

ARTICLE

Teaching Tandanya in Palestine and Lebanon: Liberatory Pedagogy for Archival Sovereignty

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Abstract

This article discusses how The Adelaide-Tandanya Declaration has been incorporated as a pedagogical tool within the training components of the project, Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza's Genocide & the War on Lebanon, a collaborative archival initiative delivering emergency mitigation and digitization training to heritage stewards and information professionals focused on Palestine and Lebanon against the backdrop of expanding genocide and settler colonialism. Grounded in bell hooks' pedagogy of hope and decolonial archival praxis, the authors explain how The Declaration's insistence on indigenous archival sovereignty opened space to teach eurocentric archival standards and practices *otherwise* – critically, openly, and less oppressively. The article situates the course within broader struggles for archival sovereignty and liberatory pedagogy, outlining how the curriculum integrates foundational archival practices – on description, digitization, and emergency mitigation – with critical approaches that foreground community knowledge, anti-colonial frameworks, and principles of stewardship. Drawing on experiences from multiple rounds of training, the authors reflect on the challenges of translating and teaching archival standards, methods, and practices across linguistic, cultural, and political contexts while resisting the eurocentric assumptions embedded in archival science. Particular attention is given to the role of collective learning, translation, and contextualization in shaping an approach to archival education rooted in solidarity and resistance. The article further reflects on the challenges, contradictions, and possibilities of teaching for liberation in active war zones and argues that teaching archival practice in contexts of crisis can function as a form of community defense, supporting local actors in safeguarding memory, asserting narrative authority, and mobilizing archives as tools for justice and liberation.

Keywords: *Archival sovereignty; Decolonial archival praxis; Participatory archiving; Anti-colonial methods; Archival pedagogy; Tandanya Declaration, International Council on Archives; Emergency heritage response; Genocide; Gaza; South Lebanon; Palestine; Archives destruction and looting; Settler colonialism; Ongoing Nakba.*

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Introduction, by J. J. Ghaddar

When we only name the problem, when we state a complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope. In this way, critique can become merely an expression of profound cynicism, which then works to sustain dominator culture. [...] My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. – bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*¹

As an educator, archivist, scholar, and movement organizer, hope has been at the center of my praxis.² ‘Hope is a discipline’, I recall often.³ It requires communal labor and continuous practice. Focused on action, it builds community and seeks transformation. We cultivate it like our intellectual acumen and physical strength, or the land that we defend with our lives. We hold on to it like we grasp our loved ones amidst the bombs. We share, send, and circulate it as we do with the olives and bread that sustain and nourish. Hope is the most generous and generative gift. Walking into a classroom as an instructor for the first time, when I took up the rather mammoth task as a doctoral student to teach the first-ever ‘diversity’ course at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Information in Fall 2020 during Covid, I brought bell hooks with me. I brought all the antiracist feminists and insurgent writers with me, like Nahla Abdo, Sherene Razack, Sara Ahmed, Saidiya Hartman, Angela Davis, Walter Rodney, Audra Simpson, Kwame Nkrumah, Leanne Simpson, Rabab Abdulhadi, Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral.⁴ What else could I do? As I sought to do, all these thinkers connect teaching, research, and writing to liberation struggles and social change. On the screen during the first class of that virtual course, and of most courses I have taught since, I reminded myself and explained to the students that, ‘When we only name the problem, when we state a complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope’.⁵ It was a promise I made to myself and the class that we would not only talk about what is wrong with the world. We would also imagine and work towards a better one. The *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration* has become an important tool to do just that in a virtual archival first aid and emergency mitigation training initiative that I have been developing and teaching since 2023 to people in Palestine, Lebanon, and the Global South, in collaboration with a teaching team that includes my coauthors, Dr. Ana Roeschley, Dr. Mariam Karim, Rima Ghanem, and Fatima el-Bazzal.⁶ Tandanya’s insistence on indigenous archival sovereignty and its refusal of colonial epistemologies create space for teaching and learning the dominant eurocentric archival standards and practices *otherwise*, that is, in critical, open-minded, and less oppressive ways.

In *Teaching Community: Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks builds on the importance of hope for educators: ‘We must highlight the positive, life-transforming rewards that have been the outcome of collective efforts to change our society, especially education, so that it is not a site for the enactment of domination in any form’.⁷ I took her entreaty to heart, that we must refuse to indoctrinate students ‘to support imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy or any ideology’.⁸ Critical thinking, rigorous study, and open-mindedness – these are what our classrooms must foster. To teach in a way that encourages new ways of thinking, and how to think in fresh ways about old and seemingly entrenched problems, is to practice a ‘pedagogy of hope’ that turns the classroom into ‘a place that is life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality’ that builds community and interconnection between teachers and students, between classrooms and communities, and between universities and movements.⁹ In doing so, such pedagogy intentionally works against the white supremacist logics that ‘impose a forgetting of interconnections, of viable relations, and of performances of collectivity that might nurture greater social wholeness, but are deactivated for capital accumulation and state management’.¹⁰ This pedagogy of hope does not avoid discomfort or the painful, as neoliberal

pedagogy claims educators must. Far from eschewing the difficult, it ‘can use the knowledge of death and dying to strengthen the process of learning’.¹¹ This insight, that we must teach against oppression through hope, became foundational to the pedagogical interventions we made through the *Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza’s Genocide & the War on Lebanon* project co-led by me (South Lebanon), alongside co-authors Dr. Hanine Shehadeh (Gaza) and Dr. Rami Zurayk (South Lebanon). To teach community and generate hope are principles at the core of *Fighting Erasure’s* training initiative, *Safeguarding Archives, Building Resilience in Palestine, Lebanon & the Global South*, where accessibility, empathy, and community are as much the ends as the means of our teaching.

This article explains how we used the Tandanya Declaration as an educational tool to teach hope in this training initiative, outlining how we have incorporated it into both the content and structure of the curriculum to help us grapple with the questions and dilemmas inherent to teaching against a backdrop of genocide, ethnic cleansing, displacement, and settler colonialism. The following also shares key aspects of what it is like to develop a course and educational infrastructure that has to respond in real-time to violence that is ongoing, devastating, continuously shifting, and embedded into the lived experiences that participants bring to class. The first section discusses the *Fighting Erasure* project that the training is part of, and its broader goals and framework of archiving and documenting (against) genocide. The second section focuses on the training program and how The Declaration has been incorporated into the curriculum. The last section draws on comments and discussions by training participants, as well as theorizing about land and pedagogy, to reflect on, and tease out, the broader political and pedagogical implications of incorporating The Declaration into community-based and locally grounded archival training programs. In the process, the article provides a relatively successful participatory model for training and teaching in settler colonial contexts and active war zones that is honest about limitations and challenges.

This article contributes to the expansive debates within archival science about archives, decoloniality, liberatory memory work, and education, including literature that considers the potential of international instruments, statements, and protocols like the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Vienna Convention on Property, Archives & Debts, CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance, and Position Statement on the Right of Reply to Indigenous Knowledges & Information Held in Archives.¹² Tandanya is one such instrument. It builds on UNDRIP, expressing its core principle of self-determination within archival settings. As with the aforementioned literature, this article recognizes the usefulness of Tandanya as an instrument for imagining and working towards decolonial archival futures, as well as the lack of political will to realize decolonial now’s as expressed within such instruments. This intervention demonstrates that archival pedagogy can move beyond teaching diversity and inclusion to become an active intervention against racist violence, erasure, and settler-colonial structures, particularly when courses are structured through participatory and community-centered approaches.¹³ While Kuecker et al. argue ‘that teaching community archiving can create a classroom community that becomes a community archive in itself’, this intervention further illustrates the power of building community through the classroom to resist erasure while likewise acknowledging ‘the value of the personal, affective, and collaborative aspects of archival practice that are emphasized in community archiving practice and literature, and [...] the ways in which these operate as dimensions of pedagogy and classroom community, allowing both the content and delivery of the class to work in harmony’.¹⁴ Our experience also demonstrates a strong relationship between the way a course is structured and its content and teaching goals. Building on this insight, this article places on the agenda of the archival field urgent questions that it can only begin to answer: how archival educators and

practitioners might develop and implement a decolonial archival pedagogy through participatory frameworks of education; and about how the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Arab regional context challenges and/or affirm The Declaration's principles, which have largely emerged through conversations focused on settler colonial sites such as Canada and Australia.

Palestinian and Lebanese conceptualizations of indigeneity, which recognize the people's rootedness in the land, emerge from a historical experience of sovereignty, land, identity, culture, and colonialism that differs significantly from other settler-colonial contexts. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these issues in detail, suffice it to say that Palestinian and Lebanese people are indigenous in that they have a settler to deal with. In line with an expansive and cross-disciplinary literature on the topic, here, indigeneity in the context of the Israeli project is used to refer to the reality of living under settler colonialism. Indigenous identity, then, is defined relationally, that is, by a continuous relationship with a settler state that seeks to dispossess land and eliminate native presence to make way for an external population.¹⁵ For this reason, I adopt the convention of using a small 'i' instead of capital 'I', to distinguish this usage from that associated with settler-colonial contexts such as Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand, where Indigenous (with a capital 'I') refers to historically specific colonial formations and cultural paradigms. While The Declaration has been written from such sites of struggles and settler violence, this article discusses an experience of applying it within the former contexts that are very different. This distinction has been emphasized by training participant and collaborator, H.J., who requested we provide only her initials in this publication. In conversations with Rima Ghanem and I, she emphasized that one important difference is that Palestinians are not a minority within their ancestral lands – which also applies in the case of Lebanon. To her apt observation, I would add that in both cases, there is a plethora of written records that capture and attest to the history of the people on their lands since time immemorial, a substantial number of which were written by locals over centuries and millennia.

Overall, these questions about archival pedagogy, participatory decolonial praxis, and the way in which Tandanya travels (so to speak) have often been discussed among the teaching team. They are considered below not to provide definitive answers, which is beyond what this single article and initiative can do, but to begin finding insight and creating openings towards addressing them more fully in the field. Doing so is crucial. As the USA-Israeli aggression and genocide expand and deepen from the small Gaza Strip to the rest of occupied Palestine, from besieged Gaza to an increasingly besieged South Lebanon and Dahiye, from Gaza's bloodied Mediterranean waters deep into the Syrian and Iraqi hinterlands, and from Gaza's dystopian landscape to Iran and across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, the importance of a pedagogy of hope that is transformative, community-building, and life-sustaining only increases. It takes a lot of discipline and commitment to cultivate hope in the midst of the incredible work the teaching team has been doing. I often think of team members participating in meetings on their phones while driving in the midst of bombs and catastrophic landscapes. I think of long days and nights tracking who is alive where, displaced, or is no longer reachable. I think of all the martyrs, often, and of our training participants risking their lives to reach internet cafes in Gaza with the meager funds we could give them to huddle around a computer and listen to us talk about provenance and checksums. I think of the kindness of our guest instructors and teaching assistants (TA) – like Dr. James Lowry, Raymond Frogner, Dr. Nisha Toomey, Amal Ahmed, Andy Sandock, and Krystal Payne – who never hesitate to help where they can. I think of my co-instructor, Dr. Ana Roeschley, tackling Arabic through online translation services so she can respond with the kindest messages on the live Zoom chat to participant comments. I think of the incredible sense of community and purpose we feel in the virtual classrooms, teachers and participants alike, and how the training helps sustain us through the

horrors of the unfolding genocide and war. I think of Fatima el-Bazzal and Rima Ghanem in virtual meetings debating how to translate ‘dispossession’ in The Declaration into Arabic; of the many comments by Palestinian and Lebanese participants about how our societies have no means to assert the self-determination affirmed in The Declaration; and of the enthusiasm with which the International Council on Archives’ Indigenous Expert Group responded to my email proposing that the translation be officially adopted by the Council.

It is from such places and people, to paraphrase bell hooks, that my hope emerges. This article tracks and discusses such moments at the intersections of Tandanya and archival pedagogy in active war zones. Yet this discussion is as much about violence and death as it is about hope and community. It is as much about the dissonance of teaching in virtual classrooms in Gaza, where students never complain about the immense difficulties and griefs of their lives, while walking into the affluence of physical classrooms in the Global North, shaped by the white power and privilege that makes the violence in Gaza both possible and erasable. It speaks to the contradiction between archival science’s avowed commitments to social justice and universality, and the often insurmountable barriers to trying to teach or do archiving in the Global South. The Declaration speaks to such dilemmas, challenges, and conundrums, to both impossibility and hope. Acknowledging how thoroughgoing and unabridged the colonial violence and dispossession have been and remain, it simultaneously insists on the undoing of the colonial and the reinvigoration of the indigenous. After Israeli bombs obliterated Gaza’s education sector, and after almost 3 years without formal learning for the children and people of the besieged strip, this article shares a collective experience of teaching for liberation and how The Declaration creates space against the eurocentricism of archival science by providing conceptual tools to work towards an alternative, even when we are still mired in the western archival hegemon.¹⁶

Section I: Fighting erasure from Palestine to Lebanon

At the start of the 2023 Gaza genocide, as the mass displacement of people from their lands unfolded; as threats were first made and then executed to destroy crucial documents and archives across the Gaza Strip; and as the annihilatory drive to remake natural and built environments became undeniable, an international group of scholars, researchers, memory workers, archivists, architects, professional and academic associations, heritage institutions, non-governmental organizations, and research centers came together to launch a comprehensive project aimed at fighting erasure and producing anticolonial knowledge with local communities in Palestine and Lebanon.¹⁷ Launched on October 8, 2023, the *Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza’s Genocide & the War on Lebanon* project is housed at the Archives & Digital Media Lab and the American University of Beirut’s Landscape Design & Ecosystem Management Department. A participatory action research, archival, and teaching initiative that is locally grounded and deeply collaborative, the project operates through a large project management team alongside a cross-sectoral network of Palestinian, Lebanese, regional, and international professionals, communities, and organizations. In turn, a core aspect of our archival interventions has been a focus on supporting the development of independent professional and trans-institutional governance structures for local professionals, organizations, and communities to gain greater decision-making mechanisms when interfacing with collaborators regionally and globally, including ourselves. These include the Archival Community – Palestine and the Palestine Archives Task Force at the International Council on Archives.

The project has operated with initial seed funding from the University of Amsterdam, American University of Beirut, New York University – Abu Dhabi, and Dalhousie University, as well as the International Council on Archives’ Section for Archival Education & Training, Fund for International Development of Archives (FIDA), and Programme Commission

Projects. With these modest funds, and a substantial global network of committed volunteers, we have organized a series of research, advocacy, education, and capacity-building projects over the last 3 years under the auspices of the broad *Fighting Erasure* initiative, with a focus on Gaza and South Lebanon. These have included efforts to assess and report on damage to local heritage, archives, land, ecosystems, and built environments; to document human rights violations, population displacement, and settlement expansion; to develop and deliver culturally specific archival curricula with local associations and organizations for increased resilience, networking, and knowledge sharing; to provide training, equipment, and resources for digitization and archival first aid projects; and to work towards developing new frameworks and models for resilient and agile digital infrastructures and transinstitutional governance in active war zones and colonized spaces.¹⁸

A key aspect of this work has been the rather mammoth effort to translate, localize, and create or further develop local archival and digital standards, protocols, methods, and practices for archiving in the cultural and linguistic context of Palestine and Lebanon; as well as to develop new approaches for archival and heritage work. So far, as part of the training course, we have developed initial translations of about 400 pages of archival standards and protocols into Arabic. Included among these are the Tandanya Declaration, the General International Standard for Archival Description (ISAD-G), the American Library Association's Minimum Standards for Digitization, materials from the SAA's Documenting in Times of Crisis Resource Kit, and multiple templates and guides specifically created for the course. We are now beginning the much slower and more challenging work of polishing, testing, adapting, localizing, or replacing these translated standards collaboratively with impacted communities and organizations. The challenges are formidable if not insurmountable in some instances; Ghaddar argues that ISAD-G actively erases Palestine and other native nomenclatures; Drake notes that creator-centric provenance undergirding dominant archival standards recenters white men of property and racist logics; and Wiebe shows how the increasing use of Linked Data 'in archival description to enhance interoperability and discovery across systems often involves settler-colonial epistemological and ontological assumptions that can distort, flatten, or misrepresent community-defined meanings'.¹⁹ In line with Wiebe's emphasis on 'design principles for community-governed, protocol-supported infrastructures that ensure archival descriptions remain rooted in Land, kinship, and Indigenous authority', *Fighting Erasure* is working toward archival standards and guidelines for Palestine, Lebanon, and the region that are decided upon and governed by local communities, and that actively work to cohere indigenous societies and their relationship to their lands.

We seek to create an innovative decolonial archival and heritage suite of standards, guidelines, models, frameworks, and protocols focused on land and community that can interface with the dominant archival practices and standards by international and regional bodies on description, metadata, digitization, storage, and data sovereignty in coordination and consultation with local professionals, organizations, and associations. Alongside these standards and models, we have also developed, and continue to refine, a curriculum to train cultural stewards and archivists. This work seeks to lay the critical groundwork – theoretical, technical, and professional – for building sustainable, sovereign, and resilient archival and digital infrastructures in Palestine and Lebanon. By working to theorize, if not develop, robust systems for digital and archival governance and preservation, this project works to support local institutions and heritage stewards in safeguarding their heritage *in place*, i.e., as much as possible without removing them from their original place and cultural ecosystem, or at least from local control.²⁰ Crucially, this project is designed for scalability, providing a blueprint that can be adapted to protect archives and documentary heritage in other regions affected by conflict or disaster. In thinking through this alternative model, we seek to defy the now discredited

colonial wisdom that only by removing our archives from our lands and/or control can they be saved.²¹

Instead, we ask, as Yusef Omowale puts so well in the context of community archives in the USA, ‘what are the core values that enable the sustainability of archives that, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, were never meant to survive?’²² Working in defiance of complex, unpredictable, and often life-threatening challenges, we eschew half-measures and insist on developing innovative anticolonial practices and decolonial frameworks that address the root causes of the problems, such as theories and concepts of *archiving in place*, *Palestine as provenance*, *provenance in place*, and *many small returns*.²³ While beyond the scope of this article, here we gesture at the innovative decolonial, land-based, and community-oriented practices being retheorized and modeled for emergency mitigation and heritage management in marginalized and locally specific contexts that integrate key Indigenous, antiracist, feminist, and decolonial thinking into curatorial and archival praxis.²⁴ Hence, our work draws on and feeds into scholarly debates and theorizing of practices of refusal in research; feminist research methods and frameworks; decolonial archival praxis; epistemic violence and repair; memorialization of mass violence, transinstitutional modes of governance and collaboration, indigenous data sovereignty, and the politics of heritage.²⁵ It speaks to Butler’s call for:

[A] healing mode of thought and aspiration, that is neither naive or uncritical, but bound up in a belief in the capacity of archival memory, heritage and certain modes of representation to bring comfort, cure and healing to situations of conflict, containment, displacement and exile [that address the] urgent need to restore and reconstitute a collective Palestinian archival memory through acts of archival restoration and reconstruction.²⁶

Such a collective archival memory that is urgently needed in Palestine is also required in Lebanon, particularly in the South, as well as elsewhere in a region that has suffered for well over a century from western imperial encroachment and its epistemic violences. Similar destruction has occurred in South Lebanon over the course of repeated invasions, including Israel’s long occupation of South Lebanon and its ongoing control of the Syrian Golan Heights – both of which reflect broader territorial and settler-colonial ambitions beyond Palestine – and continued bombardments and militarized tension, contributing to both material and epistemic violences that have irreparably damaged archival and other material heritage while disrupting the oral and intergenerational transmission of knowledge and memory.²⁷ There is a parallel need, then, to reconstitute and restore archival memory in South Lebanon as there is in Palestinian contexts. Regardless of the locale, our approach places the people on, and of, the land at the center of the work.

The project’s foundational ethos is South-South and North-South knowledge transfer, cooperation, and solidarity beyond benevolence and paternalism in sites of mass violence at the margins of governance structures and the fringes of disciplines and knowledge infrastructures. By challenging extractive modes of heritage ‘rescue’ efforts, this project works towards an alternative to colonial paternalism through a community-led, feminist, and decolonial model of heritage protection. This project integrates community-led development of practices, tools, and standards with cultural resilience strategies and digital sustainability in conflict areas. Despite immense challenges, local guardians of history persevere in documenting and preserving their heritage, yet their vital work is constrained by a critical lack of resources, training, and state or national coordination. In direct response, our initiative is built on a foundation of decolonial archival praxis and indigenous archival sovereignty so well articulated in The Declaration, prioritizing local leadership, community ownership, open and replicable tools, and the expansion of technical possibilities for preservation. It is bolstered by strong

academic and civil society networks, creating a sustainable ecosystem of support. As part of this overall initiative, a project focused on training and capacity building was launched in 2025, which is the focus of the next section.

Section 2: Fundamentals of archival management & emergency mitigation in Palestine, Lebanon & the Global South

The course we have been developing and delivering is a crucial node for building community and creating spaces for collective thinking in the aforementioned training and capacity-building project, which responds to the urgent need to provide assistance and support to the archival and heritage sector for the protection and safeguarding of archives and heritage in Palestine and Lebanon in the face of the expansive Israeli settler colonial project. This need has been identified by many statements, reports, and investigations that detail the extensive damage and destruction to archival heritage taking place at an alarming rate, and the threat of far greater damage given the continuity and potential escalation of the conflict.²⁸ Reports also indicate the incalculable loss of knowledge and skills with the deaths of professionals, educators, and volunteers in the heritage sectors. The project offers training, networking, advocacy, knowledge sharing, and capacity building focused on professional archives, archival institutions, and other custodians of significant collections and vital records to increase emergency preparedness, mitigation, rescue, and recovery efforts. It builds on and substantially expands training activities initially planned for Lebanon with the LLA and Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), which were then repurposed and expanded with the Archival Community – Palestine (ACP) and other partners when the genocide in Gaza began. It was not possible for us to ignore the urgent need to act in solidarity with our Palestinian colleague in Gaza and proceed with our initial plan. Here we demonstrate what it means to refuse to normalize genocide.

So far, we have held three iterations of the course: Round 1 online from January 25 to March 8, 2025; Round 2 online July 5 to August 30, 2025; and Round 3 in-person at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon with some virtual sessions from November 10–19, 2025. The training's primary target group is the archival and heritage sectors in Palestine and Lebanon, with an emphasis on the staff, members, and community of our partner and collaborating organizations, including the ACP, MELA, LLA, American University of Beirut, Ramallah City Archives, and Wathaqiyya Archival Initiative. Secondary targets include archivists and professional heritage workers who are Palestinian refugees and members of the Palestinian diasporas in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. Hence, we are targeting those who are situated in the region and committed to preserving Palestinian and Lebanese heritage and history against erasure and epistemicide. A key goal is to provide a course that could serve as an incubator for digitization, archival first aid, and emergency mitigation planning and projects by embedding the training within a broad networking, fundraising, knowledge sharing, mentoring, and coordination program. Our goal, in sum, is to provide the support that our Palestinian and Lebanese colleagues deserve to better preserve and digitize their archives, records, and collections. Through the training program, we aim to develop a network of people across the region and beyond for rapid response to safeguard archival heritage at risk, while increasing their emergency preparedness for any escalation of the conflict. The course would be rooted in an archival curriculum and training program in English and Arabic, tailored to the current conflict, environment, and conditions in the target areas, and in (relative) conformity with international standards and best practices. Ultimately, we also hope to leverage the training initiative to help us co-initiate with participants a plan to mitigate risk and prepare for potential emergencies.

Participants in the course would have access to the course curriculum and training materials, 20+ hours of synchronous lectures and tutorials, and the full course (lecture recordings, exercise sheets, etc.) online for free through Library Juice Academy's educational portal. This is possible because of the incredible generosity of Rory Litwin and the Academy. While some of our universities refused to allow us to use – at no extra cost to them – our teaching portals for the course, Rory Litwin from Library Juice Academy responded almost immediately in the affirmative to our request to use their educational portal. Participants would also benefit from access to a volunteer advisory network of experienced and recognized archival and heritage experts, educators, researchers, and organizational representatives who agreed to provide advice and assistance in completing digitization and emergency mitigation projects for archives and heritage at risk in the target areas. As per the syllabus, the course we developed is a free online live training on the fundamentals of archival and records management taught in English with Arabic interpretation/translation, prioritizing professionals in Palestine, Lebanon, and the Global South in conflict settings, and where there is little to no archival education capacity locally. It is an incubator for the development of digitization projects with a focus on emergency mitigation, disaster planning, and archival first aid. The course is grounded in a critical anticolonial and decolonial framework grounded in The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, which is a tool to help us think through the Eurocentrism of the western-dominated archival field and engage alternative practices emerging from communities and movements.

The course deals with five major interrelated concerns of archivists and records managers:

1. the context of the creation and the characteristics of records
2. the management and preservation of historical and current records in all formats and media (digital, paper, multimedia, audio, etc.) with limited resources and infrastructures, with a focus on the Palestinian and Lebanese cases
3. emergency preparedness, disaster mitigation, and archival first aid in times of conflict and natural disasters from a Global South perspective, with a focus on the Palestinian and Lebanese cases
4. the digitization and digital curation of records in all media to enhance preservation and accessibility; and
5. the social, cultural, legal, and political dimensions of archives and records from a Global South perspective in relation to historical and contemporary dynamics of power, racism, and colonialism.

Furthermore, as per the syllabus, the course is divided into two units: **Unit 1 – Fundamentals of Archives & Records Management (ARM):** The course begins with an introduction to key concepts, theories, methods, and practices that all archivists and records managers need to know, with a focus on the knowledge needed to plan and implement a digitization project. These include the fundamental ARM functions of acquisition/creation, appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, retention/disposition, and access. Students will learn how to perform these functions based on key international standards, guidelines, and best practices, with a focus on the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD-G) of the International Council on Archives (ICA), Dublin Core, Minimum Digitization Capture Recommendations, and Digital Content Life Cycle Model. **Unit 2 – From Emergency Mitigation & Archival First Aid to Digitization & Digital Preservation:** The second part of the course builds on Unit 1 to walk participants through the challenging process of developing and implementing emergency mitigation, disaster planning, and archival first aid initiatives and projects, as well as digitization projects for preservation in accordance with the Minimum

Digitization Capture Recommendations and related key best practices and standards. The class will also learn the basics of digital preservation and hear first-hand accounts from colleagues who have implemented digitization projects. During the third round of the course, we would also add an oral history unit to the course; **Unit 3 – Planning & Implementing an Oral History Project:** The aim of the oral history module is to introduce students to the concepts of oral history and oral memory as two complementary research fields that broaden the horizons of historical writing beyond the limits of classical narratives based on official documents. The course provides a theoretical and methodological framework that enables students to understand the relationship between history, memory, documentation, and oral narration from a critical and analytical perspective. Overall, the course aims to equip students with the conceptual and methodological tools necessary to understand oral memory as an alternative source for writing history, and to develop their skills in collecting, analyzing, and employing oral testimonies within research and archival projects that contribute to preserving local social and cultural history.

While planning the training course, our expectation was that the training module would be offered in iterations of 20 to 40 students. However, when we first opened applications for the training project, we could not have anticipated the result.²⁹ Launching the call for applications on archival, information, and heritage listservs, we received 463 applications within 3 days from librarians, archivists, museum curators, civil servants, activists, and other cultural heritage stewards in Palestine, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Global South, including the Congo, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen. It was not lost on us that many of these applications came in from individuals living under occupation and genocide, in active conflict zones, and in refugee camps. We could not, as a group of Palestinian and Lebanese archivists and scholars, and as people from other places like Bosnia and Turtle Island, turn away our colleagues from areas of mass imperial violence. But how could we meet the needs of hundreds of individuals when we initially anticipated 20–40 participants? This moment was an emotional one for us. We decided that we could not turn away people in urgent and isolated conditions. We needed to make necessary pivots to ensure that the applicants with the highest needs could participate. Pivoting required us to recruit additional volunteer coordinators and teaching team members to process the large number of applications, expand the number of students we could accommodate in each round of the course, and increase the number of times we would offer it. We also had to develop a set of criteria by which to decide who we would commit to provide the training to, and who would be prioritized among them for each round.

This pivoting required time, effort, and care. We emailed applicants, informing them openly and honestly of the situation and what we were trying to do to address it. We announced to them that we had to postpone the dates of the first round of training and that it would take us longer than expected to get back to them.³⁰ The messages we received from the applicants in turn were kind, appreciative, understanding, and reciprocating of the sense of community and mutual responsibility our message sought to convey. Eschewing detached professional tones, or overtly politicized or urgent ones, we sought to communicate throughout the training with our participants in an open, calming, and warm professional tone that expressed our sense of community and common cause with them. In the end, we committed to offering the opportunity to complete the training to over half of the applicants based on a complex set of criteria about who had the most urgent situation, most pressing needs, the least support and resources, and the most compelling claims to relationality with us and responsibility from us. In Round 1, we accepted 47 applicants, most of whom were from Gaza, of whom 34 completed the course. In Round 2, we accepted 66 applicants, of whom 47 completed the course. In Round 3, we accepted 53 applicants, of whom 40 completed the course. We are now in the process of planning further rounds of the course as well as additional advanced modules. As this goes

to press, we have had to cancel a round scheduled for Spring 2026 that we planned to deliver in person in South Lebanon. The launch of the US-Israeli war on Iran on February 28, 2026, and the subsequent escalation of the conflict in Lebanon, have foreclosed that possibility at the time of this writing.

After the completion of the three rounds of training, we organized a virtual symposium for our cohort of archival professionals, volunteers, and heritage workers trained and certified in the curriculum, as well as a consortium of professionals and institutions to increase regional capacity, coordination, and preservation efforts. The *Resilient Communities, Resilient Archives Conference: Protecting Heritage, Memory & Land in Palestine & Lebanon* took place online in Arabic and English from December 5–7, 2025. Featuring over 30 keynotes and panelists comprised mainly of local practitioners, alongside a global network of allies and diasporic community members, the symposium fostered North-South and South-South networking, capacity building, education, and advocacy focused on the importance of preserving Palestinian and Lebanese archives and heritage. Many training participants presented their knowledge, experience, and perspective at the symposium while training team members served as audience members and moderators, intentionally complicating, if not altogether flipping the teacher-learner roles from the course.

Perforce, the first two rounds of the course had to be virtual to include participants in Palestine, as well as Lebanon, during the full-scale war in 2024 and 2025 (and again now as this goes to press). There is no other way to navigate the bombs, checkpoints, travel restrictions, and geographic challenges inherent to occupation and militarized zones, as well as the transnationality of the course. However, the pivot to virtual delivery meant that participants would need access to a computer and the internet, as well as the ability to read PDF and text files. They would also need a video and a microphone. Despite an initial reluctance, we ended up settling on Zoom video conferencing for synchronous course delivery because of its interpretation feature and relative ubiquity. We also worked to raise funds for participant stipends that would allow them to purchase data or access internet cafes. Because many of our Round 1 participants were in Gaza, we moved the course time to ensure that it was held during the working hours of the internet cafes they used. All of these logistical decisions, as well as the curricular and project design ones discussed previously, were made through consulting with our local partners and participants. We spent a lot of time in virtual meetings and on phone calls. Often that meant waking up or staying awake at odd times as our team and participants live in many different time zones. It took a lot of commitment and care for people to wake up at 5 am on Saturdays, for example, to run the Zoom or deliver a lecture. It took even more commitment and a lot of courage for people in Gaza to access the internet and computers they needed to participate.

While virtual delivery was necessary, we anticipated from the outset that the technology aspect would lead to challenges for participants, not least those in Gaza with the internet shutdowns, displacements, violence, and other aspects of the ongoing genocide. One of our approaches was to recruit a team of accessibility and course coordinators whose role was to work with each individual participant. Key to their work was building rapport and relationships with participants that prioritized hospitality, empathy, and creativity. Rather than assuming that participants were uninterested in participating in the course if they did not respond to our emails, we would follow up individually with each participant several times over email and phone, as well as through other participants or our partners who knew them. We also created a WhatsApp group for participants in each cohort. This last simple pivot was especially effective at creating easier and clearer communication between participants and us. Thanks to the hardworking accessibility and course coordinators who were generally local

to each participant group assigned to them, we were able to anticipate participant needs and rectify accessibility challenges more easily.

One of the biggest challenges to successful course delivery was the language barrier between our participants and several of our team members, including one course co-instructor and guest instructors. On top of this, because of the eurocentric and colonial history of international archiving, we had to work to ensure that key archival studies resources and international standards were translated for participants as indicated above. It is shocking, for example, that ISAD-G is translated into 17 languages but not Arabic, which is an official language of both UNESCO and the UN. The general lack of archival education programs in the Global South – especially the lack of programs offered in Arabic – made this problem especially pronounced. Despite the fact that archival methods have not been developed for us or for our participants, we are all subject to the epistemic dominance of archival institutions. It was evident that we needed to include both translators and live interpreters throughout this process. We recruited two professional interpreters, George Rishmawi and Ibrahim Khair from Shepherds Translation Services, who are located in Ramallah in Palestine, who have experience with live interpretation under pressure. However, as archival concepts are so specialized, we needed to provide our interpreters with what amounted to archival methods pre-training through lists of concepts and definitions, as well as multiple discussions on specific word usage and approaches to various topics. How do we translate the differences between intellectual and physical arrangements in a clear way that makes sense to interpreters and participants? Do we translate ‘fonds’ or leave it in Arabic in its French pronunciation, as is the tendency in other linguistic contexts? What is the best way to translate ‘accumulation’ or ‘acquisition’? Some of the conversations spilled over into the rounds of meetings with partners and participants. During the last class of round 2, our interpreters joked that they are now trained as professional archivists as well. This is not far off from the truth. Though they did not apply to participate in the training, their hard work and dedication made it possible. Our interpreters are a part of our archival community just as much as any of us or any of our participants.

The same is true of our guest instructors, all of whom quickly shed their initial nervousness about doing the training as they stepped into the warm, welcoming, and hopeful atmosphere of the online sessions. However, while we prepared with our interpreters and translators for anticipated translation challenges, there were issues we could not predict. For example, we did not know when power outages in Ramallah would occur and force our interpreters to log into class using their phones. Other examples also include moments of sleuthing as participants asked questions of our guest instructors that the interpreters struggled to translate. In one instance, we used a reverse image search to figure out the name of an insect that the interpreter had never translated before, so we could discuss the best ways to remediate damage done to infected manuscripts. Numerous moments like these require determination and patience – which we see in all of our colleagues, including our participants, coordinators, TAs, instructors, translators, and interpreters. Our translators and interpreters were especially graceful. Despite promises that our translation team would receive slides for translation a week before each class, this was often not possible as our instructors were actively adapting and changing the teaching materials. Our interpreters made live interpretation so seamless that instructors sometimes almost forgot interpretation was even happening, and excitedly sped through detailed answers to participant questions until interpreters would remind them kindly to ‘please slow down’. Because we are all committed to this work, our shared understanding of each other results in a willingness to believe the best of each other even during challenging moments. It also makes it feel easy to communicate and collaborate across disciplines and professions, which has often proven challenging in other team-based cross-sectoral environments.

While we share intentions and beliefs about the importance of this work, we also understand that every one of us comes to this work situationally. It is not only important to do the work, but it is also important to celebrate it and each other. It is important that our participants receive signed course completion certificates and are featured on our website and newsletter. Despite immense challenges, these guardians of history persevere in documenting and preserving their heritage. How could we not bring attention to their accomplishments? This is not only a way to ensure recognition from the wider professional community and disrupt the isolation of besieged colleagues. It is also evidence and affirmation of our growing network. Through all of the work done by participants, coordinators, TAs, translators, interpreters, instructors, and others, we are ending our own isolation in an archival profession that is not built for us. We do so by building community. Simply speaking, we are cultivating hope. As Kaba reminds us, cultivating hope is a work of discipline, and it is ongoing. While the end of our Round 1 classes resulted in a celebration of our participants, we knew that we could and should improve upon the curriculum. We did this in the same way we developed the curriculum to begin with; through ongoing consultations with participants, meetings with members of library and archives associations in Palestine and Lebanon, curriculum development team meetings, participant surveys, and more individual consultations with participants following up on survey results. This too built community and cultivated hope, while ensuring that our curriculum is as relevant, locally grounded, and culturally specific as possible. It also means that the difficult decisions of how to integrate the eurocentric archival canon are made collectively, transparently, and accountably.

Hence, aside from all the logistical and organizational dilemmas and decisions – all of which are profoundly social, cultural, and political issues – we have also been dealing with the epistemological one, that we are translating and adapting western-centric standards and theories. We had no other choice but to do so, given the urgency and constraints, and the sum total of the centuries of empire in the region where, like much of the Global South, there has been little to no capacity for developing archival training, curricula, models, theories, and practices. Similarly, for purely practical reasons, we could not see any way around delivering the course in English and Arabic. Yet, we consciously work with each iteration of the training program to develop the epistemic and linguistic foundations to move towards a fully Arabic course. As we describe in the following section, it is in relation to such issues that we first turned to *The Declaration* at a curricular level. It allows us to acknowledge and reflect in the course curriculum to create space for diverse discussions and perspectives shared about the coloniality and epistemic violences of archival studies by members of the teaching team, partner organizations, and participants. Of note is the relationship between the logistical, organizational, and epistemological aspects of the course to one another, and to Tandanya. It would have had little to no value to embed Tandanya into our curriculum if it did not already inform our practice and approach. As critical and antiracist archivists and scholars, we have operated intentionally and explicitly throughout the training course based on the anticolonial principles and decolonial ethos that imbue *The Declaration*. Otherwise, our efforts to integrate Tandanya into the curriculum would have been useless, if not performative and harmful.

What distinguishes this work from much of the existing literature on decolonizing archives and decolonial archiving is that we are not writing about decolonization or decoloniality from a distance; we have been attempting to practice it, imperfectly and urgently, under conditions of active military violence and colonial occupation. A substantial body of archival scholarship has taken up questions of colonial violence, epistemic injustice, and the need for decolonial practice over the past two decades.³¹ This work has been vital in naming the problem and building theoretical foundations for change. But theory developed in the relative safety of the Global North academy, however critical and well-intentioned, is not the same as

implementation under fire. We have not had the luxury of ideal conditions, controlled pilots, or iterative development cycles. We have the reality of bombs, internet outages, displacement, grief, and colleagues whose participation in a training session is itself an act of resistance and survival. The educational infrastructure we have built in the community with our participants (the translated standards, the WhatsApp groups, the stipends for internet café access, the interpreters trained on the fly in archival terminology, the accessibility coordinators tracking participants across shifting displacement routes) did not exist before we made it. We build it while teaching, and we teach while building it.

This is not a limitation we apologize for. It is, in fact, central to what this article argues. Decolonial archival practice cannot wait for perfect conditions because colonial violence does not pause to allow for them. The communities we work with, archivists in Gaza navigating internet shutdowns and mass displacement, cultural heritage workers in South Lebanon managing collections amid bombardment, Palestinian refugees in besieged camps shaped by deprivation across the region, need support now. Working as members of and alongside communities under occupation and military violence means that our pedagogical decisions are not abstract: every choice about language, timing, curriculum, platform, and tone has immediate material stakes for real people in extreme conditions. We cannot be disinterested educators delivering a curriculum from above; we are, many of us, people from these same communities, shaped by the same histories of dispossession and erasure that we teach about. This positionality is not incidental to the pedagogy; it is constitutive of it. It is what made the classroom a space of genuine mutuality rather than benevolent instruction, and what made the cultivation of hope, as bell hooks insists, a collective discipline rather than an individual sentiment.

Section 3: Teaching Tandanya for indigenous archival sovereignty

From the start, we had recognized the relevance and importance of including The Declaration alongside descriptive and digitization standards like ISAD-G and the ALA's Minimum Digitization Capture Recommendations, models like lifecycle and continuum, and principles like *respect des fonds* and original order. However, the importance of The Declaration increased as we struggled with the eurocentricism of archival science, even as we work to translate, localize, and shift the curriculum to the context of participants. In the first round of the training, we had translated brief parts of The Declaration and discussed it in a couple of sessions as part of larger discussions about liberatory memory work and fighting erasure. By the second round, however, we had shifted towards considering The Declaration as scaffolding for the entire course, a process we further deepened in the third round.³² For the second and third rounds, we also added take-home exercises, including one on The Declaration, and, in Round 2, we also hosted a guest lecture by Raymond Frogner on The Declaration in his capacity as co-chair of the Indigenous Expert Group at the ICA and someone who had played a key role in drafting The Declaration. Hence, the course syllabi for Round 2 and 3 explicitly described the course as 'based on critical anticolonial and decolonial framework grounded in The Adelaide-Tandanya Declaration, which is a tool to help us think through the Eurocentrism of the western-dominated archival field and engage alternative practices emerging from communities and movements'.³³ More specifically, the syllabus read as follows:

Throughout the course, we will explore within the framework of The Adelaide-Tandanya Declaration, international laws and norms, and Global South practices and theorizing, the challenges and conundrums of applying Eurocentric archival standards and theories, and using Eurocentric technologies and platforms, for archiving in the Global South. As part of that, we will consider questions like: What is the relationship between archives, records management, racism, colonialism, and western imperialism? What does it mean to

decolonize archives and records? How do we practice antiracism in description? Or make records and archives accessible to people and communities depicted in the records? How can we provide liberatory services and programs? Who owns records and why? How are archives and records disputed or displaced in colonial and neocolonial contexts? How is archives repatriation, restitution or transfer negotiated, contested, and resolved? How does repatriation involve the creation, recreation and remaking of records – from the use of oral history testimonies and living archives to the use of digitization? How can archives and records be used to reclaim lands, rewrite histories, locate the disappeared, and identify and reclaim human remains?

Hence, The Declaration is considered foundational to the course, as a framework that is threaded throughout it, and as a tool to help us think through complex social issues and debates. We learned from the first round of the course that embedding and centering The Declaration explicitly and throughout the curriculum in this manner is key to realizing its pedagogical potential. After Round 1, Tandanya was mentioned in most of the course sessions, providing many more opportunities in class for both us and participants to consider how Tandanya can be applied to what we do, the limits in its applications in different Global South settings, and how we can use Tandanya not as a standard to be prescribed – but as a means of imagining and working towards diverse visions of liberation through memory work.

The reality is that in Palestine and Lebanon, like other places facing settler colonial and imperial aggression, Tandanya is an aspirational document – forcing us to commit (and recommit) to the discipline of hope without falling prey to toxic positivity or universality. It forces us to refuse (and re-refuse) to normalize colonial supremacies and settler sovereignties. It provides a context and language to combat and acknowledge what we all know, think, and feel to one another openly and with greater ease – that it is unfortunate that to survive and fight our erasure, we must adopt and adapt the knowledge and ways of the very societies and institutions that put our survival in question. As Yejide Omowale explains, in the face of the neoliberal drive to colonize or assimilate:

[W]hat remains of the memories of the dispossessed [...] the values we must practice are ones of refusal. Refusal not as an act of negation, but as a condition of possibility. [...] We are not marginal or other to the archive, but integral to it. We may be silenced or made invisible, but we have always been present. Rather than set out to find or discover what has been lost, or made illegible to forms of whiteness, let us begin with the understanding that we have always been here – becoming. [...] Our archives have always existed and our communities have always done archival work. It's being dispossessed of things like our land, our housing, even our health that have made our archives unsustainable.³⁴

These ideas and insights were reflected in the answers to the take-home exercise we provided, which likewise affirmed the right to self-determination and the necessity of indigenous epistemologies, even as they acknowledged ongoing colonialism and epistemic violence. In Round 2, Fatiha Polin, Executive Director of Perceive Research & Design in Palestine, provided an answer to the exercise that speaks to this tension between what is and what should be, as well as the defiance that saturates it:

I find the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration as a significant milestone in archival science to recognize our struggle to be heard, and give the right to protect intangible culture in our own way. For how many years we should follow [...] western documents to protect their legacy? We have our own history and culture. We have our own people and language.

It is time to establish authority, ownership through adequate research and access with self-determination.

In the take-home exercise, we asked participants to identify an article of The Declaration that is relevant to their work and explain how. These articles are: (1) Knowledge Authorities; (2) Property & Ownership; (3) Recognition & Identity; (4) Research and Access; and (5) Self-Determination. Like Polin, many participants referred to Article 5 on self-determination while situating their interventions within political and historical context, in line with The Declaration.

Jamila Bdair, Director/Head of Digital Archives at the National Library of Palestine, highlights Article 3 as particularly relevant, with its emphasis on the right of 'First Nations Peoples [...] to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage and associated knowledge systems'. She elaborates as follows:

This article resonates strongly with my work at the National Palestinian Library, where we are entrusted with preserving and providing access to the documentary heritage of the Palestinian people. Much like First Nations communities, Palestinians have a long history of dispossession, displacement, and struggle to assert cultural sovereignty. Upholding the right to maintain and control our own historical records and cultural expressions is vital for safeguarding national identity, resisting erasure, and promoting archival justice. This principle guides our efforts in ethical archival management, inclusive representation, and the protection of our collective memory from external distortion or misappropriation.

Bdair here echoes many key themes and concepts in The Declaration on epistemic violence in the context of dispossession, while situating these issues within Palestine and her work. In turn, H.F. notes the relevance of all five articles of The Declaration to the Palestinian context, but adds that the article on self-determination is the most relevant 'because we are under occupation'. There is a power to the simplicity and matter-of-factness of this statement referring to a brutal military Israeli occupation of the West Bank in Palestine since 1967.

In Round 3, participants also emphasized self-determination in their answers and spoke to their political context. While not focused on the article on self-determination, Jana [last name withheld] from South Lebanon speaks to the related issue of the right to self-representation as a component of self-determination as it undergirds Article 3:

I chose the article on recognition and identity. The Declaration explains that colonial archives often represented Indigenous peoples through categories and descriptions that erased or distorted their own ways of naming and understanding themselves, and that Indigenous communities have the right to be recognized in archival systems as distinct peoples with their own kinship, identities, and cultures. This is directly relevant to my work because I am dealing with materials related to marginalized and colonized communities. When I describe, arrange, and provide access to records, I need to think carefully about the names, subject headings, and descriptive language I use. Applying this article means involving community voices in how they are described, avoiding labels imposed by outside authorities, and making sure the archival description reflects their self-defined identities. It reminds me that description is not neutral and that archival work can either reinforce erasure or support cultural resilience and self-representation.

Hiba [last name withheld], also a participant from South Lebanon in Round 3, speaks on these themes further:

These materials are important and contribute to the right of peoples to protect and preserve their archival memory and heritage, but the right to self-determination and recognition of collective identity requires authorities, methodologies, and management to contribute to supporting peoples, revealing the facts, and moving away from the fabricated narrative by colonial authorities, especially for peoples who have been colonized for a long time. [translated from the Arabic by Fatima el-Bazzal]

In *Making a Killing: On Race, Ritual, and (Re)Membering in Digital Culture*, Tonia Sutherland notes how images of Black death and suffering are making social media corporations money – literally, they are making a killing on race.³⁵ Participants have highlighted in class discussions that Global North governments and institutions make money off of the data and archives of those they colonize and genocide.

This profit motive is raised by Abeer Bou Diab, a Lebanese participant in Round 2, who chose Article 5 in her answer to the exercise, as follows:

Article 5: The right to self-determination: Not applicable, not in my personal case, but in Lebanon. The daily security violations perpetrated by the Israeli enemy against Lebanon could at any moment lead to catastrophic damage to heritage and archive centers, particularly in southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut (the recent aggression against the southern suburbs of Beirut resulted in the destruction of public and private libraries, ...). It is well known that most of the residents in these areas are Shia, which means there is a systematic plan to eliminate this segment of the Lebanese population and, consequently, to eradicate their history and cultural and social heritage. This topic was chosen because we live in a time when people in 'Third World' countries are denied the right to self-determination and to defend their land and property. Instead, the superpowers decide their fate under the banner of 'democracy', according to their own interests, which allow them to plunder resources, kill, and violate laws. [translated from the Arabic by Fatima el-Bazzal]

Emphasizing self-determination and the right to one's land and resources, this participant also gestures at the specificities of the Lebanese context as distinct from Palestine. She alludes here to a long history of western encroachment and colonialism that has shaped Lebanon along sectarian lines; first, in Mount Lebanon, and eventually the sectarian legal-political order established there through European imperial machinations with the 1861 *Règlement Organique* spread through various incarnations to the rest of what is now Lebanon, that is a political system based on proportional confessional representation. Each stage of the making of modern Lebanon and sectarian state formation has entailed extreme violence, displacement, and partition, as well as the increasing incorporation of the local population and its resources and territory into the global western-dominated capitalist system.³⁶ Here we emphasize that sectarianism is not a primordial or local phenomenon. Rather, it was first introduced by western missionaries in the 1830s to the region. It is best understood as a manifestation of modernity that originated at the intersection of western colonialism and Ottoman economic liberalization, as the traditional local social order based on a hierarchy that bridged religious difference disintegrated. While beyond the scope of this article to address this issue in detail, the discussion here highlights that sectarianism is a political creation of racial capitalist expansion and class violence.³⁷ One aspect of this sectarianism in a Lebanese context is that Shia Muslims have been racialized as *other* within the Lebanese nation. At the same time, they constitute the majority of the population of South Lebanon that has been the target of Israeli ethnic cleansing, settlement expansion, and land dispossession since the establishment of the Zionist state.

Another common theme tied records to persistence on the land, in line with extensive academic literature and social debates that speak to the centrality of land in the struggle against settler colonial erasure and dispossession. These are some examples of participants who raised this issue in their answers to the exercise on Tandanya, which have been translated from Arabic by Fatima el-Bazzal:

Amina Khalil (Round 1): We chose the principle of research and access in order to empower people to access information and records, affirm our right to this land, and ensure that these materials remain a stable and readily accessible reference.

Fouad Kurdi (Round 1): The right to self-determination – We chose this declaration because of its applicability and feasibility, while recognizing that its realization requires international will to uphold the Palestinian people's right to life, their right to self-determination, and their right to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. Today, reality itself has made the application of this right even more urgent and tangible, especially after the exposure of the falsehood of the Zionist Israeli occupation and the massacres it carries out daily in the Gaza Strip, as well as the crimes of genocide committed against Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza. This comes alongside the continuation of the occupation of Palestinian land for more than 70 years, and the ongoing attempts to erase Palestinian identity and existence, while denying Palestinians their right to freedom and self-determination. The Palestinian case can serve as a concrete and compelling example of how documentation and historical archiving preserve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, as well as their civilizational, environmental, cultural, and economic history.

Across the three rounds of the training and their various locations, the vast majority of participants spoke to these two themes of self-determination and resisting land dispossession in their answers to the exercise. The majority also contextualized their answers in relation to war, occupation, colonialism, and the western hegemonic bid in the region. Clearly, teaching Tandanya in the course opens vital space for participants to speak to their experiences of archival erasure and colonial violence, as well as think, dream, and work towards more liberatory archival practices and professional environments. It has also served as a mechanism for the teaching team to do the same throughout the course and in specific lectures on Tandanya.

For example, in the second and third sessions of Round 2 of the course, the lead instructor, Dr. Jamila Ghaddar, spoke about Tandanya in the class lectures. She acknowledged the challenges of working through and fully understanding 'the very important and complicated philosophical and epistemological issues' related to Tandanya (Week 3), and raised in Raymond Frogner's guest lecture on the topic (Week 2). She spoke to the need to learn from the participants' perspective on Tandanya in the take home exercise, which was ongoing at the time of these comments, so the teaching team can better understand 'what you did or didn't find relevant to your work, and that will be really helpful for us to know, as we keep giving this course, what we should be learning from you and thinking with you about this important historic declaration'. She further added the following:

To what extent does it, or does it not help us in what we're trying to do in different parts of the world? And the answer is probably different for different parts of the world. So that's why we need all of us to think about it together. I just want to emphasize that The Declaration is an attempt to articulate – against the background of 500 years of archival plunder, looting, appropriation, and misrepresentation by the European and colonial powers – how we can assert self-determination, indigenous sovereignty, indigenous epistemologies,

non-western epistemologies, native rights over land, native knowledge. We can alternate these words, indigenous native, colonized. Part of my studies has been trying to understand what is similar and different about these words, and how that changes around the world. So it's really a global conversation that gives rise to a global declaration like this and that, then we decide where and how is it applicable or not? I know at least some of you have indicated [in the take home exercise] that the question of the right to ownership over information and archives about Palestinian people, Lebanese people, about Bangladeshi and Sudanese and Congolese people, about all of you, your countries, your nations, that that principle resonates with you. So maybe I'll talk to you about other international laws that pertain to this in future.

This intervention by Ghaddar contextualizes and historicizes The Declaration, and delineates the way in which concepts and ideas from settler/indigenous and native/colonizer to land and knowledge shift and persist across borders, boundaries, and places. It further indicates how iterative and conversational the pedagogical approach is, and the insistence on learning, thinking, and struggling together. At the same time, it acknowledges and reflects the perspective and issues raised by participants themselves about The Declaration's limits and potential. She further added:

At the same time, what I would like to emphasize from this Declaration, which is actually relevant for almost everybody in the world, is that it brings to our attention, and it prioritizes, the rights not just of those who create or own records but also the rights of those that the records talk about, the subjects of the records. At the same time, almost like a paradox, it tries to emphasize the right of creators to the records that were taken from them by the colonizer. So at the heart of this Declaration is a struggle over information, culture and history as depicted in records, no matter who created or owned them, between the colonizer and the colonized, between the native and the settler, between indigenous nations and the colonizing nations. We're going to keep thinking about these in relation to dominant archival practices and standards like ISAD-G that we are all stuck with in one way or another.

Throughout the iterations of the course, Tandanya has been invoked to problematize archival praxis and indicate what new possibilities we can work towards. Tandanya has been referenced in lectures and material on the dominant creator-centric approach to provenance to bring in the aspiration and efforts for a provenance or new principle that affirms indigenous archival sovereignty. Similarly, with most lessons and concepts, Tandanya marks a conceptual and political terrain where we can acknowledge the daily impact of the violence of empire and its Zionist onslaught, as well as the liberatory futures we hope for. Pedagogically, then, Tandanya allows us to do what all liberatory pedagogies emphasize, which is to link what we are teaching and doing in the (virtual) classroom to the lives of participants.

Archival pedagogy has long been shaped by a professional tradition rooted in European and North American institutional models that center the neutral custodian, the disinterested expert, and the standardized techniques of acquisition, arrangement, description, and preservation.³⁸ This model assumes a universal, bounded, and static conception of archives and transmits it through transmission-based pedagogies that position instructors as authorities and students as recipients of professional norms. As a result, it tends to reproduce the epistemological and political hierarchies of colonialism within the very classrooms where archivists are trained.³⁹ The limits of this approach have been well documented by archival scholars engaged with questions of social justice, postcolonial critique, and community-centered practice, yet structural change within archival education has been slow to follow. Our approach to archival pedagogy in the *Fighting Erasure* training program is explicitly oriented away from

this tradition and toward what we understand as a pedagogy of liberation, one that draws on Freirean principles of conscientization and dialogue, Black feminist traditions of teaching community, and Indigenous frameworks of learning with and for the land.⁴⁰ Rather than treating participants as empty vessels to be filled with professional standards, we position them as knowledge-holders, community guardians, and political actors whose situated expertise must be at the center of any meaningful archival education. Rather than pretending that archival knowledge is neutral or universal, we foreground the coloniality embedded in dominant archival standards and use that critical discomfort as a site of generative inquiry. This does not mean abandoning technical skills or professional standards, with much of our curriculum dedicated to teaching ISAD-G, digitization standards, and preservation protocols. It means teaching these tools alongside a sustained analysis of the power relations that produced them, and in relation to the alternative epistemologies and practices that communities in Palestine, Lebanon, and the Global South are developing on their own terms. A pedagogy of liberation, in the archival context, is one that cultivates what Freire called critical consciousness: the capacity to read and transform the world, not merely to describe or preserve it.⁴¹ The Tandanya Declaration has been central to enabling this approach by providing a shared language of indigenous archival sovereignty, self-determination, and epistemic justice that participants across very different contexts have been able to engage, contest, and claim as their own.

Our approach speaks to the distinction Grande notes ‘between emancipatory pedagogies, which explain how exploitative relations operate in the everyday lives of people so that they can be changed, and liberatory pedagogies, which privilege the desiring subject at the center of their politics, protecting the material interests of the powerful and propertied classes’.⁴² Here, we are speaking about centering ‘the Indigenous desire for sovereignty’ and ‘keeping colonialist desire and capitalist greed at bay while working for the increasing recognition and extension of sovereign powers’.⁴³ For indigenous people under a genocidal settler colonial regime, liberatory pedagogy can only be one that works towards the realization of the indigenous desire for the affirmation of sovereignty, which is always already about land decolonization and the return to the land.

Conclusion

In October 2025, during the recent International Council on Archives’ Congress in Barcelona, two panels featured presentations on the course and its ties to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. One panel on *Fighting Erasure* and its training program featured the co-chairs of the ICA’s Indigenous Matters Expert Group, Raymond Frogner and Dr. Kirsten Thorpe, who presented on the history of The Declaration and its increasing use by communities. During this panel, the Arabic version of the Declaration was publicly announced alongside the establishment of the ICA’s Palestine Archives Task Force, making an urgent and direct case that the ICA’s commitments under The Declaration cannot be separated from ongoing crises of colonial archival destruction in Palestine and Lebanon. The systematic destruction of Palestinian archives and cultural institutions, the targeting of Lebanese heritage sites, and the long history of erasure of local lived environments – these are not peripheral concerns but precisely the conditions The Declaration has been designed to address. Indigenous archival scholarship on truth-telling, self-determination, and the unacknowledged roots of archival theory in Indigenous social thought provided the theoretical framework for understanding both crises as continuous expressions of colonial epistemic violence. The *Fighting Erasure* project’s work in archival education and emergency preservation in Palestine and Lebanon was presented as a model for translating The Declaration’s commitments into practice. The training program was discussed in detail during another panel featuring Ghaddar that was hosted by Sharon Alexander-Gooding and Jessica Squires for the ICA FIDA, which had partially funded the

program. Again, the training program was presented as a model of what can be done with FIDA funding to increase capacity and create networks in the Global South.

As this article goes to press, we are in the midst of replanning another training round in South Lebanon (we hope), and are engaged in more consultations for curriculum development and refinement with previous and new partner organizations and training participants. We are continuing to improve the translation and localization of standards even as we proceed with their adoption by global and professional standard-setting bodies. Our work is iterative. Perfection is neither possible nor a goal. It is a reparative intervention in the now that addresses a situation of overwhelming loss and incredible cruelty that nothing can mitigate or undue: 'To repair, in this sense, is not to rebuild what was, but to reimagine the grounds of life itself – to craft, from ruin, the possibility of belonging'.⁴⁴ Distretti argues, adding that, 'Repair, then, is not a plan but praxis; a slow, patient disentangling and reassembling of shattered life-worlds, where grief saturates the everyday'.⁴⁵ Grief has saturated every aspect of this training program, where most participants and team members have personally and directly suffered loss and hurt from the genocide and wars, but we persist in spite of and because of this grief. We anticipate and hope that our peers and colleagues, as well as future generations, will improve and expand on our work, or perhaps even better, take things in a completely different and more thoroughly decolonial direction, whereby they realize in fact (and not merely hope aspirationally) the indigenous archival sovereignty that The Declaration outlines. What we have sought to do, if nothing else, is to lay the groundwork for such future decoloniality and liberation through an archival praxis that disrupts the taken-for-grantedness of things and makes space for the *otherwise*.

More fundamentally, we have refused to stand by silent, helpless, complicit, and corrupted by an ongoing genocide. However imperfect or limited our efforts may be, they represent a refusal to abandon colleagues and communities living under siege – from Gaza to South Lebanon, and from Sudan and Congo to Libya and Yemen – who continue to endure the multiple violences of war, colonial domination, and geopolitical abandonment. Our interventions are about refusing abandonment and remaining accountable to those whose histories, lives, and futures are being systematically threatened. They are about insisting that archival practice can remain a site of ethical commitment, collective care, and struggle for justice.

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region, specifically the endowed collection of Asad Allāh ibn Muhammad Mu'min al-Khātūnī al-ʿĀmilī in the Astān Quds Library, Mashhad, Iran, which was donated in the year 1067 AH/1657 AD. Fatima's research explores the provenance history of this collection, placing it within the context of the migration of ʿĀmilī scholars to Safavid Iran, who attained various academic and administrative positions in the emerging Safavid state and played a significant role in reshaping the religious identity of the Safavid Empire.

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Notes

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