations of the post-custodial paradigm, see: Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22 (Nov. 1994): 300-328; Margaret Hedstrom, "Archives as Repositories: A Commentary," *Archival Management of Electronic Records*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report no. 13 (Pittsburgh, PA, 1992). For a coeval critique, see: Linda J. Henry, "Shellenberg in Cyberspace," *The American Archivist* 61 (Fall 1998): 309–327. For a non-Anglophone perspective, see Mayra M. Mena Mugica, "Coordenadas del cambio de paradigma en la archivística. Argumentos para sus rasgos pos-custodiales," in *Una mirada a la ciencia de la información desde los nuevos contextos paradigmáticos de la posmodernidad*, ed. María José Vicentini Jorente and Dunia Padron (São Paulo, Brazil: Cultura Acadêmica Editoria, 2017), 43-69. It should be noted that this article focuses primarily on the development of the post-custodial paradigm in the United States. Other applications of this theory such as those developed in Australia, are beyond the scope of this article.

[17] Harvey, *Neoliberalism,* 3.

information.[18] Writing in the 1990s, Cook similarly described the automation of archival labor, while Pederson and Bearman used a corporate framework for reimagining the archival profession.[19] To what extent, these authors asked, should archivists be leaders in the neoliberal transformation of information into a commodity of the electronic age? By abandoning the traditional focus on physical control of archival materials in favor of intellectual and legal control, advocates of the post-custodial paradigm seemed to take the neoliberal route.[20]

When Jeannette Bastian drew on the language of the post-custodial paradigm to propose a new, anti-colonial approach to archival practice, she largely sidestepped the question of commodification. In her 1999 dissertation and subsequent publications, Bastian argued that the post-custodial paradigm had the potential to create new opportunities for justice in colonial communities by facilitating access to historical memory.[21] "Custody only serves an archival purpose in the long term," Bastian writes, "if it accommodates the people and events to whom the records relate as well as the collective memory that the records foster."[22] In a postcolonial context where multiple communities and nations have equally valid claims over the archival record, Bastian argues, the post-custodial model, with the aid of electronic technologies like microfilm or the web, can help facilitate the shared goal of access across these communities. While the technologies are different, post-custodial practice at LLILAS Benson shares Bastian's focus on facilitating access to aid in the construction of collective memory.

The Post-custodial Model at LLILAS Benson

Post-custodial projects at LLILAS Benson fall along and move across a continuum that extends from the acquisition of digital copies of archival records to deeply collaborative cross-institutional partnerships. As of 2018, these projects include the Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA; est. 2001); the Human Rights Documentation Initiative (HRDI; est. 2008), the *Primeros Libros de las Américas*, the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional digital portal (AHPN; est. 2011), the Michoacán

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[18] Ham, "Archival Strategies," 215-216.

[19] Cook, "Electronic Records"; Ann Pederson, "Empowering Archival Effectiveness: *Archival Strategies* as Innovation," *The American Archivist* 58, no. 4 (Sept. 1995): 430-453.

[20] Jeannette Bastian, "Defining Custody: Archival Custody and Its Impact on the Relationship Between Communities and Historical Records in the Information Age: A Case Study of the United States Virgin Islands" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1999), 5.

[21] Bastian, "Defining Custody"; Jeannette A. Bastian, "A Question of Custody: The Colonial Archives of the United States Virgin Islands," *American Archivist* 64 (Spring/Summer 2001): 96 - 114; Jeannette A. Bastian, "Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Post-custodial Role for a New Century," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 76-93.

[22] Bastian, "Taking Custody, Giving Access," 91.

Libros de Hijuelas (est. 2016), and the first three partnerships of the Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI, est. 2014). This article focuses on work done for the *Libros de Hijuelas* project and the previous and ongoing projects associated with LADI.[23]

While implementation varies, each project follows the same fundamental model. In each case, the documents in a collection remain in the custody of the local creating institution or individual, which maintains traditional archival responsibilities including the preservation of the material object and the authentication of the record. In most cases, LLILAS Benson, through the support of granting agencies, provides the financial resources, hardware, and training that are required to digitize and describe the records, but the work of digitization and description is done primarily in the collection's country of origin. After digitization, digital copies of the records and accompanying metadata are transferred to Austin, Texas, where archivists, librarians, and other information technologists build the infrastructure necessary to provide online access of these collections through web-based platforms. LLILAS Benson, with support from the University of Texas Libraries system, ensures that the records also receive long-term preservation storage and care. Copyright over digital and material records is always held by the partner institution.[24]

Overall, LLILAS Benson post-custodial initiatives seek to provide access to and preservation of the information contained in vulnerable records. All of these collections contain materials that were created by or about vulnerable communities, from indigenous communities in Mexico to political activists in Guatemala. In some cases, there is a real risk that these records will be destroyed or sealed for political reasons, meaning that international preservation of digital copies can serve as a safeguard against destruction. In other cases, lack of resources limits the ability of holding organizations to facilitate digital access. By providing online access to these records, LLILAS Benson draws

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[23] See HRDI: https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/4022; Primeros Libros de las Américas: www.primeroslibros.org; AHPN: ahpn.lib.utexas.edu; AILLA: https://ailla.utexas.org/; LADI: ladi.lib.utexas.edu. These projects have been supported in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme. Additionally, Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI) is the umbrella term used to refer both to the digital repository built to contain a number of post-custodial projects and to the projects themselves. During the first phase, launched in 2015, materials were digitized in collaboration with the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) in Nicaragua, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA) in Guatemala, and Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) in El Salvador. The second phase includes collaborations with organizations in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.

[24] Though the question of intellectual property is beyond the scope of this paper, it informs much of the legal framework underpinning the way that these records circulate (or not) as commodities. We hope to see more work on this aspect of post-custodial archiving in the future.

on its extensive technological resources to fulfill the archival mandate, as described by Bastian, of supporting historically oppressed communities in the work of accessing their own records and constructing their own historical memory.

As archivists based in the United States, we do not have a legally valid claim to any of these collections, unlike the colonial nations that Bastian describes. We have a duty towards these collections, however, because the conditions of political oppression, environmental destruction, racial violence, and economic insecurity documented in these collections – as well as the ongoing conditions of instability that make these records vulnerable – were created or exacerbated by U.S. intervention. These interventions date as far back as the nineteenth century but were particularly impactful during the devastating years of cold-war dictatorships in Central and South America. Usonian political and economic interests during that time came together under the name of neoliberalism to shape a new interventionist policy in Latin America, made visible in cases like the U.S. support of the Contras in Nicaragua, or of counterinsurgency forces in Guatemala. The consequences of this policy are documented in the collections we are working to preserve. In that sense, they are our heritage – and our history – too.

The challenge is to participate in creating this shared historical memory without replicating or enabling the neoliberal structures of transnational inequality that were left in place in the wake of the Cold War. Our hope is that our post-custodial interventions can serve as a small step towards restitution for the interventions of our government. We find in practice, however, that the post-custodial model nevertheless accrues wealth and cultural capital primarily within already-wealthy institutions; at the same time, it tends to enhance potentially exploitative conditions, or conditions of inequality, both within our own institution and among ourselves and our partners.

This, we believe, is the neoliberal element of post-custodial practice. Neoliberal economies concentrate wealth among the already-wealthy in order to reinforce pre-existing class structures. As the early post-custodial theorists foresaw, reimagining custodianship in terms of information creates conditions under which cultural heritage can be easily extracted and repackaged as a commodity. This is true even within a system that is designed to resist forces of transnational exploitation and to correct for the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America's historical memory.

We are not without hope. In what follows, we look closely at three elements of post-custodial practice at LLILAS Benson: the undervaluing of archival labor; the market underpinnings of our digitization practice; and the co-opting of the common good in the service of neoliberal aims. In each case, we analyze underlying structures and practices in order to better understand, in the words of Cifor and Lee, "the insidious and embodied ways that neoliberalism structures from within *and* without."[25] Our approach to this work is not exclusively critical, however. As Cifor and Lee remark, archives have also been

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[25] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 8.

identified as sites of resistance to hegemony, oppression, and even neoliberalism. In each case, we consider the ways in which the post-custodial model is resistant to the neoliberal paradigm, or ways that it can be refined in order to better develop more meaningful archival partnerships for the collective good.

PART II: LABOR

The impact of neoliberalism on archival labor has serious consequences for our communities and for historical memory. Under neoliberalism, cost-cutting practices tend to accrue wealth and status to white, anglophone workers, especially those in administration or digital libraries, while undercutting economic security for all others.[26] This leads to the erosion of job security for library workers.[27] It also leads to an increased dependence on lower-cost labor, including volunteers, interns, and outsourced workers.[28] The resulting illusion that the work can be done by underskilled and underpaid workers sets a precedent that can quickly become the status quo. "This puts the long-term survival of archives at risk," Cifor and Lee write, "which challenges the archival paradigm of long-term preservation and historical importance."[29]

The post-custodial model has the potential to adjust some of these imbalances, both at US institutions and among our international partners, but this is a work in progress. In this section, we focus on labor at LLILAS Benson and on the outsourced labor of our international partners. By reflecting on these practices, we seek to illustrate how our own practice is limited by the neoliberal labor conditions that we are all subject to, and to highlight places where we might draw on post-custodial theory to push back against these limitations.

Library Work

At LLILAS Benson, the post-custodial archival team currently includes a post-custodial archivist and head of digital initiatives, a digital processing archivist, a metadata librarian, a postdoctoral fellow, a software developer, and a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). It is further supported by the work of other staff across the University of Texas library

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[26] Lisa Sloniowski, "Affective Labor, Resistance, and the Academic Librarian," in "Reconfiguring Race, Gender, and Sexuality," eds. Emily Drabinski and Patrick Keilty, special issue, *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 645–666.

[27] Chris Bourg, "The Neoliberal Library: Resistance is Not Futile," *The Feral Librarian* (Jan. 16, 2014). Retrieved from https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/01/16/the-neoliberal-library-resistance-is-not-futile/.

[28] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 10.

[29] Ibid., 13.

system, including those working in administration, information technology, and digital stewardship.

Salaries of the full-time post-custodial employees range from $50,000-$70,000, with the highest salaries going to the postdoctoral fellow and the software developer; in the case of the GRA, salaries are set by the libraries and do not include full tuition remission.[30] The wage disparities within our team illustrate how traditional archival labor, including managerial work, is undervalued compared to research and software development. Many library workers in positions such as these, especially those with MLIS degrees, also carry substantive student debt. Under these conditions, librarians often speak of receiving moral, rather than financial, compensation for post-custodial work. It is perhaps easier to undervalue these positions because of the sentiment that the work is for the common good.

Most staff positions associated with post-custodial work have been occupied by contingent workers on one- to two-year contracts, including our metadata librarian, digital processing archivist, postdoctoral fellow, and software developer. These conditions have placed constraints on our ability to achieve our archival goals. Because we need to produce rapid results, our hiring process can undervalue cultural knowledge in place of technical expertise.[31] A recent job posting, for example, asked for specialized skills, but no area-specific knowledge. Because the positions are temporary, they tend to attract early-career workers and lead to frequent staff turnover; these conditions also lead archival workers to focus on short-term goals and objectives that can be completed within the terms of their contracts. As a result, we operate without the deep knowledge that comes with long-term practice, and without the institutional memory that would enable us to sustain the many relationships on which post-custodial projects depend.

In recognition of these challenges, LLILAS Benson has created two permanent roles: first, a digital scholarship coordinator, and later a post-custodial archivist (now also head of digital initiatives). Significant investment has also been made in training staff and in documenting and analyzing our post-custodial practice, necessary work under conditions of frequent staff turnover. These investments make it possible to work effectively and even ethically within the constraints of the grant-funded model. Ultimately, however, we still have a long way to go to create work conditions that will truly ensure the sustainability of our projects and of the people involved with them.

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[30] All salaries at the University of Texas at Austin are public information and can be accessed via the Texas Tribune's salaries explorer. https://salaries.texastribune.org/university-of-texas-at-austin/departments/university-of-texas-libraries/.

[31] For a more complete discussion of immaterial labor in the neoliberal library, see Sloniowski, "Affective Labor, Resistance, and the Academic Librarian."

International Partnerships

The post-custodial work at LLILAS Benson is conducted in close collaboration with our Latin American partners, who complete most of the digitization and description work, and who receive financial compensation as contractors under our project grants. Because our partners receive significantly less financial compensation than staff in the United States, we must think critically about how this model differs from the more traditional outsourcing undertaken by digitization projects like Early English Books Online.[32] Library outsourcing has historically been used as a way for libraries to take advantage of global inequities in order to cut costs. It's often accompanied by a devaluing of the digitization and description work done by outsourced laborers, which can be treated as un-intellectual, neutral, or rote.

In contrast, we use outsourcing primarily as a way to direct funds to international partners in order to compensate them for their collection-specific expertise. This is a fundamental aspect of our post-custodial model, and it depends on fair wages, as determined by our partners, and open communication. We also accompany these funds with training and equipment. We are proud of these partnerships, and yet we find that they are limited by transnational inequities and U.S. funding structures. Our payment model, which includes third-party contracted labor, compensation for partner staff, and acquisition fees, is shaped by our funding streams and is not designed to be renewing, sustained support. The ideal of equitable intellectual partnerships is difficult to sustain beyond the completion of grant-funded projects, when we find ourselves developing metadata and description without the finances to secure continued collaboration.

By investing in the time and training of archival practitioners abroad, we hope to use compensation to support our partners in sustaining historical memory. But the neoliberal construction of labor within our own institution is sometimes a limiting factor. It devalues the labor that is most fundamental to effective archival practice, including cultural and linguistic training, institutional memory, and capacity to sustain long-term transnational relationships. As the work has gained more traction and attention, in part through grant funding, we have seen an increased institutional investment that we hope will move us towards a more sustainable future.

PART III: DIGITIZATION

In our archival practice, we adhere to the idea, first put forth in the 1980s, that the post-custodial model is possible only as a direct result of developments in digital information and communications technology. Advances in scanning technology and library publishing

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[32] Diana Kichuk, "Metamorphosis: Remediation in Early English Books Online (EEBO)," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22, no. 3 (2007): 295.

architecture allow us to "acquire" collections and make them available in a non-colonial manner for the first time. Short of halting all acquisitions and fundamentally undermining our research mission, it is difficult to imagine how post-custodial collecting might be achieved without digital technology.

In adopting this new model, however, we risk embedding into our work the biases that are fundamentally built into digital technology, both at the level of software design and in programming languages themselves. [33] We also risk forming problematic relationships with private industry, and ultimately contributing to the commodification of cultural heritage information. From the very beginning of our post-custodial initiatives, we have been sensitive to certain partner needs, such as Spanish-language software. Still, we believe that a closer interrogation of our practice can shed light on the implicitly neoliberal nature our work, and allow us to identify better practices, which will allow us to meet our project goals without reifying a neoliberal North-South power imbalance.

In recent years, LLILAS Benson has moved to institutionalize its post-custodial collecting practice by approaching new partners and collections with standardized digitization workflows already in mind. This standardization has allowed new digitization projects to proceed much more quickly and evenly than in the past, but as the following section will show, the digitization practices we have now institutionalized carry dependencies and limitations.

Digitization Workflows

One workflow that we currently use for post-custodial projects was developed for the *Libros de Hijuelas* project, which launched in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico in 2016. The size of the collection (nearly 100,000 images when fully digitized) and the limited timeframe (two years) led us to develop a workflow prioritizing digitization speed.[34] That workflow uses mounted DSLR cameras tethered to computers running Adobe Lightroom.

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[33] For a discussion of gender bias in the design of modern technology, see Nelly Oudshoorn et al., "Configuring the User as Everybody: Gender and Design Cultures in Information and Communication Technologies," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 30-63. Additionally, Paul Dourish has explored the fundamentally Western nature of object-oriented programming (and envisioned alternatives). See Paul Dourish, "'Computational Thinking' and the Postcolonial in the Teaching from Country Programme," *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* 2 (2010): 91-101. More recently, Safiya Noble has written extensively on bias reflected in search algorithms. See Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

[34] The Libros de Hijuelas project will digitize 192 books of bound land deeds documenting the privatization of indigenous land in Michoacán from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. The project was funded by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme.

Since its successful implementation in Morelia, the workflow has been publicized locally and adapted for use in other collections. By examining this workflow more closely, we hope to show how the decision-making process that led to our hardware and software choices may have reinforced a neoliberal dynamic in our partnerships.

One of our goals is to empower our partners to promote and preserve their collections without fostering a relationship of dependency. All digitization equipment used in our post-custodial partnerships is purchased by LLILAS Benson and donated to our partners for their free use after the conclusion of the project. Most of our partners have additional collections lying outside the scope of their partnership with us, and our goal is to enable them to digitize and publish these collections themselves.

The success of this model depends on the acquisition of high-quality equipment with a life-span that extends beyond the scope of the partnership. In practice, we have found this difficult to achieve. In the case of the *Hijuelas* Project, for example, we purchased DSLR cameras that were donated to the Michoacán archive at the conclusion of the project for reuse in other projects at our partner's discretion. Upon evaluating the cameras, however, we have found that we will have exhausted about half the lifespan of each camera shutter over the course of the project.[35] Given that shutter replacements are costly and potentially difficult to acquire, the archive may find that the cameras irreparably fail midway through any subsequent projects. If this happens, the archive may not feel that our post-custodial partnership was as mutually-beneficial as was promised.

In addition to the digitization equipment itself, our partners retain a full copy of the digital collection the projects create. Our partners retain the rights to independently publish, copy, and reuse this digital collection as they see fit. The specifications of our funding sources and our goal of maximizing digitization efficiency, however, may limit our partners' ability to share and reuse the digital collection themselves. The workflow we developed for the *Hijuelas* project, for example, followed British Library Endangered Archives Programme specifications in dictating that our post-custodial partners produce large TIFF image files but not the much more easily shared JPEG derivatives as well. That workflow has since become a standard approach for subsequent post-custodial projects. In the case of the *Hijuelas* project, our partners are free to generate JPEG derivatives now that the project has concluded, as we have, but it would be outside the scope of our partnership and outside the scope of what we have explicitly taught them to do in Lightroom. Were our work funded by stable, continuing public sources, we would conceivably have more latitude to prioritize our partners' needs and budget time for JPEG

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[35] For the Hijuelas project described above, we purchased two cameras with a shutter life expectancy of just over 100,000 activations each, according to the Camera Shutter Life Expectancy Database. Each camera will take upwards of 50,000 photos over the course of the project, roughly half their estimated actuations.
(http://www.olegkikin.com/shutterlife/canon_eos6d.htm)

derivative creation, or to work with our partners more closely on managing their digital collections post-digitization.

Our use of Adobe Lightroom to guide and manage the digitization workflow imposes another limitation on our ability to build our partners' long-term capacity through our digitization projects. When we launch a digitization project, we provide laptops with Lightroom pre-installed and pre-configured. We teach the workers how to navigate the rather complex Lightroom interface, and in the case of the *Hijuelas* project the workers became quite proficient at using the software, a skill which could be transferred to other projects. The cost of purchasing a Lightroom license, however, may make it difficult for our partners to replicate this approach for other projects.

Complicating our capacity-building goals further is the fact that in recent years Adobe has begun moving away from software licenses towards a subscription-based model called Creative Cloud, which requires stable internet connectivity and is significantly more cost-prohibitive. If we moved to Creative Cloud for our post-custodial projects, our partners would need to pay for both a stable internet connection and an ongoing subscription if they wished to launch their own digitization projects. For the moment, license keys for the legacy Lightroom 6 are still available for purchase. When the day comes that Creative Cloud is our only option, we may suddenly lose the capacity we have developed through institutionalizing its use.[36]

Data and Metadata

The outcomes of our post-custodial collaborations, including digital files and associated metadata, are also impacted by systematization and grant funding structures. Perceived success for completed digitization grants typically hinges on digitizing a certain number of records or books in a limited timeframe, at times structuring the collection according to standards set by the grant-giving agency or other formal institution. While we adapt

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[36] It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss at length how a move to open-source software might address the issues identified above. We recognize that neither we nor our partners are powerful drivers of Adobe's profit-driven development priorities. We regard the fact that public cultural heritage institutions, even collectively, lack the market position to drive development priorities as an effect of neoliberalism itself. We have only recently begun to investigate alternatives to Lightroom such as the open-source *darktable* (https://www.darktable.org). Nevertheless, open-source software often requires additional technical expertise to maintain and use. As a result of the demands of our grant-focused labor, we have not yet been able to investigate the issue or set local standards for using open-source software. While free and open source digitization software designed specifically for cultural heritage institutions would no doubt benefit institutions beyond LLILAS Benson alone, with so many public institutions struggling against the effects of neoliberal austerity, the funds needed to identify community needs and develop such tools are more elusive than ever.

our models to meet the needs of our partners where we are able, in every grant-funded project we find ourselves pressed by project deadlines or limited by physical, emotional, and mental capacities that lead us to make difficult decisions abruptly. Grant funding has enabled much of this important work, and in some cases has given us a great deal of latitude in shaping our ability to meet our partners' needs. Nevertheless, sustainable funding structures would support a more fully collaborative and mutualistic vision.

Metadata, in particular, is fundamental to the work of preserving and creating access to cultural heritage and research data. Under our post-custodial approach to metadata, partners decide how to describe their collections and create the collections' metadata. We choose this approach to ensure that voices traditionally silenced in or excluded from the archive are able to self-represent as much as possible through the process of metadata creation. Unfortunately, descriptive practices can easily become less collaborative due to pressures to quickly and economically describe large quantities of material. For example, during the development of the first iteration of the LADI platform, our post-custodial partners in Central America had full intellectual control over the granularity and extent of metadata generation, with minimal contributions from LLILAS Benson project staff. This ultimately resulted in disparities between each of the three original collections, placing additional responsibility on LLILAS Benson staff to normalize the metadata files for ingest into the repository system while still meeting original project deadlines. For the second phase of the LADI project, a full-time project staff member is dedicated to metadata management and development. As a result, we are able to dedicate significant work time to drafting a metadata collecting policy catered towards each partner's collection.

In order to establish a minimum baseline consistency across collections, we strive to align our post-custodial metadata with other metadata-creating initiatives at the University of Texas. While valuable for our institution, this more structured approach has reduced the full control a partner could have if they created the policies independently. Project staff, in an effort to not dictate entirely the scope and granularity of the metadata, treat policies as drafts that are susceptible to criticism and revision by the partner. Normalizing and augmenting collections' metadata in order to improve consistency across collections and meet our institutional goal of metadata standardization still remains a responsibility of LLILAS Benson.

Ideally, inconsistent or excessively broad metadata produced by a partner would be an opportunity for further collaboration and input as we collectively standardize and enrich the information about collection materials. However, grant funding directives carry strict deadlines and limited funds, meaning our current projects goals focus more on minimal deliverables than ongoing, robust, or intricate approaches to description. Grant cycles also limit the extent to which we can stay in regular contact with and devote resources to our past partners. Our goal of collaboratively obtaining rich and robust metadata is thus another victim of neoliberalism's incessant need for tangible and immediate deliverables.

Despite the mounting pressure to quickly adjust discrepancies and inconsistencies in collected metadata, the LLILAS Benson team strives to continuously reevaluate decisions and approaches as we prioritize the direct contribution of metadata by our partners. This approach models itself loosely on Indigenous Data Sovereignty frameworks that center "indigenous peoples' right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions."[37] Positioning our partners as metadata creators and decision makers allows us to provide avenues for them to take on many roles, including protecting sensitive information or developing metadata standards that meet their own internal needs. While our projects are not Indigenous-centered or driven, we recognize that groundbreaking work from Indigenous epistemologies can provide invaluable insights into people-centered practices. Post-custodial projects can resist systemic neoliberal pressures by entrusting partners to define metadata priorities, boundaries, and capacity – an ability "especially critical in a world where information is monetised and made increasingly important and increasingly valuable."[38]

Collections in Context

The above examples shed light on the ways that our digital workflows may perpetuate neoliberal trends, including the commodification of information through digitization and the neoliberal proliferation of Information Communication Technologies. The effect of this work is the incorporation of discrete cultural heritage collections into systems that, in the words of Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "embody a certain logic of governing or steering through the increasingly complex world around us," individuating us and "integrat[ing] us into a totality."[39] Computers construct their own Foucauldian governmentality through which individual behavior is regulated according to the interests of hidden power structures. By extending these systems to new parts of the historical record, and especially to records that document the history of vulnerable populations, we become part of the apparatus by which behavior is regulated and state control is enforced.

Chun argues that the proliferation of software as the locus of most computing mirrors the rise of neoliberalism: software imparts a feeling of empowerment and individual sovereignty onto users just as neoliberalism gives individual workers a sense of economic and bodily empowerment through participation in the market; in both cases

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[37] Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, "Preface," in *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda*, ed. Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor (Acton, Australia: ANU Press, 2016), xxi.

[38] Matthew C. Snipp, "What Does Data Sovereignty Imply: What Does It Look Like?" in *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda*, ed. Tahu Kukatai and John Taylor (Acton, Australia: ANU Press, 2016), 52 .

[39] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 9.

this feeling of empowerment belies hidden mediations and power imbalances which actually restrict individuals' freedoms.[40] Our post-custodial projects both resist and reinforce this. By digitizing our partners' cultural heritage collections and publishing them on the web, we facilitate new avenues of access and research into Latin America, particularly anti-imperialist struggles during the Cold War. We are also necessarily removing these objects from their original contexts: by placing the collections in a single shared repository with linked metadata and search functionality, we may be reifying the neoliberal practice of integrating all subjective individual experiences (both as expressed in the documents and as experienced by our different partners) into a single totality.

This is not to discount the benefits of digitization, particularly in the case of human rights records at risk of destruction. Digital preservation helps secure the integrity of the physical collection by discouraging documentary tampering. Further, putting disparate collections in conversation allows for new avenues of research and bolsters ongoing historical memory processes. Nonetheless, critiquing our work along these lines also encourages us to consider the way the digital collections we create and publish differ from the original materials, particularly how the affective experience of traveling to individual repositories, sifting through collections, and working in close collaboration with local archivists is lost in the digital context. Our digital collections facilitate the generation of new knowledge but may also flatten locally-created and locally-understood cultural heritage to information objects, commodifying the knowledge contained therein. Going forward, we aim to be conscientious of the fact that each act of reuse and recontextualization further alienates the digital object presented from its original context and site of meaning-making. We must also think critically about which kinds of digital reuse to accommodate for each collection and make these decisions with our partners' input.

PART IV: FROM COMMON GOOD TO A COLLECTIVE GOOD

We conclude our reflection on post-custodial work at LLILAS Benson with some final thoughts on why we do this work. Instead of depending on depthless articulations of visions for "freedom" and "equality" for the good of all, we recognize a need to critically examine and reframe our understanding of our motivations.[41] In reflecting on the meaning of the "good for all," or the common good, we observe that "state structures of organizing bodies as individuals but within tacit hierarchies that work to 'universalize' but with value categories linked to economies of power" undeniably prevent us from

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[40] Chun, *Programmed Visions*, 6.
[41] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 4.

approaching freedom or equality.[42] As a result, we witness a dissonance between our stated desire to contribute to the common good, and the impulse to produce information as public goods – that is, as commodities. In order to avoid replicating some of the neoliberal practices mentioned above, we would do better to move away from a passive nonaccountable articulation of common good and towards a more duty-bound model of collective good.

Our work as justice-driven information and cultural heritage practitioners oftentimes gets framed alongside our mission as a higher education institution, subject to the "traditional discourse of the public sphere and social good that libraries have long represented."[43] This social good, which we see as synonymous with the common good, manifests itself as a self-imposed mandate to provide access and facilitate the creation of knowledge, a goal that is considered by many to be a shared benefit usable by anyone.

In examining these values more closely, we find that the concept of the common good can no longer be assumed to be a commonly understood notion among all. On the one hand, funding sources prioritize innovative projects which are presented as fix-all solutions for societal issues. Organizations and institutions such as ours respond by saying that we can be the problem solvers if given funding – and hopefully more funding after that. With taxpayer funding sources depleted and an increased reliance on private funding sources, whether foundations or corporations, those who continue to receive money are those that measure and demonstrate their capacity to go a long way with less. Given this predicament, the production of knowledge no longer centers on advancing or strengthening our common good, but rather positioning the creation of knowledge as consumable public goods.

In the context of our work at LLILAS Benson, we have implicitly defined the "common good" as the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge through the process of collecting archival materials. Problems with this definition arise at the divergence between how and why knowledge is perceived as important and how, alternately, neoliberalism forces educational sectors to market it. When the common good in higher education is reframed as the marketable commodification of knowledge, a clear distinction no longer exists between the common good as a non-rivalrous communal gain and the economics driven competitive consumable public goods. Jonathan Cope describes this dilemma as the "discursive framework in which the value of information is determined by its ability to be monetized."[44] Digital records, much like their analog and

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[42] Ibid., 7

[43] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 9

[44] Jonathan Cope, "Neoliberalism and Library & Information Science: Using Karl Polanyi's Fictitious Commodity as an Alternative to Neoliberal Conceptions of Information," *Progressive Librarian* 43 (2014/2015): 67-89.

paper-based predecessors, very easily get positioned as gateways to the production of knowledge. Some may even mistakenly assume that digital projects automatically come with reductions in cost, space, and demands on staff. In turn these projects get framed publicly by outsiders as selfless public service achieved through righteous imperatives and limited resources, time, and long-term capacity. This framework fails to recognize the ways that "neoliberal processes have come to seem natural and inevitable parts of information, government, and academic systems."[45]

In the neoliberal paradigm, knowledge has to show itself through tangible educational gains such as degrees with the final goal of producing individual advancement and economic security through job placement.[46] As Sarah Brackmann explains, in order to exhibit a unique and competing persona under the guise of providing knowledge through scholarship, higher education institutions have historically erected barriers to access.[47] Under these conditions, "the pursuit of knowledge is no longer framed as common good contributing to public interest and democratic responsibility [but has instead been transformed into] individual responsibility, competition, and efficiency."[48] When seeking to identify the "common good" for our work, then, we find ourselves faced with a situation in which "common" refers to an elite community and "good" refers to tangible individual benefits.

Given the ways that the "common good" framework has been co-opted by neoliberal discourse, we suggest that a more effective way of understanding the value of our work is in terms of the "collective good," a framework that brings together theories of common good and collective action. Much of our work has begun to make this shift by prioritizing both the educational mandate that comes from working within a higher education institution and the desire to build new communities across sectors, borders, cultures, and institutions. This has led us to center collaboration in the discourse that we use to describe our post-custodial praxis, although much work remains to be done.

Ultimately, our archival work requires that we address the "intersecting timescapes of past, present, and future [that forces us to] recogniz[e] the difficulty in seeing one's positioning within the present."[49] Combating neoliberalism as archivists requires that we reckon with this difficulty while also recognizing the concrete sites of our power. Post-custodial archival partnerships present an opportunity to direct the distribution of resources and labor along more equitable channels, which holds the power to minimize or reverse the effects of neoliberalism, even if on a small scale. Our

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[45] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 9.

[46] Sarah M. Brackmann, "Community Engagement in a Neoliberal Paradigm," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 19, no. 4 (2015): 115.

[47] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 4.

[48] Brackmann, "Community Engagement," 116.

[49] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 8.

partnerships can also yield profound collective benefits, but only if we as archivists acknowledge power imbalances between institutions, make long term material commitments, and carefully choose tools and platforms that can accommodate a plurality of needs, practices, and perspectives. Post-custodialism requires that we continuously interrogate the context of our work and social conditions, as well as the implications of the professional decisions we make. We must recognize that whatever good we do and whatever positive vision for the future we may have, our institutions have inherited a historical debt that may shape our partnerships in unexpected or unwanted ways.

We conclude that in order to remain loyal to our mission of advancing a collective good, our work in digital preservation, management, and discovery must not "serve neoliberal aims where everything must lead to a demonstrable outcome."[50] Rather we must trust that the decisions made collectively by us and our partners will facilitate a wider access to the acquisition of knowledge, whether that occurs in the classroom or in the solitude of an individual's home. This approach decenters the focus from individual success as well as introduces a community organizing methodology that "seeks to not only reform, but also to transform unjust systems that arise from inequalities perpetuated by dominant groups."[51] Much like the organizing and social movement work that we highlight in our digital collections, we must relentlessly urge ourselves and those we closely work with to resist the normalcy of neoliberalism and strive for a more collective vision for preserving and accessing society's historical memory.

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[50] Cifor and Lee, "Towards an Archival Critique," 12.

[51] Shane R. Brady, Andrew C. Schoeneman, and Jason Sawyer, "Critiquing and Analyzing the Effects of Neoliberalism on Community Organizing: Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners and Educators," *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psycholog*y 6, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 36.

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