

## *Chapter 3:* *Archives and their Actor Networks*

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### **Introduction: Archival Actors – Hidden Figures in the Fonds**

Although countless actors converge in archives, not all are recognizable. This may be due to the document creators and their substantial agency over the identity, structure and description of archive collections. What we need to understand, however, is the nature of archive creation and how some identities have been silenced or portrayed in biased ways. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the power relations involved in the original construction of archives. This calls for an understanding of the traditional position of archival actors and how some actors have been relegated to a secondary status or even rendered invisible. We use a network analysis approach to discuss these actors, their relations, and their impact on archives.

In the first instance, the *record producer*, a public or private person or organization, creates records to control or facilitate their work with the information stored in the archive. The public field covers the government and its institutions; records are produced as part of their legal duties and according to their government system. Private organizations, on the other hand, pursue a particular interest when they make, collect and preserve records. Another traditional actor is the *archivist*, the professional who controls the information flow and organizes it in line with the administrative structure and duties of the organization. Finally, there are the *users* who work with the archives and whose abilities and knowledge play a key role in finding information.

Up until now, most of these actors have been recognized. As mentioned earlier, however, the archive encompasses many more actors, of whom the following are the least known. The first actor not easily recognized as such in the archive is the *person subject of the records* described in the files. In the public ambit, they are the inhabitants of the territory controlled and administered by the government through a bureaucratic system whose primary source is the record. The Archive of the Indies in Spain, for example, is managed according to the role Spanish Empire institutions played in the Americas, reflecting how the empire governed and controlled its overseas territories. Here the fonds<sup>1</sup> do not immediately draw attention to the original and *marginalized communities* of the time. Instead, they show them as administrative problems. In the private case, records respond to particulars directly linked to an organization or to a specific interest in documenting certain processes. In other words, *subjects* vary

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<sup>1</sup> The Dictionary of the Society of American Archivists defines fonds as “the entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator”.

according to these needs. In this case, there are two types of archives: corporate archives that produce and preserve records associated with their economic activity, and community archives that work on filling the gaps in *marginalized communities*, whose voices and representations are not regularly depicted in the government archive.<sup>2</sup> Some use *social media platforms*, which are gaining traction as new actors in the archival realm. In a few cases there are memory initiatives or projects from public authorities aiming to facilitate autonomous actions of communities to reconstruct and represent their memories from different identities and territories.<sup>3</sup>

*Archival processes and tools*<sup>4</sup> are also uncommon actors and refer to various procedures that govern the archive, such as tools pertaining to arrangement, description and access; the latter are highly relevant as access intermediates and help to produce or maintain archival power structures. The principle of provenance and the original order based on the source creator are examples of these structures. Provenance refers to management of the document collection according to the *record producer*, that is, separate from other collections so as to preserve its creation context. Implied is the control and sovereignty of the records. The original order principle is based on maintaining the authentic arrangement of the records as the producer intended.

This chapter aims to illustrate the wide variety of actors that converges within and outside of the archive. It will also look at new types of archives that emerged as a result of the biases and silences found in classic archives. The chapter builds on the dynamics of the archives, drawing attention to the people, power structures, and processes that form the actor networks associated with archives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Government archives, also known as public archives, are conceived of here as the institutions whose records are created, preserved and managed by an official organization or agency as part of their official/legal function. The structure of this archive usually depends on the territorial organization of the country and the political system (federal or central). Generally, includes federal, state, and municipal archives (among other territorial typologies), and commonly depicts the matters and concerns in the way government performs the administration of the country.

<sup>3</sup> Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CNMH, “Construcción de la memoria histórica desde las voces de los pueblos indígenas en Colombia: un camino que acompaña el CNMH,” *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* (blog), 2021, <https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/construccion-de-la-memoria-historica-desde-las-vozes-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-en-colombia-un-camino-que-acompana-el-cnmh/>.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Yakel tackled this as *archival representations*. See Elizabeth Yakel, “Archival Representation” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 151–63.

<sup>5</sup> Actor network theory or ANT analyses the configurations and connections involved in the co-production of a specific context, so it considers the role of all the agents concerned: from humans to material objects as agents in constituting a social order. This approach allows us to understand and make visible the configurations that exist in the archive, the role of material objects and processes in stabilizing master narratives, thereby diminishing the idea of archives as neutral agents. For a deeper understanding of ANT, see Bruno Latour, *Reensamblar lo social: una introducción a la teoría del actor-red* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2008).

## I. How did the actors change?

Numerous factors have caused a shift in the perspective on archival actors. One is the issue of sources and their creation context, which shows evidence of other actors in their production. Michelle Caswell, for example, introduced the idea of “the social life of records” to archival discourse in 2013, an approach that considers the significance, uses and values of a record in diverse settings.<sup>6</sup> Another factor refers to the archives' political awareness of being a government technology, where power relations facilitate the preservation of master narratives and control populations. The archival amnesty concept suggested by Tonia Sutherland shows that questioning official voices in the traditional archives allows us to see that minority groups are kept silent.<sup>7</sup> She illustrates how neglect of certain documents and preservation of others is a violation committed by state forces to actively create gaps in the archive collections and endorse presumptions about the *communities* concerned, adding insult to injury. One example of this is the case of the remains of Indigenous children found in Canada. Some of the children could not be identified due to lack of records,<sup>8</sup> causing even greater pain to their relatives and the community. As Patricia Kennedy Grimsted shows, some governments have issued norms to control national narratives with a decree that regulated them through record management and state control of documentation, in turn leading to ideological and political implications for the archives and the legitimate histories of the countries concerned.<sup>9</sup> This is evident in centralized record management systems or authoritarian governments, where control of the documentary legacy is executed through practices and policies that have a direct impact on archival theory and practice.

## II. The Original Actors: Archivists

Considering the above, the first actor figures in the classic conservative archives that come to mind are the archivists themselves. In the traditional understanding, they are the people who look after the records, act as gatekeepers to the past and help visitors find documents in a veritable treasure trove. This seemingly naïve interpretation of the archivist's job is widespread but could not be further from reality. They decide who to let in and can also prevent people or records from getting a seat at the archival table.

The problem here, however, is not just the archivist. It is also the archive itself and its link to the prevailing power structures of the time. As shown in the first chapter, these were either imperialist or nationalistic, but have become more and more community-oriented. This means

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle Caswell, “Rethinking Inalienability: Trusting Nongovernmental Archives in Transitional Societies,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 1 (2013): 113–34.

<sup>7</sup> Tonia Sutherland, “Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (June 2017): 1–23.

<sup>8</sup> Holly Honderich, “Why Canada Is Mourning the Deaths of 215 Children,” *BBC News*, June 2, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, “Lenin’s Archival Decree of 1918: The Bolshevik Legacy for Soviet Archival Theory and Practice,” *The American Archivist* 45, no. 4 (1982): 429–443.

two things:

1. Record narratives are the reflection of a certain perspective, which almost always coincides with the position of those in power.
2. Records from other perspectives are absent.

The colonial origins, the absence of specific sources in archives, and the impact of the said absence have all been widely discussed in contemporary archival studies. The discourse ranges from concepts to decolonize archives to articles on the social and emotional impact of belonging to a group that is absent or misrepresented in the sources used to write history.

### III. Archival Subjects and Users

Michelle Caswell uses the term *symbolic annihilation* to describe the realm of archival studies. The term was created by scholar George Gerbner to discuss the television representation of the effect of absence on social life. While representation is equal to social existence, absence is equal to the symbolic annihilation of certain groups in society that are ultimately marked as eternal outsiders with no place in the world. In the archival field, where history is written, being absent through symbolic annihilation means to be non-existent in major areas of world history. The absent lives of Africans in medieval Europe or Native Americans tapered down to a footnote in American history are merely two examples. It makes sense to use the term symbolic annihilation to describe the impact on these groups of being absent in society. At the same time, it also conjures up the attendant emotions. Caswell specifically uses the term in archival studies to depict the emotions that absent, silenced, or misrepresented groups must feel and how this affects their self-esteem.<sup>10</sup> It also distinguishes another point: classic archives are not the place for everyone. Migrants, immigrants, Indigenous people, women, and several other groups are underrepresented (or worse: misrepresented) in these archives.

The discourse on diversity and inclusion in society and in the archives shows why new paths must be tread. Society as a whole is becoming more and more diverse, and archive audiences are likewise shifting as a result. They will come as historians, activists, educators or private individuals and introduce new questions, viewpoints and approaches that the archive will have to answer. Without change, this new generation will visit archives and find itself either misrepresented or not represented at all. In other words, the archival audience primarily served today will be a minority in the future. Yet most archives seem unable to implement new strategies and techniques for a changing audience and instead are as undynamic as a shellac record stuck in a groove. This not only refers to the practical work, but it also means that the same narratives are being retold and the same cultural norms represented. For decades, cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, Mario H. Ramirez: "To suddenly discover yourself existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 58–59.

organizations such as archives or museums were the institutions that specified the standards and norms of what and what isn't historically or culturally relevant. While cultural objects usually gain their importance inside the cultures they exist in, these institutions re-evaluate the objects or materials they get for their collections. Some objects may lose their cultural importance because the institutions they are brought to do not register them as an object of importance. This must be differentiated because objects and records can have a value beyond their designation as culturally or historically important objects or records by institutions named above.

While all the above are recognized in the theoretical sphere of archival studies, it has yet to be acknowledged in the actual archive, where a shift in archival practice is still in the making. Diversity is mostly seen as some kind of top-down gift, whereas in reality, and this is what most corporations fail to grasp, it is a strategy to ensure the relevance of an organization in the future. If the archive has no users, what then is its use? If it fails to deliver records for a diversifying audience, why not create new ones that do? The time to adjust to our new world is already here. This need for more diversity and inclusion has given birth to two methods of altering the status quo: change the internal structures of the archives or build new archives from scratch. The latter has seen the emergence of multiple community and digital archives. The former has not yet come to fruition. Cultural organizations are stubborn and continue to work as they always have. This notwithstanding, the new generation is demanding and it is loud. Remodelling these organizations would be an option if they were to discard "diversity" and start with inclusion. This calls for a new generation with novel approaches and the power to convert these into practice. In the following, we address specific examples to illustrate these points.

#### **IV. Archival Shapers**

In his keynote address from 2017, Chris Taylor spoke of the need for diversity and inclusion in archives, not just in theory and practice.<sup>11</sup> He saw inclusion as a strategy to become more relevant to a more diverse group of users and thus in the long run more successful. While this is true, it is also true that inclusion must have a place in the future of the institution. Cultural organizations cannot simply continue to exist as they have done for decades: the flaw lies in how they work. As a result of their elitist roots, they became a privileged institution that excluded non-dominant cultures and *communities*. While diversity is often hailed as the solution, it is not the panacea for all their ills. Diversity primarily begins and ends with new staff, new staff from different backgrounds and different *marginalized groups* or *communities*. That said, the situation calls for much more than changing the system from within. What is needed now is a new work environment with more creative space to embrace multiple perspectives and experiences. Instead of expecting assimilation into existing work norms, these

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Taylor, "Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion," *The American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (March, 2017): 19–29.

work norms need to be changed if a more inclusive work culture is to be achieved. Progress on this front, however, does not begin at the bottom. It is the onus of those in leadership positions to take the first step and acknowledge that the organization has a problem, even if the solution is not yet entirely clear. Leaders need to develop a new set of skills to make the work environment more inclusive and consequently the organization as a whole. The point of inclusion should see archives becoming spaces of diverse cultures where each can tell their narratives.

## V. Citizen Archivists and Community Archives

Another approach to more diversity is new archives. The latest technologies and the internet mixed with the do-it-yourself mentality of the digital natives<sup>12</sup> have led to new archives outside the traditional institutions. These new archives frequently spring from dissatisfaction or frustration with the representation of certain groups in conservative archives. In many instances, the groups teamed up to build new archives by themselves for themselves. SAADA.org, for example, collects, preserves and even creates records to keep the stories and oral histories of its community alive. The other archival form digitalization has spawned is the digital archive. While this type is not always rooted in dissatisfaction with representation or independent of an elitist background, it still offers certain groups the independence to tell their own stories or contribute to expanding the horizon of the archival landscape. Additionally, digital archives tend to see themselves as collectors of material pertaining to current events in order to preserve what will become history in the future. Examples such as the *Coronarchiv*<sup>13</sup> are the various archives that began collecting material about the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, understanding that this event will be history for future generations.

## VI. Power relations changed with new actors

In order to explain the power structures incorporated in the archive, we need to understand how these structures are mediated by aspects such as recognition, materiality and access in the government network.<sup>14</sup> The first of these refers to the ability to be identified as a member of a community of actors that has specific features and possibilities respected and distinguished by all. Materiality is the way in which the record is created and structured, and gives attention to content form standards so that it can be preserved. Access is a means of administering power through common barriers (legal restrictions, raw archives, state secret, etc.) so as to avoid uncomfortable questions about the information stored in the archives for instance. These aspects regulate the government network in terms of trustability and interest. In this sense, it matters

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<sup>12</sup> Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, s.v. "digital native," accessed March 18, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/digital-native>.

<sup>13</sup> See "Coronarchiv: sharing is caring – become part of history!", coronarchiv, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/projector/s/coronarchiv/page/welcome>.

<sup>14</sup> This refers to the set of institutions, actors, and relations in government, supported by legal status. Individuals or Institutions not recognized in the government network become non-legitimate actors, whose records are not considered preservable in the network.

who is legally accountable for a certain activity, what is acceptable for preservation, and whose level of trust leads to access.

Two kinds of actors appear in the network: those who are recognized by the government and those who are not. This aspect is far from trivial. If recognition exists during record creation, the records are considered preservation-worthy. On the other hand, if institutions and people are not recognized, the tendency is to silence them or portray them according to the government networks own interest. Hence, if there is neither a community base nor a special archive initiative to support the collection, preservation and outreach of such records, it is highly unlikely that an alternative record collection of people's self-representations outside of government depictions would survive in the archives.<sup>15</sup>

This is what we call a conflict between legitimized and non-legitimized actors within the government network with reference to credibility and who can or cannot create trustable records. This distinction again raises questions: who creates the record? Is it an accepted content form? What level of accessibility does the record have? Thus, in the appraisal process, one considers the author of the record (among other things) and their reliability in the network to decide on record preservation. Recognition becomes a battle for a voice in the political and historical realm, where specific characteristics and purposes limit the social and institutional recognition of groups outside of traditional notions of legitimacy. It can be seen as a memory dispute in which master narratives consolidate one voice only and relegate others to second place. Transitional societies in particular face the challenge of reaching a consensus on memory, given the different actors and approaches involved in what happened, what people remember, how they remember, and how much of what is remembered needs to be preserved to avoid repetition.

In the realm of materiality, it is essential to consider the degree to which the structure, goals, and tight standards of the archive determine what is to be archived, making it problematic to preserve items beyond those norms. This creates gaps in collections and leads to the delegitimization of alternative forms of records (or content forms). Tonya Sutherland argues that the lack of recognition of various objects in the archive results in loss of memory and credit on the part of those who do not produce standardized records<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, "[...] methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced,"<sup>17</sup> meaning that record materiality should also be considered an actor in the analysis of silences

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<sup>15</sup> There are some examples of *communities* that have created to fill the gaps about themselves or situations that affect their community. See "A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland", accessed March 18, 2021, <https://archivingpoliceviolence.org/>, and "Coronarchiv: sharing is caring – become part of history!". In Colombia, a number of armed conflict victims set up their own archives to share their personal stories of the conflict and preserve the memory of their loved ones.

<sup>16</sup> Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty".

<sup>17</sup> Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 12.

and gaps in archives, particularly when written sources have a preponderance for government stewardship. Thus, some traditional archives decline to collect records that fail to fit their acquisitions and permanence policies<sup>18</sup>. *Technical tools* such as retention schedules are likewise determinants of material to be excluded from archive collections due to appraisal process policies.

Lack of trust in public authorities and records lead *communities* to raise their voices through community archives, as we have seen above, to document other perspectives with diverse material as a means of pluralizing memory and perspectives otherwise excluded from master narratives. In the long term, however, their efforts will face the test of sustainability. The only way to overcome the dilemma of not having government recognition of their archives is through a solid and supportive community that engages with the archive and the material they collect to depict their stories. Finally, although the latest technologies have enhanced the access to and outreach of archive collections, they also face materiality concerns due to media expiration. Reading devices call for substantial investment in preservation and digitalization plans for all kinds of formats, material, and platforms.

Accessibility and openness of the archive depend on the distribution of power and the decisions taken on what is open to the public. Some collections are merely available as a privilege, not as a right for everyone. In other words, policies, laws and vast institutional structures intervene to control access. In this sphere, the government plays an active role in managing and transferring information to the archives. Furthermore, intermediaries such as description guides, information system organization, and the software used to reach the document also play a part. Access tools designed by archivists, librarians, historians among other professionals are crucial, since their academic and political background are instrumental in describing a collection or implementing technology. One example is the library classification system, which is seen as a neutral tool, although it can affect information access in libraries and archives in local and specific contexts. The above has led to some classification concerns in the context of local knowledge production, particularly with categories not included in these standard systems. To avoid this, specialized and national libraries have developed local classification systems that integrate international metadata description standards and local context scenarios to guarantee interoperability between librarian systems and recognized local knowledge production. Another essential aspect to consider is heritage collections. These require the expertise of the archivist. Archivists have to address a cultural and academic background that will lead them to appropriate descriptions to enhance information access. The above portrays how archive collection analysis reflects the dominance of some of the actors concerned. Power relations can change in terms of recognition, materiality and access, which in turn rely on archive dynamics and how they are mobilized in society.

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<sup>18</sup> This practice involves the nature of the institution that keeps the records, the budget, space, and other aspects concerning preservation and the underlying aims of the said institution.

## VII. Privileged vs. Public Users

The change of actors brought about change in the records. For example, surveillance records comprise a portion of records in classic archives and, in the case of *marginalized groups*, tend to be about rather than from them. The new records are more diverse. We see community archives interviewing members of their environment in a bid to preserve their stories or oral history. Migrants and immigrants tell their stories, creating a parallel provenance from their perspective. New technologies also contribute to creating new actors and a new type of record. For a time, these were mostly written or recorded files similar to those in the traditional archives, that is, the record category not its content. With social media and the habit of sharing personal content with the world, 2021 might be the time for archival science to ask when a record is a record. *Social media* are used to share community-based content. Apart from Twitter and YouTube, which are well established, apps such as Instagram and Tik Tok can be regarded as contributing to some sort of record. For example, the content of Native American user posts on these apps often refers to their heritage and their culture. While users like @notoriouscree showcase their traditional dances in full regalia in their videos, @shinanova posts videos of her throat singing with her mother and educating others about Inuit throat-singing traditions and beliefs. User @tiamischik posts videos of her family singing traditional songs, on how to put on her tribal clothing, and on cultural appropriation. @indigenous\_baddie makes videos about moccasins and the jingle dances of her people. All of these users post other kinds of content such as selfies and dance videos, but also speak of their heritage and their culture, and the struggles they entail. These users can be seen as creators of records, too. Songs and dances are best preserved on video or as a recording, but there is more to it than that. These people preserve the culture and general content of their community, so that the records are not just *about* them, they are created by them, their tribe, their community and their cultural environment. In this sense, they are similar to community archives, records created by the community. One could argue that the only thing missing in the social media posts above is the archival environment to finally make them a record. Would they be recognized as a record? The provenance of the record is key to its recognition as valuable enough to be preserved. Although the origin is frequently vital to its recognition as a record, it does not always mirror its potential value. Colombian lawyer Carolina Botero tackled this concern: the challenge that digital memory faces due to lack of preservation policies on content issued on *social media platforms* (such as Facebook or Twitter) was specifically related to the Colombian Peace Process, government accounts, and other actors involved.<sup>19</sup> She notably addressed the role of platforms in regulating content and how regulation cancelled out the possibility of preserving the voice of those

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<sup>19</sup> Carolina Botero, “La memoria también es digital: Conflicto armado derecho de autor y otros de sus retos,” III Seminario de archivos, derechos humanos, memoria histórica y transparencia, August 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YppQLUwjPTY>.

considered terrorists, in this case the FARC group<sup>20</sup>, or even the former presidential account, which was removed following the government switch in 2018. *Social media platforms* function as archival actors, since they regulate content. Furthermore, because they each have their own policies, it is vital to recognize these and be aware of how the content is managed.

Today it is possible to share everything at any time, a development that archival players use to their advantage. Digital archives like the already mentioned *Coronarchiv* use Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to post their content. While it is easy, fast and communicative to build online archives on existing *social media platforms*, they do not come without snags. Facebook co-owns the rights to every photograph posted; Instagram has a worldwide license to re-use posted content. All of this ends once someone deletes their account, which leads to the next issue: How are social media archives preserved? Will they simply be dead accounts one day or vanish from the Internet? What if the platform these archives use shuts down? This may seem a strange thought, since Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are currently the key players, but do we know what will happen in two or three decades?

### VIII. Future Archival Actors

The provenance of both new and existing records has become a topic of discussion. The question of record provenance began with the discussion around the colonial heritage of archives and merged with the discussion on diversity, inclusion and silences in the archives. Archival collections claim to be the keepers of collective memory and the source for the writing of history. But again, whose history and society are depicted in the records? The pluralist provenance approach questions the profession's understanding of the role of creator and subject of a record. Archival records have traditionally been described as having one creator and one provenance. A pluralist provenance stretches this concept, allowing for several perspectives and a broader historical context. This new concept of creatorship allows the different actors involved in the making of records to enjoy co-creatorship. It not only applies to the creators of the original, but also to those involved in the life cycle of the records, that is, the archivists. Why should the provenance of a record be expanded? This approach is best explained with an example: In his text on pluralist provenance, Nathan Sowry presents practical examples of single creatorship that should be pluralist<sup>21</sup>. Is the creator of a police file on a case of assault the sole creator of the record or is the person interviewed about the attack likewise a creator? Are the participants in the assault and those attacked creators or *subjects* of the record? Sowry sees every single one of these individuals as creators, since all of them were actors in creating the record. Privileging one perspective renders others less legitimate, which is why these actors

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<sup>20</sup> The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) were once considered a terrorist group. In 2012, however, they began a peace process with the Colombian government that culminated in a peace agreement in 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan Sowry, "Viewing Subject(s) as Creator(s): The Need to Reexamine and Redescribe Civil Rights Collections for a Pluralist Provenance," *Archival Issues* 35, no. 2 (2014): 99–114.

should be included as creators. Given the colonial heritage of archives, the plural provenance can be used to widen a record's colonial viewpoint from the eyes of a white colonizer only to a more diverse one. It includes not only the previous objects as *subjects* but also recognizes the records (colonial) history and origin. With this new approach, *subjects* become active creators of records and have some form of ownership. They also take an active part in record life cycles. Previously seen as mere objects, records are now in the process of becoming more dynamic. New archival actors are interested in the history of the record itself and become active participants of history.

Plural provenance has the same origin as the discussion around diversity and inclusion mentioned earlier, the world has changed in recent decades and so have archives and historical research. A more inclusive approach to archives re-examines archival structures, the role of the activist in interpreting and altering records, the *subjects* and the users, and the people whose histories archives tell.

## **Conclusion**

This essay sprang from a seminar entitled Archives – Gatekeepers of the Past?. The seminar heading was an ironic suggestion that the archive represented some sort of guardian of records, a place not everyone could enter. The Cambridge dictionary points out the ambiguity of the word gatekeeper, noting that it can also mean someone who has power over others, particularly the power to decide who gets resources and opportunities, and who does not. In Internet language, it is used to describe someone who devalues other opinions by claiming they are not entitled to have one because they are not sufficiently qualified or not part of a particular group. In this sense, the ambiguity of the term gatekeeper is a perfect match for the light and dark sides of the archive.

For a long time, archives have sustained the illusion of neutrality. As this chapter has shown, however, there is no such neutrality. One way or another, each element and each person plays a part, making it crucial to recognize the situated voices on which the archival sources are based. In this sense, archives have both preserved and shaped history. We should bear in mind that preserving history calls for a broad cultural perspective on all of the performers and dynamics present in the archive, without exception.

Finally, society and the government network are challenged to recognize and integrate other perspectives into the archive to prevent biased depictions and silenced voices. This is not an easy task given society's many interpretations of a single experience. There is always a dominant narrative, making a democratic consensus process indispensable if we are to ensure multiple narratives and plural provenance in cultural and historical institutions. Furthermore, professionals, *communities*, and other actors are challenged to reconsider and learn about their own culture and that of others in order to enhance their knowledge of different lifestyles and be

aware of master narratives as a control mechanism for the regulation of society and dissent against power structures.