

Meztizaje and remembering in Afro-Mexican communities of the Costa Chica: implications for archival education in Mexico

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Abstract This paper summarizes some of the major themes of a larger study that used Afro-Mexicans of the Costa Chica as a case study to understand archival education in Mexico. This study seeks to provide insight on how absences of Mexicans of African descent from the official record and recordkeeping came into being in Mexico; to examine the role that education of archival professionals might play in addressing or contributing to these absences; and to produce recommendations for remedying this under-documentation—at least in part—through changes to what is currently taught in formal archival education at the university level.

Keywords Archival education · Afro-Mexican · Archival paradigm · Mexico · Remembering · Community archives

Introduction

The historical record indicates that during the first centuries of Spanish colonial rule in Mexico (roughly between the early 1500s and the late 1600s), the African population was significant (Beltrán 1958; Brading 1971; Brady 1965; Carroll 1991; Avila and Angel 1988; Casasús and Luis 1989, 1991; Mendoza 1956). Juan Cortés, the first African slave brought to colonial Mexico, accompanied Hernán Cortés in 1519 (Casasús and Luis 1991). Spain did not begin importing large quantities of chattel slaves from Africa until the mid-1500s, under the rule of Carlos V (Palmer 1976). Davidson (1973) shows that, by 1570, 57% of Mexico City's population had African origins. By the end of the 1500s, an estimated 60,000 slaves were brought into Mexico and by the mid-1600s, the black population living in Mexico City accounted for 55% of the population (Beltrán 1958).¹ This number

¹ Other sizable black concentrations included the present-day Mexican states of Jalisco, Colima, and Zacatecas.

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doubled to around 120,000 in the seventeenth century, making Mexico the second largest slave importer in the Americas (Carroll 1991) and, based on Beltran's estimates, making African slaves the second largest racial group of Mexican society by the mid-eighteenth century. It was not until 1810 that the Spanish population marginally outnumbered that of the African. In 1821, Mexico became a sovereign nation and all legal distinctions pertaining to race were terminated (Gonzalez 1970). The descendants of enslaved Africans officially became part of the *mestizaje* (racial mixture among the Spanish, African, and Indigenous population groups) element of the newly formed nation. In 1830, Mexico abolished slavery.

To understand the place of race in Mexican society, it is necessary to understand the essentiality of the concept of *mestizaje* in the formation of Mexican identity. Although blackness was a major element of the colonial discourse, the black population and its heritage are not officially included in what eventually would define Mexican identity—*mestizaje*. This occurred primarily through implementing racial ideologies that progressively defined the new nation. *Mestizaje* dominated modern ideas of race in Mexico and is the dominant nationalist ideology that helps to define what it means to be 'Mexican.' Much of *being* a model 'Mexican' hinges on the hegemonic assumption that Mexico is a *mestizo* nation—the product of a straightforward 'merger' of Spanish and Indigenous people with little or no reference to its African heritage and contributions to Mexican society.

Along Mexico's southern Pacific Coast lies the region commonly referred to as the 'Costa Chica' of the Mexican states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. Here, many of the Mexicans of African descent tell a story about the origins of the region's black population. When several elders in El Ciruelo, Oaxaca, the site of this study, were asked about their origins, they often linked their heritage to another black town in the surrounding area.² Other elders invoked an origin from outside the region—most notably, from a foreign shipwreck in a nearby lagoon. Some accounts emphasize the ship's human cargo of slaves; others do not. The basic sketch of these narratives tell of a ship that wrecked off the coast of Guerrero, Mexico. The details remain sketchy, but all accounts end in a familiar way—those who escaped the sinking ships found freedom on land and formed communities along the coast; they grew in numbers and are the distant ancestors of the blacks of the Costa Chica. To an outsider, these shipwreck narratives may sound suspicious, but in a Mexican context, they show how the memory of Mexico's slave legacy has eroded over time. Furthermore, those narratives, when contrasted with more prevailing expressions of a fundamental uncertainty about the origins of blacks in the Costa Chica, suggest two competing perspectives: first, a discourse that searches for answers, meaning, and significance, and secondly, a discourse of anonymity in which one's own cultural and racial heritage has been deemed as irrelevant (Vinson and Vaughn 2004).

Within the field of archival science, postmodernist and postcolonial ideas have had an impact upon archival practice. Those ideas have shed light on the fact that there are many communities today, especially those that are Indigenous or comprised of former slaves, whose experiences are not recorded in the official narratives of the states in which they are located. This absence may partly be explained by the fact that many members of those

² The study referred to here is the author's dissertation, White K (2008) *The Dynamics of Race and Remembering in a 'Colorblind' Society: A Case Study of Racial Paradigms and Archival Education in Mexico*. PhD University of California, Los Angeles. This thesis builds on an ongoing research initiative led by Professors Anne Gilliland (University of California, Los Angeles), Sue McKemmish, (Monash University, Australia), and Zhang Bin (Renmin University, China). The Project surveyed repositories across nations in the Pacific Rim as well as various cultural and ethnic communities such as Indigenous and immigrant populations to examine their needs and circumstances.

communities were featured as subjects of the record—i.e., objects of legal or property transactions—rather than record creators. Another explanation is that the ways of remembering of these and other communities have record-keeping infrastructures that are different from those of the dominant or mainstream societies. Indigenous and former slave communities often rely on non-textual ways of remembering, including oral, aural, and kinetic forms. These are usually excluded from an archival paradigm that historically was constructed and perpetuated around textual records created and kept by those in power to support the bureaucratic and cultural needs of monarchies, governments, corporations and churches, and their expanding empires (Gilliland and White 2009).

Those institutions in turn exported their record-keeping theories and practices to various regions in the world as key tools of colonialism, commerce, evangelism, cultural dominance, and, more recently, globalization (Harris 2002; Ketelaar 2001; McKemmish et al. 2005; Richards 1993; Schwartz and Cook 2002; Wareham 2002). Archival theory, as articulated by such eminent figures as Muller et al. (2003) and Jenkinson (1922), has subsequently been augmented to address the needs of modern recordkeeping, and of digital records in particular. Furthermore, it has also been codified through the development of international standards and local, national, and international legislation and policy. In the European Union (EU), for example, member countries are making efforts to standardize archival education as part of the Bologna Process, which aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010 (European Commission, Education and Training 2009).

With this as a starting point, I conducted a study in 2008 that had four objectives: (1) to provide insight as to how communities of African heritage became absent from Mexico's official record; (2) to describe Mexico's archival education infrastructure and identify the role that education of archival professionals might play in addressing or contributing to these absences; (3) using the case of Mexicans of African descent in the Costa Chica (home of the largest such community), to delineate ways of remembering in non-Indigenous ethnic communities; and (4) to generate recommendations for how under-documentation and the resulting absences of these kinds of communities from the archival record might be partly remedied by changing the way in which archivists are educated. The study also examined the extent to which racial paradigms, specifically that of *mestizaje*, might influence archival education in Mexico. This is significant because the frameworks for the selection, collection, arrangement and description, preservation, and accessibility of archives that are taught in programs educating future archival professionals are tools which serve to implement certain kinds of societal processes of remembering and forgetting which may result in inclusion and exclusion (McKemmish et al. 2005). In applying these frameworks, archivists identify what is considered to be a 'record' in a particular context, and then choose which records to preserve and discard, using the power of appraisal to assert, consciously or unconsciously, chosen narratives while ignoring or reframing others.

Research methods

Survey of archival educators

To address the objectives, I conducted face-to-face and e-mail surveys of archival educators, who were initially identified through publicly available information, primarily Web sites and directories, from academic departments in archival science and related areas such as library science in Mexico. This survey sought to provide an idea of the current status of archival education in Mexico based upon responses from faculty within the institutions that

are currently providing this education. In most jurisdictions, archival education in Mexico is seen as a distinct professional area and is taught under the aegis of the state. However, there were library and information science programs at various universities that at least offered one introductory level course in archival science. For this reason, ancillary education areas were also surveyed.

Survey of archival professionals

I also conducted a survey of archival professionals who were recruited from cultural repositories (based on their mission statements and mandates) at each of three levels: national, state, and regional. Those repositories included the National Archive of Mexico and relevant libraries as well as repositories in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, where the township of El Ciruelo is located. This survey sought to obtain data on perceived local and regional needs from those who are archival practitioners at the national and regional levels.

Semi-structured interviews of community memory keepers and cultural leaders

To address objective 3, I conducted semi-structured interviews of community memory keepers and cultural leaders, who were identified by the community as experts on or familiar with Costa Chican local history and cultural practices, and who could provide valuable insight from outside the formal archival field as to how the documentation of rights, securing of benefits, local activities, and culture might be recorded and preserved. Subjects were recruited from community-based organizations in el Ciruelo, Oaxaca, such as *Mexico Negro* (Black Mexico), and state-sponsored associations, such as *Programa Nuestra Tercera Raiz* (Our Third Root), that are involved in grassroots efforts to celebrate African/Afro-Mexican heritage in the Costa Chica region.

Mini-ethnographies

To address objective 3 further, I conducted a series of mini-ethnographies over a 6-week period between October and November 2007, in the township of El Ciruelo, Oaxaca. The purpose of these was to broaden my understanding of traditional knowledge structures and current strategies of memory-keeping within a Costa Chican community of African descent. A mini-ethnography, also known as a focused ethnography, is an ethnographic study that is used when the domain under investigation focuses on a specific or a narrow area of inquiry (Diaz et al. 2001). Mini-ethnographies generally occur in less time than that of a full-scale ethnography (Leininger 1997; Boyle 1994; Muecke 1994).

Summary of findings

Overview of Mexico's archival education infrastructure

Changes in archival education programs are often closely associated with major political shifts and events (most frequently those associated with greater freedoms for citizens, increased government accountability, and the end of colonial or repressive administrations). For example, the Archives Act of Taiwan (1999), legislation developed to refine the management of archives, led to the founding of the National Archives Administration in

2001. These events led to a modernization of Taiwan's archival education infrastructure to meet policies and demands stipulated by the new law (Hsueh 2006). Similarly, the passage of the 1999 Korean Public Records Management Act (PRMA), which required that all levels of government and public institutions include archivists and record management professions as regular staff employees, led directly to the establishment of university-based archival education programs across Korea.

The results of the present study suggest that archival education in Mexico is following the same pattern. Much of the change in the infrastructure of Mexico's archival education programs occurred shortly after the 2000 presidential elections. For the first time since the Mexican Revolution (70 years earlier), Mexico was politically controlled by a party other than the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). During the administration of Vicente Fox, several sweeping pieces of legislation were passed, including one which was the equivalent of the United States Freedom of Information Act—the Law of Transparency and Access to Public Government Information. In 2002, the Law of Transparency went into effect, mandating that all public government information be made readily accessible and searchable by the public at no cost.

Along with that law came an increased need for trained archivists and records management professionals capable of meeting the requirements stipulated in the law, that is, that all government institutions and entities must establish record-keeping principles that rest on the premise of disclosure; must routinely publish all information pertaining to the day-to-day operations of government institutions; and must make this information, as requested by the public, readily and easily accessible in a variety of formats. The demand for trained archivists is likely to continue to grow as individual states develop and pass their own freedom of information legislation.

The survey data underscored that one of the greatest challenges facing archival education programs is being able to meet this growing demand for archival professionals. Because of the shortage of trained archivists, the National Archives and the *Escuela Nacional de Biblioteconomía y Archivistomía* (ENBA—the National School of Library and Archival Science) have joined forces to professionalize the field. Collaboratively, in 2005, both institutions launched a program called 'Project AGN/ENBA: Professional Training.' The purpose of this program is to train personnel currently working as archivists.

The educators' survey data analysis focused on three broad aspects: curricula (syllabi, what texts are being used, what types of readings are assigned), student experiential components (length of internship, at which institutions, who supervises, and work assignments); and instructors (who are they, how many ladder and adjunct faculty, their preparation to teach—which degree and from where, level of archival experience and from where).

In its current state, the curricular content of archival education in Mexico is largely driven by market demands to produce an entirely new workforce of archivists and records management professionals to work in major corporations and governmental institutions. Ninety-six percent of archival educators indicated that the driving force behind their current curriculum is the national demand for archivists. The increased demand led to the implementation of a degree at ENBA that could be completed in 3 years rather than five. With a pressing need for students to enter into the workforce immediately, it was not surprising to learn that the curriculum of all surveyed programs solely focused on mainstream archival functions and administration.³

³ The typical curriculum can be summarized in seven areas: 1) documentary heritage; 2) technical organization; 3) user-services; 4) archival administration; 5) Mexican history and historic institutions; 6) research methods; and 7) automation.

Discussion of the curricula

Mexico's curriculum leaves little room to explore or address the needs of non-élite institutions or non-mainstream communities such as ethnically and otherwise diverse communities that employ different documentation practices. The absence of focus on the needs of such communities might partly be explained by an overall lack of diversity in background and experience among archival educators in Mexico. For example, all of the educators listed the Licenciatura in Archivonomía (although this degree is equivalent to the Bachelor's degree in the U.S., it is considered a professional degree in Mexico) as a requirement to teach full time in both programs. All of the educators surveyed indicated that they had received their archival degrees from ENBA, which until 2006 was the only archival degree granting institution in the country. Furthermore, nearly all of the educators at both programs share similar archival work experience. Over two-thirds of all of those surveyed indicated that they had worked for the National Archives of Mexico at some point in their careers. Some still do. Other organizations mentioned in relation to prior experience were banks, state and municipal archives, museums, law firms, and various businesses (such as credit card companies, manufacturing companies, and hospitals). This makes it less likely that educators would have an experiential or intellectual framework that would motivate or equip them to contemplate broadening the base of archival practice and thought by reconceptualizing aspects of archival education.

An additional explanation for the overall lack of attention to the needs of non-élite institutions or non-mainstream communities may relate to the country's education model, which has an impact on how curriculum is developed. Mexico has a national education model. Federal agencies, in cooperation with various faculties, establish the curriculum for any given program at public institutions of higher education. It is common for professional programs, regardless of whether the program is located in a college, school, or university setting not to be multidisciplinary in nature. At the time of the study, the curricula of archival education programs resemble a curricula of 'best practices' in that they primarily consist of courses that are teach skills necessary for working in government and corporate repositories. Because of such close proximity between the state and curriculum development at institutions of higher education, it is reasonable to assume that there are power relationships embedded within what is taught in Mexico's archival education programs.

It is not surprising that the survey results indicated that enterprise and government needs were the primary drivers in developing archival education curricula. This is especially problematic in a country that constitutionally defines itself as a pluralistic nation, yet has (by international standards) politically, historically, and culturally denied communities such as Afro-Mexican and Indigenous communities. That the nation's identity is based on *mestizaje* poses enough problems when it comes to acknowledging the cultural heritage and record-keeping practices of non-Indigenous ethnic groups—*mestizaje* is one of the reasons why African racial categories are no longer included as part of the record that establishes and formalizes individual and community identities (for example, census data, birth certificates, and so forth). The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the government, a proponent of *mestizaje*, plays a key role in curriculum development.

The overall failure in addressing the needs of non-élite institutions or non-mainstream communities lies in curricular content. The syllabi for courses that teach archival theory—Introducción a la Archivonomía (Introduction to Archival Science), Valoración Documental (Archival Appraisal), Descripción de Archivos (Archival Description), and so forth—included readings from leading twentieth century archival theorists, such as

Lodolini (Italy), Schellenberg (United States), Muller, Feith and Fruin (Netherlands), and Tanodi (Argentina), but nothing from postmodern archival scholars who have played significant roles in introducing and developing newer conceptualizations of the archival role in society. These roles include empowering citizens and other residents of a country, regardless of national origin or race and ethnicity—i.e., acknowledging and supporting pluralism, supporting emergent areas and methods of historical research, managing the flood of documentation resulting from digital technologies, or documenting personal lives and social movements. When modern archival theory is taught without a postmodern critique, it appears commonsensical and *court tout*, especially if there is a movement emanating primarily out of Anglo-Western nations to standardize archival practice globally. Under such circumstances and in light of postmodern critiques, it ought to be incumbent upon archival educators to equip themselves and their students to be able to recognize and address the assumptions, practices, and constraints that are embedded in such standardization and the perspectives and interests they support. Additionally, both educators and students should be able to examine critically the central role that archival theory, as mediated by specific activities, contradictions, and relationships, has played in promoting archival thinking and practice worldwide, and how it might be used as a tool to promote a more reflexive and inclusive archival paradigm.

Based on the survey and ethnographic data collected, there is little or no evidence to suggest that the current curriculum prepares students to address the kinds of cultural, heritage, and traditional knowledge structures that exist within Indigenous and non-Indigenous ethnic communities in Mexico. For example, a majority of the archival institutions indicated that it was very important to be able to understand local record-keeping systems. Almost three-quarters of them also indicated that it was somewhat important to be able to provide access to users with specific community or local interests. When archival educators were asked to what extent local needs are addressed in their programs, two-thirds indicated that they were always addressed. However, survey data showed that archival education programs and institutions restricted their definition of community and ‘local needs’ to those pertaining only to enterprise and governmental institutions. Similarly, when asked about the level of importance their institutions placed on educating the staff to be able to address local or regional needs of their communities, only 20% of the respondents indicated that it was somewhat important to be able to document multiethnic populations. Although Mexico is a country where numerous Indigenous languages are used (some with no written component), and in some cases (such as Oaxaca) are regionally dominant, most educators and practitioners indicated that they encountered no challenges in working with multicultural or multilingual populations within their community or region. Even if archival institutions might not have mandates to capture the experiences of marginalized communities, it is still necessary for institutions to be able to provide services to all types of users, including marginalized communities.

Ethnographic data suggests that the community of El Ciruelo is increasingly becoming interested in their African heritage and the legacy of slavery. Several interviewees stated that they simply want to know how they (Afro-Mexicans) fit into Mexican history. As more Mexicans of African descent are exposed to global history, international researchers, entertainment media, popular culture, and relatives who have migrated to the United States and returned to the Costa Chica, Afro-Mexicans have begun to see themselves differently, particularly as part of the larger African diaspora. As a result, grassroots efforts are underway to learn more about the Africa–Mexico relationship. Those interests have prompted the community to come up with its own solution by establishing repositories to collect materials relevant to its own identity, culture, and heritage and to make these

accessible to the community in ways that the community understands.⁴ The recent surge of interest in Africa is not to suggest that the community's way of remembering through incorporated practices has been altered in any way, but rather that the community now has something larger and global to connect with and further define their ways of remembering and their origins.

The need for pluralization is made clear by the fact that archival education programs in Mexico focus on inscribing practices—'modern devices for storing and retrieving information, such as photographs, print, alphabets, indexes, data bases, and so on... that trap and store information long after the human organism has stopped informing' (Urry 1996). These practices represent archives in the classic sense—repositories of records created and set aside by their institutions for legal, fiscal, and administrative purposes. Data yielded from semi-structured interviews and min-ethnographies suggest that while the community of El Ciruelo uses records described in the classic sense, the community traditionally has relied on aural and kinetic ways of remembering.

This set of circumstances places archival educators in a dilemma. Is it better to develop an archival workforce that is capable of meeting current government or enterprise needs, or to produce a generation of archivists who are equipped not only to meet current needs—compliance with the Law of Transparency for governmental agencies and businesses and the users of these types of institutions—but also able to respond to change, especially change that will inevitably be prompted from current requirements of the law, one of which may be how to meet the archival needs of different types of users? What happens when students, having graduated, are faced with users, or indeed records creators, who have needs other than those addressed in archival education programs (for example, documentary cultural heritage material for Afro-Mexican communities; potential questions about who owns certain records, especially in the case of Indigenous communities; or determining what types of objects to include in the archive, particularly when dealing with marginalized communities who may have differing notions of how a 'record' is defined and where they should be kept)? Both survey data and published curricula suggest that archival education programs are not equipping students with an intellectual framework that will enable them to be able to grapple with more complex issues such as those mentioned earlier.

Moving toward a solution

Mexico is more ethnically and culturally diverse than *mestizaje* acknowledges. When it comes to the official position of the nation's cultural heritage, Mexico's identity and collective memory rest solely with its Indigenous and Spanish lineage and heritage, despite African contributions to the nation's formation. Similarly, the Mexican community is more diverse than archival education acknowledges. There are many more archival needs and roles besides those of major institutions and enterprise. How might archival education programs in Mexico give more attention to local and regional needs, as defined by the Afro-Mexican community? As an impetus to address such needs, I recommend developing a curriculum based on the following pluralizing framework:

⁴ Despite the availability and use of records such as birth certificates, financial records, baptisms, and so forth, community members informed me that those types of documentation reveal little if anything about their African heritage. I suggest that the reason for this is because historically *mestizaje* has precluded including any data element in official records that pertain to distinctive racial or ethnic categories outside the Indigenous-Spanish construct.

1. *Conceptual expansion*, which considers different conceptualizations of the record (kinetic, oral, aural) by different communities, particularly those with non-Western epistemologies; different notions of ownership (who owns cocreated records and how should this be addressed?); different ways of remembering (inscribed or incorporated? What are the implications of each on archival ideas and practices?);
2. *Embeddedness*, which considers locating field experiences within communities to gain a richer understanding of community needs; locating teaching within communities where learning can be supported through the participation of the entire community;
3. *Collaboration*, which considers partnering with community-based organizations in efforts to cultivate equitable, mutually beneficial partnerships; integrating community teachers and critical learning models (pedagogy); partnering with community-based organizations in efforts to strengthen sustained community engagement (and produce equitable mutually beneficial partnerships) through cultural-keeping projects;
4. *Leadership, activism and ethics*, which considers expanding the archival role in promoting visibility of under-documented communities; identifying how records and archives (however, defined) contribute to the constitution of national and individual identity and history; expanding the archival role in promoting visibility of under-documented communities, especially to secure rights and responsibilities;
5. *Reflexivity*, which considers not only critical examination of the body of knowledge comprising archival theory and practice, but also the role the academic in the community and its implications; integration of critical approaches (e.g. cultural theory and critical pedagogy); examination of one's own cultural competence; and,
6. *Sustainability*, which considers planning that is sensitive to the community's resources and relevant to its cultural protocols.

The underlying assumption in developing this framework is that not all communities have the same documentary needs and record-keeping traditions, as the results of this study have indicated. This framework was developed as a tool that may be useful for systematically incorporating the interests, needs, and cultural beliefs of diverse communities into archival education, practice, and research. To accomplish this, input from the community is needed.

The above framework may be implemented by using a generative curriculum (Ball 2004), which does not assume that everyone does everything the same way. The most significant difference between using a generative model and the model currently used by archival education programs in Mexico is that a generative approach provides space for community voice when designing courses. This strategy enables educators to develop counter-hegemonic curricula that include the interests and perspectives of whatever targeted group is chosen. In this case, it is the Afro-Mexican community. A generative approach may also prove more sensitive to Mexico's current archival education infrastructure, which includes government control over the curriculum. Rather than being viewed as replacing current curricula, a generative approach might be seen as an enhancement, since implementing it does not require abandoning what is currently taught in Mexico's archival programs.

For this design to work, there are at least two factors which must be present. First, all parties involved must have a desire to engage in dialog without either side representing knowledge of the other. For example, archival educators should not try to represent the knowledge structure or documentary practices of Afro-Mexicans, and vice versa. Second, in addition to both sides sharing the desire to engage in dialog, all parties must have a clear understanding of what it means to dialog. I use the term 'dialogic' in the Freirean sense—more philosophical than methodological. Dialog in this sense is more than a mechanical

exercise whereby everyone is given a chance to share thoughts. Rather, the emphasis of dialogic action is the epistemological relationship of dialog, which is the means of developing a better understanding about an object of knowledge *without* aims of correcting, appropriating, or illegitimizing it. The goal is to understand the object of knowledge as taught by the community, or vice versa. Because of the perceived power imbalance between the ‘educated’ and community members, the educator (by the mere fact that he or she has more intellectual tools to work with and will probably be perceived as having more power) should constantly be aware of assuming that he or she knows and understands the object of knowledge from his or her own cultural or intellectual viewpoint. Taking a dialogic approach, which also requires reflexivity, will be useful in that educators may realize that they need to gain cultural competency (as much as is possible, permitted or appropriate without causing disrespect) by spending time with community members to learn about the object of knowledge and gain a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the group’s perspective.

This generative approach also requires collaboration between archival education programs and community organizations. In the case of Afro-Mexican communities, archival education programs may choose to partner with grassroots organizations such as *Mexico Negro*, an organization created by the Afro-Mexican community to build awareness of and preserve the cultural heritage of Mexicans of African descent. These relationships are pertinent to building a sustainable infrastructure which could diversify archival education and practice in at least two different ways. First, community members may become a source of new students and eventually new faculty for archival education programs. Secondly, engagement with the community will create a space to incorporate the interests, needs, and cultural beliefs of diverse ethnic and marginalized communities into archival education, thus potentially pluralizing archival knowledge and practice.

Other types of arrangements might include tracking students from the Costa Chica region into archival education and establishing a requirement that students who are taken from the region have to go back to work in the Costa Chica for certain periods of time. This would provide these students who can walk in both worlds with the potential to take leadership roles alongside their own cultural leaders and further increase their visibility. Archival programs could also incorporate final projects or extended pieces of investigation into advanced topics specific to the needs identified by the Afro-Mexican community, including a service learning component where students are placed in Afro-Mexican organizations.

Once these types of partnerships are established with grassroots organizations, dialog can take place in various locations. But there should be a location embedded within the Afro-Mexican community, since it is economically the most disadvantaged, and part of the way in which this community remembers is linked to the Costa Chica region. For examples, many of the *corridos* (songs about local historical events) refer to actual locations in the region; several of the dances refer to the historical relationship between Mexicans of African descent and various regional Indigenous groups; origin narratives are linked to geographic features such as lagoons and mountain ranges. Those contextual elements may help educators better understand the context of documentary practices in the region as well as helping them to address more practical aspects such as preserving textual records in a region that experiences prolonged exposure to humidity and heat, structures with uncontrolled environments, flooding, and insects. Educators and students could be paired with community-identified elders and/or cultural leaders to discuss issues identified by the community as relevant to preserving and documenting Costa Chican cultural heritage.

An example of how this might be done is to take the Introduction of Archival Science course taught at ENBA since it is an introductory level core course that would provide opportunities for conceptual expansion. This course could be used to introduce students and community members to some of the principal foundations of archival theory such as the lifecycle of records, how the paradigm defines a record, archival functions such as accessioning, appraisal, and description; provenance, ownership, how the paradigm defines an archive, and so forth. The Afro-Mexican community would define and share its notions of these concepts.

Traditionally, a ‘record’ is defined as a two-dimensional object. The International Council on Archives (ICA), whose archival description standards are taught in Mexican archival education programs, defines a ‘record’ as ‘[r]ecorded information in any form or medium, created or received and maintained, by an organization or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs’ (CPBS 2007). However, its definition of the term ‘medium’ limits conceptualizations of the record to two-dimensional objects. The ICA defines ‘medium’ as ‘the physical material, container, and/or carrier in or on which information is recorded (i.e., clay tablet, papyrus, paper, parchment, film, magnetic tape). This definition works well for literate societies that often rely on textual ways of documentation, but how well does it work for oral communities such as Afro-Mexicans or Indigenous communities who might not have a written language? Does it mean that these communities have no records? Or does it mean that because their ways of documenting the past are different from what the definition says, these ways of remembering will not be captured?

An example of the type of discussion that might arise from a course that includes the community’s voice is a consideration of Afro-Mexican *corridos* and their textual properties. Most archival educators would probably tend to dismiss the *corrido* as a song or ballad, but dialog with local Afro-Mexican *corrido* experts might inspire a new interest in the notion of ‘text’ since members of the *corrido* community recognize an ideal form of each song, which could be seen as a ‘textualized’ version that may or may not be captured in writing. For example, *corridos* usually consist of three major components: composer, performer, and audience. The community considers the original positioning of these components as comprising the original text. Any rearrangement of these components with respect to the *corridos* and to the events they narrate constitutes the creation of an entirely new text—one that is understood by the Afro-Mexican community. Performers may create a new text when an existing *corrido* is only minimally altered in the act of performance. Thus, when seen from the community’s perspective, Western, literate notions of texts are challenged. It seems that ‘text’, in this context, does not always refer to print but rather is a social process between composer, performer, and the audience. The *corrido* proposes a realignment of focus, locating ‘text’ as an indicator of social process culminating in the performance of *corridos* in public arenas. The *corrido*’s textuality might also raise questions about its function as a record. How are *corridos* preserved? How is authenticity established? Since they are considered as records in the Afro-Mexican community, who owns them, if anyone? What mechanisms are in place to ensure the veracity of *corridos*? These are the types of questions that archivists, as experts in the record—broadly defined—should be able to engage in ways that are culturally inclusive and sensitive to the Afro-Mexican community.

The traditional definition of the ‘archive’ is another example of an archival concept that needs to be pluralized. The Society of American Archivists defines ‘archives’ from an institutional perspective, as the ‘division within an organization responsible for maintaining the organization’s records of enduring value, ...[a]n organization that collects the

records of individuals, families, or other organizations...[t]he building (or portion thereof) housing archival collections' (Pearce-Moses 2005). Should the archive serve the same purpose and have the same form throughout Mexico? Perhaps, Afro-Mexicans or Indigenous communities have different notions of how an archive is defined. Rather than being a building where two-dimensional records are kept and preserved in environmentally controlled vaults, what if a community, particularly an oral community, finds more cultural value in the notion of an archive as a living entity, where non-textual records are collected and preserved through intangible artifacts such as *corridos* and dances, or through physical objects such as costumes and instruments? What if the living archive is a more useful way for some marginalized communities to access their own heritage, particularly those like Afro-Mexicans, whose African heritage is not officially recognized by the State? Ethnographic data from this study showed that history survives through dance in the community of El Ciruelo. With an open architecture, generative curriculum design, which included community voices, these types of issues might be addressed more fully.

Conclusion

With this study, I hope to have broadened an understanding of the role archives play in society and to have demonstrated that the archive (broadly defined) is critical, for it is the archive and its corresponding components that collectively determine what and who are remembered (and how) as well as forgotten. This applies to all societies, not only to the Afro-Mexican community. The issues raised in this study concern other disenfranchised groups within Mexico, Latin America, and Europe. Globally, ethnic communities are demanding political representation not because they see themselves as being less French, Mexican, Peruvian, and so forth, but because they are different. In many nations, there is movement, albeit slowly, in the opposite direction from the traditional view that we need common national values to be equal. Replacing this view is one that does not diminish nationalism, but recognizes difference. The archive, again broadly defined, also needs to recognize difference.

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Kelvin L. White is an assistant professor at University of Oklahoma's School of Library and Information Studies. He received a Master's degree in Afro-American Studies and his PhD in Information Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Using social justice as a framework, his work examines the interconnections between the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which record-keeping activities exist and the implications they have for marginalized or underrepresented communities. Currently, his research examines issues of memory and remembering in Afro-Mexican communities in the Costa Chica (Mexico); critically interrogates contemporary archival theory and constructs; and develops ways in which education and pedagogy might contribute to cultural relevancy and sensitivity in archival practice and research.