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ORIGINAL PAPER

Returning love to Ancestors captured in the archives: Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty

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Abstract

This paper explores the holistic needs of First Nations people in the archives to control their cultural heritage materials with dignity and respect. It highlights the importance of the archives supporting Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Indigenous people's spiritual and emotional needs are addressed by considering the support for Indigenous people's wellbeing in the archives. Models of social, emotional and cultural wellbeing are presented as alternatives to discussing the need for Indigenous cultural safety in the archives. A definition of *Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty* provides an approach to caring for historical records with dignity and respect and a framework for the local care and protection of Indigenous people's knowledge into the future. The concept of *Returning Love to Ancestors Captured in the Archives* (Thorpe 2022), extending the work of (Harkin 2019) and Baker et al. (2020), is offered as a significant reform needed in the approaches to managing historical archives. The paper concludes by sharing a case study of the *In Living Memory* photographic exhibition, drawn on images created by the former New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board to demonstrate archival approaches supporting principles of trust, benefit sharing and reciprocal relationships. Combined, they respond to the pressing need for designing respectful archiving approaches for future generations that do not reproduce harm.

Keywords Wellbeing and archives · Indigenous archives · Archival return · Indigenous wellbeing · Indigenous archival sovereignty · Reciprocal relationships · Indigenous research methodologies

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Introduction

> *While these archives cast a dominating white shadow, they also trace another history. This invisible history can be seen through the almost breathtakingly complete absence of our voices within these spaces and texts. There are glimmers and whispers and we can read through their colonising archival lies. This is a history that we can collectively give life to; our Nunga histories of creative resistance, our histories of collective love transforming abjection, and our histories that are deeply engaged in survival. We cast our own shadows. We shed our own light; it can be found shining in the midst of oppressive times.* (Baker et al. 2020, p 856)

The "colonising archival lies" described by members of the *Unbound Collective* (Baker et al. 2020) is a narrative frequently expressed by First Nations people when engaging with the archives. The archives are both a site of power and pain for First Nations people in Australia. In the seminal article *Who Owns the Past?–Aborigines as Captives of the Archives* (Fourmile 1989), Henrietta Fourmile made some of the first calls to address the contested nature of the archives for Aboriginal people grounding tensions about access, ownership and control. Fourmile painted a picture of the sense of isolation that First Nations people experience when wanting to access materials in the archives arguing that "Aboriginal people feel ill-at-ease and self-conscious when entering white institutions which emanate an entirely alien cultural presence" (Fourmile 1989, p 3). The words of Fourmile are not remnants of the past, and as members of the *Unbound Collective* have described, the silences of the archives continue today, and many issues continue to be systemic.

This paper draws on my doctoral research project *Unclasping the White Hand: Reclaiming and Refiguring the Archives to Support Indigenous Wellbeing and Sovereignty* (Thorpe 2022) and the importance of Indigenous people's spiritual and emotional needs being considered in the archives. Questions about the redistribution of power in the archives and the need for dismantling dominant archival practices and approaches are shared. Focussing on the care and protection of Ancestors and methods to build reciprocal relationships in archival practice helps us understand how the archives can be refigured to enable Indigenous agency, self-determination and wellbeing in the archival contexts. A definition of *Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty* is provided outlining mechanisms for the care of historical records with dignity and respect. It is a framework that encourages the local care and protection of Indigenous people's knowledges into the future. These approaches respond to the pressing need for designing archiving practices for future generations that do not reproduce harm but are grounded in and support Indigenous wellbeing.

A case study of *In Living Memory* photographic exhibition is used to demonstrate approaches that can assist with community engagement based on principles of trust, benefit sharing and reciprocal relationships. These reciprocal relationships are not just about encouraging greater access and use of historical

collections. Rather, they aim to increase First Nations agency in the archives, moving from documentation and sharing stories to dialogue and decision-making. While the *In Living Memory* case study provides opportunities for counter-storytelling and enables spaces for voices to speak back to colonial collections, it also calls attention to the need for major archival transformations to support Indigenous wellbeing, self-determination and sovereignty in the archives. In doing this, the paper will demonstrate the value of these participatory models being developed to enable a web of relationships to be incorporated and respected in the archives.

The contested nature of the archives for First Nations people in Australia

The 2017 *Uluru Statement from the Heart* encouraged people to connect with the deep histories of First Nations people in Australia. The statement urges public recognition of Aboriginal people's sovereignty as the First Peoples of the Nation, an expansive view of Aboriginal histories being in existence from time immemorial for over 60,000 years (Uluru Statement from the Heart 2017). The long view of First Nations history challenges the notion of *terra nullius*—the doctrine of a land belonging to no one—and repositions the connections of Indigenous people to Country as being in continuous existence throughout millennia. Currently, the archives in Australia do not encapsulate these deep histories of First Nations people expressed in the Statement. Instead, the narratives of colonisation that arose from the Australian colonial project have produced an archival legacy that is often incomplete, frequently biased and renders Indigenous people invisible or positions Indigenous people as the subject or the other.

According to Larissa Behrendt, the narratives of colonisation became in and of themselves, an essential part of the colonisation process, as "…they illustrated the reasons given to justify the taking of Aboriginal land" (Behrendt, 2016, p 184). The continuing colonial nature of the archives, enacted through their systems, structures and resourcing of priorities, continue to privilege mainstream narratives and positions. These all combine to create the stories of the archives. Claire Coleman recently wrote about the impacts of colonisation and the power of storytelling arguing that "colonisation is a process not an event" (2021, p 69).

> *Words are weapons. Stories are dangerous for they define who we are, they define our history; they can be weaponised. Stories and history are tools and weapons of war. Stories can be used as part of genocide, because if you say a people are extinct other people might believe it. Stories can be part of genocide because you can use stories to erase a culture.* (Coleman 2021, p 1)

The archives play a critical role in supporting memory keeping and supporting people's rights to have their histories, cultures, and stories documented in

appropriate ways. Fundamentally, the archives have power in holding these stories and making them accessible, usable, and understandable for this generation and those to come.

Discussing the dual nature of the archives and the need for them to be reclaimed, Kath Apma Penangke (Travis 2023) has argued that "The historical narratives of Australia are governed by a collective sense of amnesia and denial around the injustices perpetrated against First Nations people. This forgotten historical past in Australia leaves the burden of public recall to the surviving members of families and their descendants" (p 119). Calling for a more thorough interrogation of the archives by First Nations people, Travis challenges the silences present in official recordkeeping and discusses methods to reauthor colonial narratives held in the archives. The work of Travis reminds us that the archives are not neutral, and in addition, they shine a light on the ongoing failures present in the archives to support First Nations people's information and recordkeeping needs.

Against this backdrop, it is evident that significant gaps exist in supporting Indigenous memory keeping in the archives. The current archival approaches and practices continue to support the dominant culture and because of this they continue to supress the voices of First Nations people. Further, there is a lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous people's sovereignties in archives in Australia, and for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, libraries and archives are places of tension and distrust (McKemmish et al. 2011). Indeed, as Nakata & Langton have argued, the complicated history of Indigenous and coloniser relations in Australia has significantly impacted the terms of engagement of Indigenous people with the archives in Australia (2005, p 4). Currently, the management of Indigenous archives is dominated by Eurocentric approaches to knowledge management that silence the worldviews of Indigenous people and their histories, lifeways and protocols. McKemmish et al. describes these silences and absences as *archival terra nulluis* (McKemmish et al. 2019, p.285).

Nevertheless, as repositories of Australia's documentary heritage, the archives in Australia are significant for connecting with the past. The archives are vitally important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experienced the pressure and violence caused by discriminatory government legislation and policies. As Nicholls and colleagues identified, the archives then can be at once sources of reconnection, truth-telling, and painful remembrance (Nicholls et al. 2016). The records can support people searching for personal, family, and community histories and assist as language and cultural reclamation and revitalisation sources. The archives are vital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people despite the incomplete and biased nature of the records they contain. This is particularly the case for Stolen Generations Survivors who require access to records for identity purposes and to support their journey to reconnect with families and communities (Evans et al. 2020).

Unclasping the white hand: reclaiming and refiguring the archives to support Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty

My doctoral studies *Unclasping the White Hand: Reclaiming and Refiguring the Archives to Support Indigenous Wellbeing and Sovereignty* (Thorpe 2022) examined the contested nature of the archives and argued that the collecting practices of the archives have played an extensive role in suppressing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and supporting the colonial project of Australia. In the research, I assert that the archives have formed one of the fundamental "arsenal of tools" described by Irene Watson, used to dispossess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their positions of sovereign nations (Watson 2016, p 30). The systems that have enabled the collecting of documentation in the archives have been an apparatus of control in silencing and subjugating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices and histories across the country.

In part, the research examined the holistic needs of First Nations people in the archives to control their cultural heritage materials with dignity and respect. Looking specifically at the questions including:

- How is Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty conceptualised in an archival context?
- How do archives impact on Indigenous people's wellbeing and sovereignty?
- How would a transformative model that supports Indigenous wellbeing and archival sovereignty be developed?

I examined how archival practices could be designed to support Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Importantly, this extended to investigate how First Nations people's spiritual and emotional needs are considered to support Indigenous people's wellbeing in the archives. I drew on the term Indigenous wellbeing to mean a holistic view of Indigenous health that is culturally based. Two key definitions of health were utilised as Indigenous wellbeing models that incorporate the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of First Nations peoples and communities. First, in 1989 the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (cited in Evans et al. 2020, p 132) provided the following definition of 'health':

> *Aboriginal health" means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.* (NACCHO 1989).

Within the research I situated the use of the term wellbeing in relation to the model of Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) as defined by (Gee et al. 2014). The Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet* provides this useful summary of the term, drawing on research across Indigenous health

> *The term social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of a person. The term recognises their connection to land, sea, culture, spirituality, family and community which are important to people and impact on their wellbeing. It also recognises that a person's SEWB is influenced by policies and past events.* (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2021).

I use this definition acknowledging that the features of Indigenous wellbeing will be diverse and need to be locally situated and constituted. However, the definition provides a valuable reference point to consider Indigenous wellbeing as linked to social, emotional and spiritual dimensions and also redress and healing from the impacts of colonisation.

I drew on these models of social, emotional and cultural wellbeing as alternatives to the need for Indigenous cultural safety in the archives. When first engaging with the research questions and topic I had been exploring the concept of Indigenous cultural safety and the archives as a key theme. I recognised that the topic of cultural safety was gaining popularity in Australian libraries and archives, particularly with challenges that exist with cultural competency and the need to support Indigenous people in the workplace (NSLA nd). However, limited research has been undertaken on the topic to understand how cultural safety is conceptualised in relation to Indigenous people's broad requirements for Indigenous archiving and memory keeping in the context of wellbeing and sovereignty. Originally, I drew on Williams' concept of cultural safety as a foundational concept to explore how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can feel unsafe or feel that their cultures are under threat when engaging broadly with libraries and archives in Australia. Williams defines cultural safety as:

> *an environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening.* (Williams 1999, p 213).

I was interested in whether the concept of cultural safety could be taken from areas of rich scholarship in health research, including nursing (Papps and Ramsden 1996; Williams 1999; Browne et al. 2009; Wepa 2015), education and social work (Fernando and Bennett 2019) and within Indigenous studies (Bin-Sallik 2003) to consider areas of strength or gaps in relation to the archives, and with archival studies and practice.

However, in the research I critiqued the term cultural safety and found that the term was insufficient to support Indigenous people in an archival context. The term turns the focus back on Indigenous people rather than addressing the systemic and structural issues, and oversimplified the complex and multifaceted needs that require critique about how the tools of colonisation are manifested in the archives and institutions of Australian society. In the Yarning sessions conducted in the research, the term cultural safety was used often to describe people's opposition to being under threat, an overwhelming response being that the

archives were harmful and cultural safety was used to describe the need to mitigate these harms. An outcome of the research was that I mapped the harms and dangers of the colonial archives model. Key harms and gaps in the archives supporting Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty were analysed across the following concerns:

(1) Indigenous knowledges being managed inappropriately in western knowledge systems.
(2) A lack of recognition of the role of the archives in the Australian colonial project.
(3) A lack of Indigenous self-determination in the archives.
(4) The archives inability to engage with Indigenous people's sovereignty.
(5) The existence of the white blindfold with systemic bias and racism in the archives.
(6) The cultural load and Indigenous employment in the archives.

To address these harms, the research recorded immediate reforms are required to support Indigenous peoples archiving needs, across multiple sites of tension within the systems and structures of the archives. These reforms extend earlier work and research undertaken to develop and implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSILIRN) *Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* (ATSILIRN 2012) and the *Trust and Technology* project findings (Monash University 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). They extend the focus of these protocols and findings to incorporate approaches that relate to Indigenous wellbeing and suggest elements of care required to manage the archives with culturally informed spiritual and emotional considerations. In addition, the research evidenced the vital importance of these cultural values being incorporated into archival studies theory. The agenda of change in the archives begins by addressing reforms in Fig. 1.

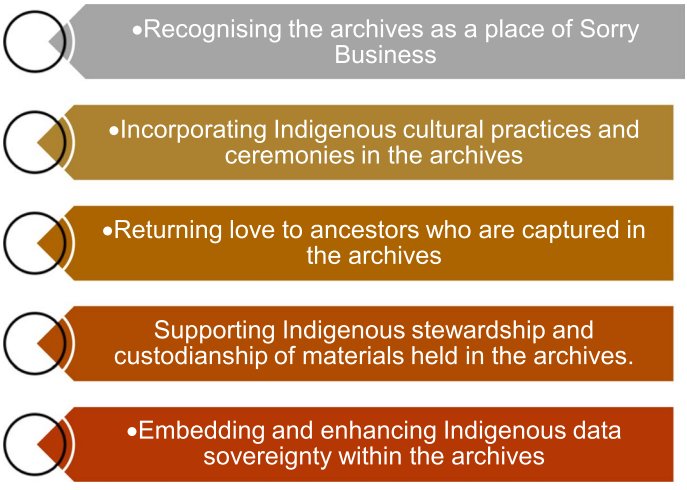

Fig. 1 Indigenous archiving reforms

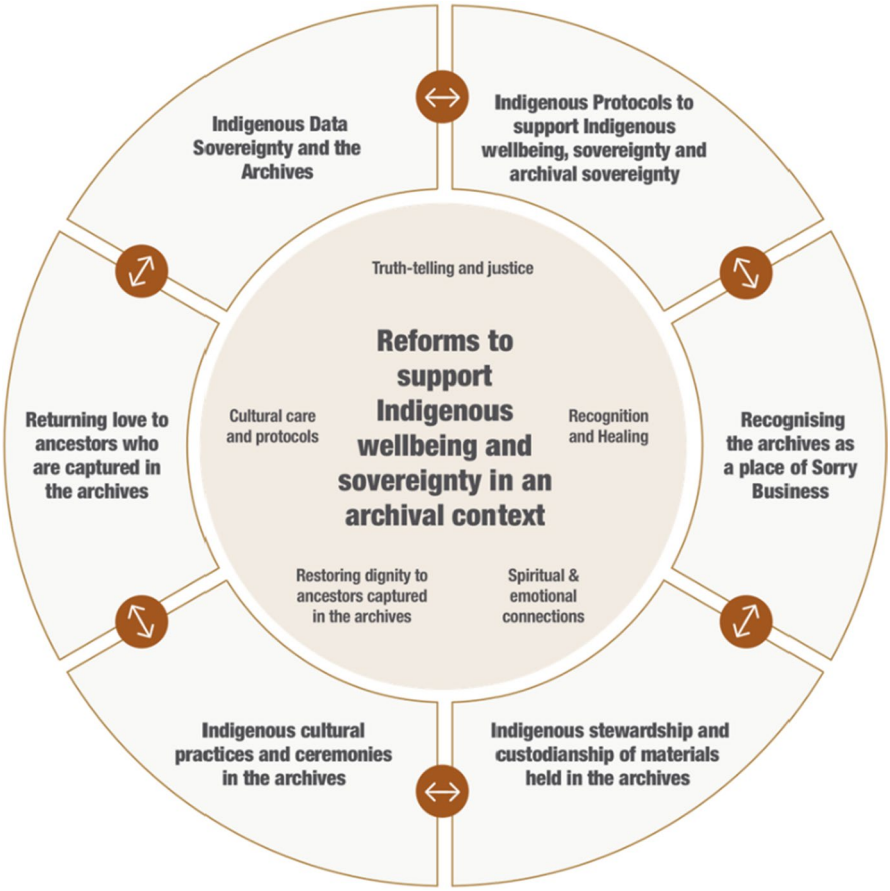

Fig. 2 Reforms to support Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty in an archival context (Thorpe, 2022)

These areas of change are linked in a relationship to the additional themes identified in the research of truth-telling and justice, recognition and healing, spiritual and emotional connections to records, restoring dignity to Ancestors, cultural care and protocols, and lastly to Indigenous governance of data and archives (Fig. 2).

Importantly, the reforms are only the beginning of what the research found is needed to support an agenda for caring for Indigenous archives. The research demonstrated that these interventions are crucial to initiating strategies of change and supporting the work required to develop a transformative model of Indigenous Living Archives on Country to enable for the care of archives and records locally through community informed protocols and local governance structures. Indigenous Living Archives are defined in my research as a transformative archive model that supports the cultural needs of Indigenous people and is aligned with wellbeing and archival sovereignty. These locally based community archives promote cultural flows of information, storytelling, and memory keeping. These are places envisaged

as holding materials that are digitally or physically repatriated from institutional archives and caring for documents, records, information and objects on Country through local ways of knowing, being and doing. These Living Archives give agency and voice to communities, whether nation groups or other communities of Stolen Generations survivors, to acquire, document and manage archives according to Indigenous protocols and Indigenous data sovereignty principles.

Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty

The research developed a definition of *Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty* to provide a framework for addressing how energy and care can be put into managing archival collections through relationships embedded with respect.

> ***Indigenous wellbeing in the archives*** is formed by embedding respect for Indigenous worldviews and lifeways to support individual and community social, emotional and cultural needs. The archives are grounded in acknowledging Indigenous peoples' agency and sovereignty and recognise their rights to have authority over managing materials that relate to them through locally informed protocols. These protocols enable governance and decision-making of the archives incorporating the ethical, spiritual and emotional care of Indigenous knowledges relating to Country, people both living and their Ancestors.
> ***Indigenous sovereignty in the archives*** recognises and gives visibility to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is free from racism and proactively seeks to address the legacies of colonisation. The archive functions to reform its position from being perpetrators of harm to enable Indigenous people to exercise their self-determination to reclaim and restory the archives to speak back to them and amplify their context and meanings. As a place of healing and truth-telling, this archive requires difficult dialogue and contestation.
> ***Indigenous archival sovereignty*** is centred in relationships. It is a Living Indigenous Archive connected to people and place. It is constantly being used and reshaped through cultural flows and connections. It is deeply connected to Country and embedded in stories of place. It is a space of cultural resurgence and centres Indigenous wellbeing holistically to support individual and community social, emotional and cultural needs (Thorpe 2022, p 207).

Returning love to Ancestors: the *In Living Memory* photographic exhibition and reciprocal relationships

One area of concern identified as an immediate reform needed in the archives was the measure to restore dignity and respect to First Nations people by *Returning Love to Ancestors who are captured in the archives*. As earlier described, the reform is inspired by and extends the scholarship of Harkin (2019) and the work of the Unbound Collective, a group of artists, researchers and performers who use creative practice to bring visibility to First Nations stories. The Collective seeks to "move

through spaces that have historically seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians excluded and reduced to tell untold chapters of Australia's true history", (Flinders University, nd), and in doing this, their collaborative and intertwined works embody a process the group describes as Repatriating Love to Our Ancestors (Baker et al. 2020). The Collective's project *Bound/Unbound Sovereign Acts* draws together theory and performative practice to enact processes of resistance and refusal and responds directly to the power of the archive and the need for colonial records to be reread and returned. Activating materials through creative practice speaks back to the archives to intervene in the power structures or redistribute power. These actions are vital to ensure that Indigenous SEWB in the archives is supported.

In their article *Bleeding the Archive,* (Grieves and Kelada 2017) discuss how Indigenous artists are mounting "archival interventions" to challenge the hegemonic nature of official archives (2017, p 321). They argue that creative practice and Indigenous activism can bring archives to life to resituate and reactivate a new cultural memory. The development of the *In Living Memory* exhibition at State Records New South Wales (NSW) almost two decades ago provides a useful case study for considering approaches that the archives can use to enable these archival interventions. Opening access to a set of images from their colonial archives through in-depth community engagement, dialogue and decision-making enabled opportunities for the photograph's meanings to be interrogated and critiqued. Below, I share information on the community engagement approaches that guided the exhibition development that focussed on principles of trust, benefit sharing and the forming of reciprocal relationships.

Work began developing a new exhibition in the State Records Gallery at the State Archives in 2005, based on the former Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) photographs. The photographs of the AWB form part of the broader collection of government records documenting the NSW AWB's administration, formerly the Board for Protection of Aborigines or the Aborigines Protection Board (the Boards). They are vital evidence of the inner workings of the discriminatory and racist legislation that affected Aboriginal people in NSW from 1883 to 1969. The records themselves are patchy and incomplete, and many have not survived. Whether the lack of documentation results from neglect or deliberate destruction, it is a devastating loss for Aboriginal people in NSW. Those fragmentary records that have survived from the Boards document the state's role in regulating the control and surveillance of Aboriginal people, including monitoring movement, finances and family. In short, they held total power over Aboriginal people within the state.

Like other colonial apparatuses across Australia, the Boards operated under the guise of providing 'protection' and 'welfare' to Aboriginal people–yet their impact was profound as they removed children, dislocated people from their lands, and controlled movements of people on and off Aboriginal reserves, stations and missions. For Aboriginal people, these are harrowing records. They documented the forced control, dispossession and removal of Aboriginal people from their lands, languages, cultures and families. They are records created to document and support the acts of government legislation and bureaucracy. The photographs taken between 1924 and 1961 are a vital resource for Aboriginal people affected by state policies and those who are researching their family and community histories.

The history and context of the photographs had, in the early 2000s, mainly been undocumented and unrecorded. Although the photographs illustrated the Boards broad functions in their contact with Aboriginal people and communities, Aboriginal people themselves were positioned as subjects. Government officials in their formal duties captured them, whereas the names, places and the stories of those people documented remained silenced. The surviving 1038 images of the Boards represented 86 years of operating a government agency. A mere 1038 images have remained with no actual order and little meaning, or context recorded. They represent categorically a failure of recordkeeping systems to support Aboriginal people's information and archiving needs.

In the only published article written on the photographs *The Aboriginal Welfare Board photographs: Fact and fiction*, researcher Carol Cooper in 1985 explored the photographs as a form of propaganda, scattered evidence of the Boards perceived 'good work' in controlling Aboriginal people's lives across the state. Cooper asserts, "While most could be termed "factual" or "realistic", they possibly tell us as much about the AWB as about the people depicted" (Cooper 1985, p 65). Cooper argues that the photographs are aimed at portraying views of the so-called "progress" of the Board. For instance, the photographs document the Boards training homes and provision of reserves and settlements for Aboriginal people to move them into alignment with European culture. Cooper pointed out the need for Aboriginal counter-storytelling to take place by "taking the photographs back to the communities from which they originate" to document missing information on the "real stories" behind the photographs (1985, p 67). When the work on the exhibition began almost two decades later, these tensions of perspectives were not adequately addressed or recognised in the State Archives main finding aids. Instead, the Archives relied on descriptions that capture the Boards administration according to their context as a government agency and their legislation and policies. The experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW are silenced and subjugated in ways expressed by Cooper as government "fiction". They are records of surveillance and control.

The development of the exhibition provided an outlet to connect people and their families to the images and build counter-storytelling to respond to government recordkeeping silences. It was also an opportunity to engage non-Indigenous people with the histories and experiences of Aboriginal people in NSW. An Indigenous Advisory Group and a broader consultative network were established to help shape and guide the exhibition process. Key to this was the then Department of Aboriginal Affairs involvement to ensure the wider Aboriginal community's appropriate consent, advice and support. It was important to build this ongoing dialogue and reciprocal relationships as the exhibition connected with the Boards photographs as living records. They were considered to be Living Archives, which have compelling histories and powerful connections to the present. The project team proposed to move beyond the anonymity of the Boards photographic record to honour individuals and communities with personal histories before and after the Boards intervention in their lives. The exhibition's driving force was to continue the documentation work to identify people in the photographs, add their names, and, where possible, tell the stories attached to them. More than this though, the exhibition enabled Aboriginal people to have agency and control over the use of the images. No photograph was

displayed in the exhibition without the explicit consent of family members, descendants or relevant stakeholder groups.

The exhibition, *In Living Memory*, was launched at the State Archives in Sydney in September 2006. The exhibition brought up many questions that concerned reframing and reimagining the archives. Importantly, the project challenged the traditional archival practice in that it sought to provide an outlet for Aboriginal communities in NSW to respond to the records held by the government, reconnecting the images from historical archives and government records into the realm of Living Archives connected with family and community. Within this, Indigenous wellbeing and community ethics were at the fore, and the consultation process sought retrospective consent from people for family photographs to be used publicly. Stolen Generations survivors and their representative groups provided permissions for stories to be told and images to be displayed. There was considerable care taken, for example, in displaying photographs of former children's homes.

The process of naming people and places in the photographs that had not been identified, generated a space for returning love to people's Ancestors, an act in itself of culturally restoring Indigenous wellbeing and recognising sovereignty. Where previously the objectification of Aboriginal people would accentuate the already isolating experience of connecting with the archive, the naming of people in the photographs gave a sense of agency to people and families that their stories would now be visible and heard. Caswell (2014) discusses the concept of "symbolic annihilation" with the silencing or erasure of people not being represented in the archives and notes how this lack of representation, in turn, affects what history is written for decades to come (p 36). Our efforts were based on the premise of giving Aboriginal people more voice and to respond to this symbolic erasure. Developing the exhibition enabled a slowing down of processes so that consultation and engagement were key. It was not just about exhibiting materials from the collection but focussed on the story of what the photographs meant to people. Essentially, this was about making space for Indigenous voices. It also followed a process that Christen and Anderson (2019) describe as "slow archives", where they discuss this temporal framework as "Slowing down" which "creates a necessary space for emphasizing how knowledge is produced, circulated and exchanged through a series of relationships. Slowing down is about focusing differently, listening carefully and acting ethically. It opens the possibility of seeing the intricate web of relationships formed and forged through attention to collaborative curation processes that do not default to normative structures of attribution, access, or scale" (p 87).

In Living Memory went on to tour Aboriginal communities across NSW. The tour was developed in response to community feedback that it could not just be an exhibition shown in the city but also visit and connect with people on Country. It was incredibly significant to take the exhibition out of the city as it enabled access in ways that were not previously imagined. The exhibition launches took place across 17 venues and included an opening day and night that brought community members to talk about the images. Included in this was often a special Elders preview, which was organised so that the community leaders could come in and see the images in their own way before the wider public came in. When we toured the exhibition, we also printed the surviving 1000 photographs and put these in albums that would tour

so that community members, Elders and families could physically sit down and flick through these albums. We knew that having albums for people to touch, even if they were copies, was an essential part of the overall feel and engagement with the exhibition in local communities.

My most significant memory of the visits was seeing people express pride in these histories being recognised. The stories were being told in local settings. Local newspapers engaged in amplifying these stories of histories of Aboriginal reserves and missions. It was a process of remembering, paying respects to people's Elders and Ancestors, and recognising Aboriginal people's resilience in the light of a colonial project that sought to dispossess Aboriginal people of land, culture, language and family. It is a challenge to bear witness to the Boards photographs. They are profoundly affecting on an emotional and spiritual level. To encounter the photos generates a mixture of feelings from a sense of pride and recognition of Aboriginal people's resilience and feelings of disgust that people's lives are so disregarded.

The people involved in the exhibition team that developed *In Living Memory* had a lot to do with its success, but in particular, it was the documentation work carried out by renowned Aboriginal photographer Mervyn Bishop that really set the exhibition apart. Mervyn documented the consultation, consent process, the families involved, and the functions (celebrations and commemorations) marking the launches at each of the 17 venues across NSW. Mervyn captured people as they sat and talked about their personal, family and community histories and spoke about the impacts that the Board had on Aboriginal people in NSW. These photographs in of themselves will be an important archive for the future. Exhibition reviews that were published at the time discussed the methods that *In Living Memory* used as being best practice (Haskins 2007). Giving Aboriginal people agency around the use of the photographs was significant as it showed deep care and honoured the people's Ancestors who were captured in the photos.

The methods of community engagement utilised for the exhibition development demonstrate approaches of respect, ongoing consent and mutual benefit on topics such as the right to reply, and similarly, the right of refusal for people to show images publicly. The lessons learned enable us to think more about approaches utilised in archival practices. Could an exhibition such as *In Living Memory* be reproduced in an online web archive or online exhibition display? Would a curation tool, or an archive system have the capabilities to manage protocols and respond to the emotional needs of communities in a digital environment? How would digital engagement be replicated online so that relationship building, and community engagement was woven into the process? What would the harms be if the photographs of the Board were made available online without these safeguards?

As a case study, *In Living Memory* demonstrates opportunities that exhibitions can create, through curatorial work, to open up the archives for First Nations people to speak back to colonial collections and archives and situate them in community knowing (Thorpe 2019, p 42). It provided a catalyst for change, enabling enhanced metadata and documentation of the photograph's context and meanings from a First Nations perspective. However, while the exhibition brought a moment of change, the practices need to transcend the exhibition programme to be embedded on a systems level into archival descriptive practices. Although this was not achieved in the scope

of the original exhibition, there are future possibilities for the work to be revitalised by the State Archives to enact *Right of Reply* to the collections. These would be symbolic and meaningful opportunities to ensure that Indigenous voices are managed as records alongside the colonial archives and treated as a source of authoritative information alongside the original record. The reforms discussed assist the archives to better support Indigenous self-determination, and they included a particular focus on institutional archives that hold Indigenous knowledges and manage them through western archival principles and practices. While these reforms require immediate attention, there are additional transformations needed too.

Social and emotional wellbeing reform principles for Indigenous archives

The reforms required to support Indigenous people's SEWB require a deeper commitment from the archives to honour the spiritual and emotional connections of Indigenous people to historical archives. The archives need to give agency and voice back to people who were silenced. The case study of the *In Living Memory* exhibition describes how archives can actively reshape their practices to respond to the holistic needs of First Nations people in the archives. It describes how the archives can provide more focus on enabling families to connect with their Ancestors who are documented in collections so that they can be honoured and recognised according to local needs. This is particularly important when collections are biased, racist or describe First Nations people in derogatory ways due to the discriminatory frame of legislation or policy they were being described within. It shifts the archives, positioning First Nations people as record *subjects* to give voice and recognition of their views and experiences, which positively supports people's SEWB.

My research has evidenced the vital need for a new ethics of care being enacted to give agency to First Nations people who are the subjects of colonial records. The materials in archives are not merely objects; through an Indigenous lens and worldview they also form tangible connections with Ancestors. There is a gap in current mainstream archival approaches where Indigenous protocols are not being respected, and the spiritual and emotional needs of First Nations people within collections are being silenced. Current processes that require First Nations people to enter an "alien" or "sterile" reading room environment to access and encounter records, or to see them online without appropriate warning or support processes, cause distress to people. Reforms for recognising Indigenous people's SEWB in the archives must be incorporated into approaches to records access, management and use.

The design and implementation of participatory archiving models that enable a web of relationships to be captured and incorporated into archival collections is crucial. Evans and colleagues (2015) have discussed how the concept and emergence of participatory archival models enable an increase in records subject's rights, including opportunities for recording multiple perspectives in records. They argue, citing Cook (2013), that participatory models are "more able to heal rather than harm" (Evans et al. 2015, p.347). Importantly, relationships must support the rights of both the living and the deceased so that agency can be returned to Ancestors by recording

and updating the context of the historical materials held in the colonial archives. This reform would ensure that examples of loving acts as demonstrated by members of the Unbound Collective are directly linked back to the records. Essentially, these acts become and are enacted as a right of reply to the colonial archives. They are not ephemeral or sitting outside in other information or recorded contexts, but also available for people to view when they see the historical records.

Critically, the loving approaches demand that all efforts are made to seek retrospective consent from people, families and descendants about the control and management of the archives relating to them. This intervention could occur when digitisation processes take records with Indigenous content from a physical format, such as analogue, paper based or an object, into turned-digital formats. As more awareness is being brought to the needs of respecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights, greater care and attention need to take place to return love to Ancestors to address the damage caused by the Australian colonial project. The ability to return love to Ancestors means that Indigenous people can determine how materials are used. Decisions about preservation and care of materials (for example, family members being able to touch and handle materials) are determined by Indigenous families or community members according to their own cultural practices. The archival institutions can provide advice on preservation, but they do not decide. Rights to know, a right to reply or the ability to set the record straight are normalised practices. People's right to refuse access to others and to destroy or remove collections are also honoured.

Transformations to support Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty and archival sovereignty

Many of the principles relating to the need for returning love to Ancestors captured in the archives were explored in the case study of the *In Living Memory* photographic exhibition. An approach to support Living Archives ensures that community memories are connected with archival practice. There is embedded support for First Nation's cultural information flows in dynamic and relational ways. Relationships require that archival processes fundamentally enable love, care and dignity to be returned to people's Ancestors. This care for collections facilitates connections between the records and families beyond a passive process of merely accessing materials to provide people with agency and choices for how they wish to engage with and respond to the records. Seeing the archives as Living Archives enables a return of respect and dignity to people and families who experienced oppressive government legislation and policies. It also is a form of redress for people to provide consent for their stories to be told in ways that had previously not been considered at the time of the record's creation. Acknowledging the need for greater control of the archives, this paper has explored the holistic needs of First Nations people to control their cultural heritage materials in archives by systems and processes that support dignity and respect. It discussed that despite the tensions and contested nature of the archives, Indigenous people continue to engage with, reclaim and refigure them. There is a strength in this process, that notwithstanding the potential trauma of the

archives, there is a need to connect with family and Ancestral stories with love and respect.

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