

EDITORIAL

In 2025 we were approached by this issue's Guest Editors about the possibility of a special issue reflecting on the work that has taken place in our sector since the signing of the Tandanya Declaration in 2019, with content created for and inspired by a 2024 symposium alongside the ASA Conference. We were both eager to advance this discussion and reflection, and have supported the production of the special issue over the last year. We thank especially the collective of Guest Editors for their dedication to progressing the publication of these key discussions, and the authors whose work is the core of this issue.

This year we welcome three new members to the Editorial Board; Nicola Laurent, Dr Mike Jones and Dr Nicholas Sparks. All three bring extensive experience in both professional practice and academia, and we look forward to working with the Board over the coming months. Louise Trott has also joined *Archives and Manuscripts* as the Managing Editor, which will expand the ability of the General Editors to focus on the curation and editing of upcoming issues.

This issue is also the last issue for co-General Editor Dr Jessie Lymn, who is stepping down after four years in the role. Jessie has shepherded *Archives and Manuscripts* to an open access publishing model, working closely with the production team at Open Academia and the PKP Open Journal System team to ensure the entire back issues of the journal are available freely. Jessie thanks the ASA Council for their support in these endeavors, and wishes Angela Schilling and the new Editorial team all the best with future issues.

Dr Jessie Lymn
Angela Schilling
General Editors

GUEST EDITORIAL

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: From Declaration to Implementation

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (the Declaration) is a milestone document that was launched by the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA) on 25 October 2019. Developed by the ICA Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM), the Declaration was handed down at the inaugural ICA Indigenous Summit, *See us, Hear us, Walk with us: Challenging and Decolonising the Archive*, held at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Centre on Kaurna Country (Adelaide, Australia). The Declaration called on ‘the jurisdictional archives of the world to acknowledge and adopt the themes and commitments of the Declaration for immediate action’.¹ The Declaration was developed in the context of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the key ‘framework for the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, free to self-determine their destinies independent of external authority’,² specifically recognising ‘UNDRIP articles of direct archival relationship to cultural self-determination’.³

The Declaration opens its preamble with the ICA’s Universal Declaration on Archives, stating the importance of archives to the promotion, protection and expansion of society, democracy and rights. However, the Universal Declaration on Archives sits in tension with the realities of archives and archival practice for First Nations peoples. For First Nations peoples ‘across the global colonial encounter, dispossession occurred in the public archive as it occurred on the land’.⁴ The Declaration marked a moment of recognition across the archives profession globally that archives and archival practice, particularly in colonial contexts, have had significant and lasting impacts on First Nations peoples. There was an urgency in the Declaration, calling for ‘immediate action’⁵ across archive organisations and placing the ICA as holding a key responsibility in the re-imagining of archives.

The Declaration outlines the commitments to First Nations archival practice across five themes: Knowledge Authorities, Property and Ownership, Recognition and Identity, Research and Access and Self-Determination. Through these themes, the Declaration highlights how unsuitable Western archival frameworks are for First Nations materials held in colonial archives. It articulates the need for ‘reciprocal respect’ in engagement between archives and Indigenous worldviews and calls for archives to fundamentally change how they work so that the themes of the Declaration can be understood and enacted.

1. International Council on Archives Expert Group on Indigenous Matters, 2019, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*, available at <https://www.ica.org/ica-network/expert-groups/egim/ica-naa-indigenous-matters-summit/>, accessed 4 June 2026.

2. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 2.

3. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 4.

4. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 1.

5. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, p. 2.

In 2024, in recognition of the 5-year anniversary of the Declaration's publication and with a goal of renewing a focus on implementation, a small programming committee consisting of members from the Australian Society of Archivists' (ASA) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group and the Indigenous Archives Collective (IAC) collaboratively curated a 1-day Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium on Ngāi Tahu lands in Ōtautahi/Christchurch, following the joint conference of the ASA, the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand Te Huinga Mahara (ARANZ) and the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA). The Symposium opened with a presentation by the Ngāi Tahu Archive on 'Me manatu te maumahara: We must remember to remember', followed by 16 speakers from across Australia, Aotearoa, and the Pacific reflecting on different aspects of the Declaration. The Symposium aimed to engage critically with the Declaration, to reflect on how it has been a useful tool in theory and practice, to consider its gaps and opportunities, and to examine how it has – or has not – been taken up by the archival community. Some speakers shared their use of the Declaration to drive change in their organisations; others highlighted how structural issues in the archives sector had meant the Declaration had not received their full attention.

While conversation and calls for action regarding First Nations priorities and Indigenous self-determination in archives and the archival profession are not at all new, the Declaration has provided a vehicle for global and sector-wide conversations about the structural and systemic barriers that need challenging and dismantling. As raised by Barrowcliffe et al:

In translating the Declaration into transformative practice, the archives and recordkeeping sector will need to address difficult questions, including how the settler-colonial status quo is too often buried under the rhetoric of decolonisation and reconciliation. It will need to move beyond the sentiments expressed in the preamble of the Tandanya Declaration to focus on Indigenous-led transformative action and structural reform. Recognising that the answers to the difficult questions raised by the Tandanya Declaration may not be found inside our current institutions – that they may be the problem rather than the solution – will be critical.⁶

This Special Issue, *The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: From Declaration to Implementation*, brings together reflections and articles that build on the previous conversations held at the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium. The Guest Editors of this issue are again drawn from IAC and the ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group. The Guest Editors deliberately did not define terminology or a methodological approach for this Special Issue, and invited community, organisational and institutional perspectives on the implementation and use of the Declaration. The goal was to gather submissions that brought together international dialogue on the Declaration, including its reach, relevance and implementation in the archives sector globally.

The following contributions showcase a wide range of perspectives, highlighting how the Declaration has been engaged across various institutions, nations and contexts. From national archives and collecting institutions to digital preservation frameworks, pedagogical projects and community-led practice. This Special Issue brings together multiple insights into the Declaration, and in doing so, shines a light on both the potentials and tensions of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. These insights include critical reflection on the limits

6. Rose Barrowcliffe, Lauren Booker, Sue McKemmish, and Kirsten Thorpe, 'Activating and Supporting the Tandanya Adelaide Declaration on Indigenous Archives', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2021, pp. 167–85, 181. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2021.1961086>.



Figure 1. Lauren Eiko, Container Type 1, 2026, Digital scan of 120 mm negative.

of a framework of this nature and the ongoing structural issues impeding endorsement and comprehensive implementation of the Declaration.

To open this Special Issue, Raymond Frogner, Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, and an author of the Declaration, offers essential context in his reflection ‘On the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: “Reach, Relevance and Implementation”’. Frogner’s reflection article situates the Declaration within the broader struggle for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, arguing that its international reach derives from its recognition of the direct impacts of colonisation on Indigenous peoples worldwide. Reflecting on how the Declaration was developed, Frogner describes the principles that shaped its drafting, grounded in his work with Indigenous residential school survivors in Canada. It offers a transparent account of the work undertaken in building the Declaration, providing an invaluable foundation for the reflections and articles that follow.

This Special Issue then turns to the need for accountability and transparency in the archives and recordkeeping sector globally, and in the Declaration itself. Archives and archival practice continue to have serious ramifications for First Nations communities, and without an ongoing commitment to action and change, these issues will persist. More than 5 years after its publication, it is still important to critically consider the Declaration and ask how it has been implemented and what change this has resulted in. The Tracking Tandanya project, the subject of the next article, was created to ask these questions. Foregrounding the need for accountability and transparency also means critiquing the Declaration and considering what gaps and silences it contains, as does the reflection by Opeta Alefaio.

Lauren Booker, Monica Galassi, Narissa Timbery and Kirsten Thorpe explore how the uptake and impact of the Tandanya Declaration can be tracked and assessed in Australia in their article ‘Indigenous Archival Futures and the International Council on Archives Tandanya -Adelaide Declaration: Indigenous Perspectives from Australia’. The authors introduce the Tracking Tandanya project, which has gathered data from archives in Australia about their endorsement and implementation of the Declaration, noting that ‘systematic tracking’ is the only way to assess whether archives are genuinely implementing it, and whether the Declaration has had an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The authors call for increased transparency from archives and highlight the need for archives to prioritise Indigenous rights in records that lead to self-determination.

Opeta Alefaio's powerful reflection, 'Wilful Ignorance, Invisibilisation and Coloniality: A Pacific Practitioner's Reflection on the Tandanya Declaration', introduces a necessary critique of the Declaration. The piece highlights that in drafting a document intended to foreground the rights and lived experience of Indigenous peoples in archival practice, the Declaration's authors overlooked the needs of smaller Indigenous populations in under-resourced nations. It asks how the Declaration can work in contexts where colonial neglect has left archival infrastructure under-funded and data governance frameworks absent or imposed. Alefaio pointedly questions the role of archival organisations such as the ICA and its regional branch, the PARBICA, that support the drafting of declarations while remaining unresponsive to calls for practical assistance from archival practitioners in smaller member nations.

Following this, Tammi Gissell and Becky Bligh's articles firmly assert their perspectives as First Nations women and share reflections on their personal experiences working in the GLAM sector in Australia. Collectively, these two articles provide unique insight into implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration across the interconnected yet distinct institutional contexts of museums and archives. In her paper-yarn 'The Powerhouse & Blak Collections: Sitting with Trouble and Standing Up for Truth', Tammi Gissell reflects on the use of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Powerhouse Museum. She charts the origins of the Powerhouse as a colonial collecting institution to an organisation prepared to 'sit with the trouble' and problematise its historical collecting practices, while recognising the care needed to properly steward its collection today. Gissell shares her own experience as an Aboriginal woman coming into the Powerhouse as a creative practitioner who was drawn into museum work through the leadership of an Elder at the museum. She discusses how the Declaration provided a framework to enable the disruption of 'the way things have always been done', showing how it can be used to ground strategy and also enact practical change. Gissell shares several examples of how the Declaration has been enacted at the Powerhouse, showing how they have embedded many of the principles of the Declaration, arguing that Indigenous sovereignty must be a priority for all collections work.

In her reflective essay 'The long road to self-determination', Becky Bligh explores the ongoing transformation of the Queensland State Archives (QSA) as it implements the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration to confront its colonial legacy and support Indigenous self-determination. By weaving institutional reforms alongside her lived experience as a Gunggari/Kullilli woman, Bligh illustrates how archival records, originally created as tools of state surveillance and control under 'Protection Acts', are being reclaimed by communities for truth-telling, healing and family reconnection. The article highlights significant milestones, including the development of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols and community-focused initiatives like 'Mob on Mondays'. Ultimately, Bligh argues that self-determination in archives is an ongoing, relational journey that requires shifting authority from the state to Indigenous knowledge holders, transforming the archive from a 'locked vault' into a culturally safe space of shared stewardship and restorative justice.

Shared stewardship is a theme running through the following articles, which provide case studies on the Declaration in different settings. Steven Gagau and Jodie Kell consider the Declaration in the context of a long-running university-based archive, the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC). Margaret Farmer describes the use of the Declaration at the Australian War Memorial, a national museum that has had a complex history of acknowledging and discussing the Frontier Wars in its galleries. Jenny Mitcham and Robin Wright then provide a case study demonstrating how the Declaration can be used by a peak body focused on digital preservation, in a cross-sectoral and international context.

In 'Reflections on Creative Responses to Archival Collections in PARADISEC', Steven Gagau and Jodie Kell reflect on the Declaration's themes of 'Recognition and Identity' and 'Research and Access' through a collaborative project between the Papua New Guinea Peroveta Singers of Canberra and PARADISEC. They discuss how the collaboration, which included creative responses from the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, demonstrates how the Declaration's themes can be implemented. Gagau and Kell also discuss their perspectives as insider and outsider researchers working with the group, and how the Declaration is 'a call for action' to reflect on roles and work in decolonising archival practices and 'embracing Indigenous approaches to preserving and transmitting knowledge'.

Margaret Farmer offers insight into the history of the Australian War Memorial and the evolution of the organisation's thinking about the way it represents Australian conflicts involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in her reflection 'Implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Australian War Memorial'. The piece focuses on the Memorial's eventual recognition of the Frontier Wars in its galleries. The Memorial used the Declaration to guide their re-reading of the records, noting that, 'each is part of a much larger national story of violence, dispossession and defence of country, and provides opportunities for truth-telling'. Importantly, this reflection shares the Memorial's process of having to 'go backwards, in order to move forwards', a process that involved adopting ICIP protocols and involving staff from across the organisation.

In 'A reflection from the Digital Preservation Coalition on implementing the Tandanya Declaration in DPC RAM v.3', Jenny Mitcham and Robin Wright from the Digital Preservation Coalition reflect (DPC) on how the Tandanya Declaration shaped the latest revision of their Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM), a maturity modelling tool used by organisations across the world to evaluate their digital preservation practice. The authors trace how the DPC's growing presence in Australasia brought them into conversation with the critical work happening around Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and how the Declaration provided a framework to centre ethical considerations, particularly around description, access and custodianship, into a tool that had previously been built on largely technical foundations. What is significant about this piece is that it shows the Declaration's reach beyond traditional archives and into the global infrastructure of digital preservation. It demonstrates that colonial assumptions about preservation, description and access do not only live in limestone walls and filing cabinets but also in the digital tools and frameworks we are building now, and that the Declaration's principles are necessary in shaping how those tools engage with Indigenous knowledges.

Finally, this Special Issue concludes with a critical discussion on the potential strength and reach of the Declaration. The Declaration can be engaged with beyond institutional walls and sector parameters to be a tool for communities to bolster archival self-determination and sovereignty. Jamila J. Ghaddar, Ana Roeschley, Mariam Karim, Hanine Shehadeh, Rima Ghanem, Fatima el-Bazzal and Rami Zurayk show how the Tandanya Declaration also has use as a pedagogical tool to train memory workers and heritage stewards in the context of their Fighting Erasure project, in 'Teaching Tandanya in Palestine and Lebanon: Liberatory Pedagogy for Archival Sovereignty' Focussing on training to deliver digitisation and archival stabilisation skills to memory workers in Lebanon and Palestine, they discuss how the Declaration offers a way to 'teach hope' against a background of genocide, settler colonialism and erasure. The authors discuss their work to translate many key archival frameworks, including the Declaration. Drawing on participants' experiences during the training workshops, they show how the Declaration can be used to problematise Western archival concepts and push for Indigenous archival self-determination and justice.

Since the Declaration was launched in 2019, much has shifted in the world. Yet many of the structural and systemic issues it identifies persist, while others are intensifying with increasingly devastating impacts. At a time of rapid technological change, including the expanding use of artificial intelligence, the stakes of this work are rising. The growing global momentum of Indigenous Data Sovereignty movements has raised the bar for what the Declaration must now address. Calls for community authority and ethical stewardship are more urgent than ever, and the responsibility sits with the archives sector to be proactive and accountable.

In creating this Special Issue, our aim was not to develop an overall narrative or cohesive set of ideas about the Declaration, but instead to share the complexities of the application of the Declaration both across First Nations contexts *and* settler-colonial contexts. As is evident across these articles, there are a multitude of perspectives on opportunities and obstacles to implementation, as well as what constitutes actual implementation beyond rhetoric. The guest editors hope this Special Issue and the tensions and unspoken conversations between these articles provide fuel for further conversation and action off the page.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across which this Special Issue was written. Acknowledging the ongoing fight for justice and for the protection of lands, waters and life that First Nations peoples globally are at the forefront of.

Thank you to the General Editors of *Archives & Manuscripts*, Jessie Lymn and Angela Schilling, for all of their assistance and guidance in preparing this Special Issue. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge previous guest editorial group member Annie Cameron. Our gratitude to the external peer reviewers who provided invaluable comments and insights to the authors of the peer-reviewed articles.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium from which this Special Issue was developed. We also wish to acknowledge the Ngāi Tahu iwi on which the Symposium was held, as well as the Ngāi Tahu Archive.

We also acknowledge and give thanks to the founding members of the ICA EGIM who contributed to the development of the Declaration.

Finally, and most importantly, a deep thank you to all the contributors of this Special Issue, and we acknowledge your knowledge and expertise that have contributed to your pieces. We greatly appreciate your patience and perseverance in developing this Special Issue with us.

Guest Editors:

Rose Barrowcliffe

Lauren Booker

Monica Galassi

Nathan Mudyi Sentance

Narissa Timbery

Kirsten Thorpe

Kirsten Wright

REFLECTION ARTICLE

On the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: 'Reach, Relevance and Implementation'

Raymond Frogner*

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

I begin this discussion on the making, meaning, and reception of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration with deep humility and respect for the experiences of the Survivors of the Canadian national residential school programme. The history and legacy of residential schools represent a painful and unresolved chapter in the shared history of Indigenous peoples and settler society in the country where I live. I write in support of the rights, dignity, and well-being of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples across Turtle Island. That their experiences of childhood deprivation, incarceration, abuse, and loss, will be respectfully remembered and learned from; that this remembrance promotes healing, confronts deniability, supports Indigenous rights and reparations, and gives reason for the sovereignty and self-determination of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples.

I open this essay in observance of the Indigenous Survivors of residential schools in Canada not only to be reflexive but also to introduce the genealogy of the Declaration. My work as the Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) coloured the tone of the International Council on Archives (ICA) Declaration. By the time that the ICA had created its first Committee uniquely devoted to Indigenous issues in 2019, and ICA official Normand Charbonneau had asked me if I would be an author of an ICA declaration on archives and Indigenous issues, I had spent 4 years working to construct the NCTR archives, a decolonising institution, from the ground up. By this time, critical theory had offered an interpretive framework to consider how records are the culturally mediated products of relationships of power and knowledge.¹ The epistemology of the global colonial condition had been articulated by representatives of the colonised such as Aimée Césaire, Franz Fanon, Edward Said and C.L.R. James.² The groundwork had begun to develop to build a decolonising archives on a national scale. In Australia the ATSIILRN Protocols for safe and ethical information practice were published in 1995³; The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, with a call for addressing the record of the residential school system in Canada, passed in 1996⁴; the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials were formulated in 2007⁵; the same year as the release of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Developing the NCTR Archives helped me to gain clearer focus on the principles of establishing such an institution.

The mission of the NCTR is to be guided by Indigenous communities to create a safe and honoured house of remembrance for the history and legacy of the residential school system.⁶ A

*Correspondence: Raymond Frogner Email: Raymond.Frogner@umanitoba.ca

trusted and sacred place where Indigenous and settler knowledge practices can come together to encounter, learn, and heal from a colonial programme of genocide.⁷ The creation of the NCTR archives brought together, within the concept of decolonisation, issues of sovereignty and self-determination, privacy, private property, Indigenous knowledge mobilisation, and Indigenous research methodologies. All of these subjects I addressed in the Declaration.

The drafting of the Declaration began in late 2018. The Expert Group on Indigenous Matters was created by the ICA Programme Commission in November in Yaoundé, Cameroon. By the start of 2019, Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM) was forming terms of reference. It was agreed that a Declaration was required stating the ICA's views on the valued relationship between Indigenous peoples and the social phenomenon of public archives. Normand Charbonneau, an ICA Director, reached out to me to begin a draft of the Declaration in February of 2019. It was scheduled to be released for the ICA conference in Adelaide, Australia in September. I commenced with meetings with Karine Duhamel, who just finished a leading role in the federal report, 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls'.⁸ Shortly thereafter Phyllis Williams, Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement, for the National Archives of Australia joined the project. We began with meeting notes, and in the next several months, I wrote several drafts for comment by Duhamel and Williams. As the Declaration progressed it was circulated for comment by several Indigenous representative groups across the globe, active in the EGIM including, representatives from Sweden, Norway, Japan, New Zealand, the U.S. and Australia. I also received comment from the Spiritual Guides from the NCTR as well as the Centre's Survivors Circle of 16 Indigenous Survivors of residential schools in Canada. I incorporated all this feedback into the final draft in preparation for the public release in Adelaide in October 2019. It has always been my thought that this is a living document and only the first draft. There remains a tremendous opportunity for refinement through engagement with Indigenous communities across the globe.

In this article, I comment on the reach, relevance and implementation of the Declaration. The reach is notable. The document has been translated into seven languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Portuguese. I have heard that work is underway to create a Sami version. I gave a Zoom presentation to the National Archives of Norway on this topic 2 years ago. There are also plans to produce versions in several Indigenous languages in Canada. Several state professional archival organisations around the world promptly recognised the document. In 2021, Rose Barrowcliffe, Lauren Booker, Sue McKemmish, and Kirsten Thorpe published an article in *Archives and Manuscripts* on 'activating and supporting' the Tandanya Declaration.⁹ It was the subject of a symposium in October 2024, led by the special interest group of the Australian Society of Archivists, at the Te Pae Convention Centre in Christchurch, Aotearoa (New Zealand). When Abu Dhabi hosted the ICA Congress in October 2023, there was a prominent special session of the conference where the National Archivists of New Zealand, Canada, and Australia discussed the document. An ad hoc committee recently translated the document into Arabic. It has become a part of the archives programme curriculum for the American University in Beirut. There will be a formal ICA release event for the Arab translation, an impressive and grassroots accomplishment, in the Spring of 2026.

The central reason for the international reach of the Declaration is that it addresses sovereignty, the fundamental issue of the global indigenous experience. I made this clear in the Declaration's preamble:

Centuries of imperial and colonial state expansion are [a]... component of our common humanity. This expansion transplanted colonial settler states into diverse global locales

creating new relationships with local Indigenous societies. Indigenous dispossession, assimilation, and genocide have characterized these colonial relationships.¹⁰

This has been the Indigenous condition since Enlightenment philosopher Jean Bodin formulated principles of state sovereignty and the requisite knowledge models that supplied its foundation. Bodin took care to marginalise holistic local knowledge models premised on relationships of spirituality and ecology; he prioritised text as the primary medium of memory and historical evidence, effectively banishing alternative immanent Indigenous knowledge practices. Until recently, the historiography of ideas has depicted the replacement of Indigenous knowledge paradigms with European knowledge epistemologies in colonial locales as a cognitive *fait accompli*. Alongside the dispossession of lands occurred the gradual and purposeful erosion of Indigenous knowledge methods in the colonial era: the progressive loss of social bonds, community memory, cultural and spiritual identities, and normative laws resulting from the overwhelming assertion of imperial sovereignty and uncompromising colonial settlement.¹¹

However, Indigenous societies have always resisted these assertions of state authority and their juridical knowledge models.¹² This resistance is often reflected in the character of archival material concerning Indigenous peoples stored in colonial public archives. The directives of the Declaration deal with this archival material. Local indigenous resistance to state sovereignty has been an historical constant since the dawn of Westphalian imperialism. As Indigenous legal scholar James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson has noted, this is because of the incompatibility of these legal epistemologies:

These two views of law – legal doctrines as founded on the latent normative order, and law as the will of the sovereign – are incompatible; ... The Eurocentric legal tradition of the imposed order of a sovereign has never been able to exclude the immanent or sacred, or customary law. These residual laws have resulted in several legal revolutions or transformations in the Eurocentric legal tradition.¹³

I've written elsewhere the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is a revolution in human rights, it addresses 'the minimum standard for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world'. Although the UNDRIP never mentions archives, it speaks of revitalising and transferring to future generations, 'their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures ...'.¹⁴ The Tandanya/Adelaide Declaration recognises the value of the UNDRIP as a generational statement on the rights of Indigenous peoples, and places these value statements into the context of the history of colonial archival practices.¹⁵ As the Declaration says: 'to reimagine the meaning of archives ... [to] become an engaging model of social memory; to embrace Indigenous worldviews and methods of creating, sharing and preserving valued knowledge; to open the meaning of public archives to Indigenous interpretations; to bring new dynamics of Indigenous spirituality, ecology and Indigenous philosophy into the European traditions of public memory. To support a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter'.

The Declaration addresses the cognitive consequences of sovereignty in a documentary fashion: the intertwined global forces of colonialism and capitalism.¹⁶ Indigenous peoples across the globe have struggled at the oppressive interface of these forces. Canadian historian Byran Palmer has recently noted, that although the creation of Canada, as with most colonial jurisdictions, cannot be understood without appreciating what he calls 'these twinned and deep structures of determination', such a broad study over centuries has

been rarely attempted.¹⁷ The Declaration's reception comes at a time when these structural elements are hardening into a neoliberal globalisation that threatens the international assertion of human rights.

Transgendered people, known as two-spirited in many Indigenous societies in Canada, is a human rights concern that has gone under recognised in decolonising dialogues. It references another field of the Indigenous cognitive landscape that requires illumination and support. In Nehiyaw (Cree) culture, the translation of the term for transgender is 'walking in two worlds'. The term acknowledges two-spirited community members as gifted. They are blessed with the ability to see the world in more than one way. Christian organisations pathologised this special status. It is known in Indigenous communities that two-spirited children suffered some of the worst abuses in the history of the residential school system. They were not recognised in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.

The social, political and spiritual challenges two-spirited people face highlight areas that the Declaration did not address. In Indigenous cultures two-spirited people were often healers, Knowledge Keepers and ceremonial leaders. These were totemic roles that carried deep spiritual significance and an intimate relationship with the natural world. More than anything, this role of spirituality and the guiding and symbiotic relationship with Mother Earth is an area of Indigenous knowledge that should be recognised in an amended version of the Declaration.

Finally, it bears observing that the languages that the Declaration have been translated into are primarily those of the colonisers. There remains a need for Indigenous peoples to come together as in the success of the UNDRIP. To promote this there needs to be more outreach into communities worldwide. One way this can be done is through language. There was not enough time to perform any significant engagement when writing the Declaration. If ever there was an opportunity to amend the Declaration, I would recommend a translation project that would bring the Declaration into communities where it could become more of a living document updated with local community observations.

I am heartened by the international reception of the Declaration. As I noted, one reason for its reach is that it can be considered a counterbalance to the expansive neoliberal cognitive and physical dispossession of Indigenous peoples around the globe. For centuries, Indigenous peoples have travelled a hard road resisting incursions on their sovereignty and maintaining their Indigenous identities in colonial jurisdictions. The Declaration notarised the success of the UNDRIP and addressed the necessity of remembrance. But is it really a small road map in a journey that has far more road to travel.

Notes on contributor

Raymond Frogner is the Senior Director of Research and the Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). He graduated with a Master of Arts Degree in History from the University of Victoria and a Master of Archival Studies Degree from the University of British Columbia. His mother was Métis with Cree relatives from Duncan's First Nation in Northern Alberta. He is the co-chair of the International Council for Archives (ICA) Committee on Indigenous Matters. In 2019 he was the principal author of the ICAs *Tandanya Declaration* concerning public archives and Indigenous self-determination. He has twice won the W. Kaye Lamb Award for best article of the year in the journal *Archivaria* for articles on the topic of archives and Indigenous rights. In 2020 he was nominated a Fellow of the Association of Canadian Archivists. In 2022 he was appointed to the National Administration Committee to support the investigation of unmarked burials sites of residential school children. In 2026 the Society of American Archivists awarded him the Best Article on Archival History Award for 2025 for the article, "Red Jenkinson: Tracing Indigenous Influences on

Canadian Archival Theory.” He continues to research, teach, and publish on issues of Indigenous identity, rights, and social memory.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London, 2001.
2. Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1956; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Grove Press, New York, NY, 1963; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY, 1978; C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Revised ed., Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1963.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network, *ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*, Australian Library and Information Association, Canberra, 2005.
4. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 5 vols., Canada Communication Group – Publishing, Ottawa, 1996.
5. First Archivist Circle, *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, April 2007, Society of American Archivists, Chicago.
6. Jean-Pierre Wallot first brought the phrase ‘house of memory’ into Canadian archival discussion in his 1991 article titled ‘Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal’, published in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Terry Cook subsequently employed it in his influential article, ‘What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift’, *Archivaria*, vol. 43, 1997. Wallot’s piece reflects the expansive seven-volume French study *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora, which examined ‘sites of memory’ or the value of symbols, events, and places of collective memory (Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Gallimard, Paris, 1984–1992). In English archival discourse, the phrase ‘house of memory’ is widely associated with Jeannette Allis Bastian, who used it prominently in her 2009 article ‘In a “House of Memory”’: Discovering the Provenance of Place’ published in *Archival Science*. In this work, she explores how archives serve as repositories not just of documents, but of collective memory, and how memory can be tied to both records and physical spaces. The genealogy of this phrase also influenced my perspective on the NCTR Archives and the Tandanya Declaration.
7. On October 27, 2022, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously passed a motion recognizing the Indian Residential School System as genocide.
8. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, Privy Council Office, Ottawa, 2019.
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ARTICLE

Indigenous Archival Futures and the International Council on Archives Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: Indigenous Perspectives from Australia

Lauren Booker¹, Monica Galassi¹, Narissa Timberly², and Kirsten Thorpe¹¹Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia; ²Department of Human Centred Computing, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia**Abstract**

2024 marked the 5th anniversary of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, a critical milestone in the international archival community's commitment to transform archives by centring Indigenous leadership, self-determination and knowledge systems. This paper introduces and discusses the collaborative Australia-based research project Tracking Tandanya, launched in 2024 through a partnership between the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney, the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, and the Australian Society of Archivists. The Tracking Tandanya project evaluates how the Declaration is advancing its aim of transforming archives to support Indigenous priorities, drawing on research data collected through a sector-wide survey of individuals and organisations engaging with, or implementing, the Declaration across Australia. Tracking Tandanya seeks to answer questions including: How is the Declaration being utilised in institutional contexts? Are projects being adequately resourced and evaluated? Are the reforms making an impact on community? Have archival practices begun to be reimagined? What are the trends from the Declaration's themes that are being addressed? By establishing this evidence base, the project aims to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in supporting Indigenous self-determination in archives.

Keywords: *First Nations archives; Impact evaluation; Rights in Records; Indigenous Archival Sovereignty*

The year 2024 marked the fifth anniversary of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (the Declaration), a critical milestone in the international archival community's commitment to transform archives by centring Indigenous leadership, self-determination and knowledge systems.¹ At its core, the Declaration calls for both a fundamental resetting of relationships with Indigenous peoples and a radical reimagining of archives to honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. This requires a purposeful agenda to transform archival practices and realign them with the existing Indigenous rights framework outlined

*Correspondence: Lauren Booker; Email: lauren.booker@uts.edu.au

in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).² The Declaration identifies five priority areas for action: knowledge authorities, property and ownership, recognition and identity, research and access, and self-determination. However, without a clear implementation strategy, it remains difficult to assess how the Declaration is being activated, and crucially, how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia are shaping and benefiting from these changes.³

This article introduces and discusses *Tracking Tandanya: A Research Project to Track Implementation and Activation of the International Council on Archives (ICA) Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration in Australia*, a collaborative, pilot research project launched in 2025. The project is a partnership between the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, and the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA).

Through the collection of self-reported data via a survey and the development of a reporting mechanism, the project aims to gain insights into the implementation and impact of the Declaration in Australia. The project gathers information from individuals and organisations based in Australia, as well as overseas institutions involved in returning materials to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through an anonymised survey, the project team aims to gather and surface data that reports on how the Declaration has been activated and embraced across the archives sector, and identify pathways for strengthening and expanding these efforts. As the Tracking Tandanya project is still in its initial phase of data collection and analysis, this article focuses on providing background and context rather than presenting findings. The aim is to outline the project's purpose, design, and guiding principles, setting the foundation for future reporting and sector engagement.

This article first outlines the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration in relation to gaps in understanding and in processes for data collection, implementation, and evaluation of statements on Indigenous self-determination in Australian archives, with particular attention on the Bringing Them Home Report's recommendations for record access. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the Tracking Tandanya project, including its aims, methodologies, and research design, along with initial reflections arising from the project's development.

Five years after the official launch of the Declaration, the Tracking Tandanya project offers an opportunity to gather and share data on its use and impact. The Tracking Tandanya project calls for increased transparency and accountability in the application of the Declaration, urging archives and other cultural repositories to prioritise Indigenous rights in recordkeeping practices that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

The ICA Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration

As the international peak body for professional archivists, the ICA is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting the effective management of records and the preservation, care, and use of the world's archival heritage through its representation of records and archive professionals across the globe.⁴ For over 60 years, the ICA has united archival institutions and practitioners worldwide to advocate for effective archival management and the protection of recorded heritage, to produce standards and best practices, and to encourage dialogue, exchange, and the transmission of knowledge and expertise across international borders.⁵ However, it was not until 2018 that the ICA formally addressed Indigenous rights and perspectives in archival practice.

The ICA Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM) was established by the ICA Programme Commission at the meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2018. According to the ICA website, the EGIM 'provides a forum for high-level discussions of issues related to

the recognition of Indigenous worldviews as vital components of archival theory and method, and the development of protocols for Indigenous knowledge management'.⁶ The establishment of EGIM marked an important moment for the ICA, as it focused on Indigenous priorities within international archival practices.

The following year, this focus on Indigenous priorities was formalised through the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. The Declaration was launched in October 2019 in Adelaide, Australia, on the unceded land of the Kaurna peoples. The launch marked a significant milestone, with First Nations leaders from several Indigenous Nations around the world attending the meeting. It was seen as a potential turning point for archival practice, with widespread support from attendees. The Declaration calls upon archival institutions globally to adopt its themes and commitments, acknowledging that decolonising archival practice requires generational effort to transform archives into ethical spaces characterised by respect, negotiation and collaboration.⁷ The Declaration's five key themes are summarised next:

1. **Knowledge Authorities:** Colonial archival institutions must acknowledge that Indigenous cognitive frameworks for understanding history, memory and cultural identity exist alongside institutional knowledge systems. Decolonisation begins through the respectful integration of these knowledge authorities, informed by Indigenous ceremony, cultural tradition and social protocols.
2. **Property and Ownership:** Archival institutions must recognise Indigenous ownership of traditional knowledge, cultural expression and intellectual property. The Declaration emphasises that Western intellectual property frameworks based on individual ownership are inadequate for protecting Indigenous collective rights to cultural heritage.
3. **Recognition and Identity:** Indigenous peoples possess the right to recognition within archival systems as distinct peoples with unique kinship structures, identities and cultures. This requires Indigenous languages and social authority to inform collaborative, participatory approaches to archival representational systems (e.g., in the arrangement and description of archives), acknowledging the need for archives to represent dynamic and constantly changing relationships across creators, context and carriers of information.
4. **Research and Access:** The Declaration recognises that research and access constitute socially mediated processes requiring Indigenous communities to exercise control over state-generated information about them. Access to records containing traditional cultural expression must respect the social, legal and cultural protocols of affiliated Indigenous communities.
5. **Self-Determination:** Indigenous peoples hold the right to preserve and share their heritage as a fundamental human right. The Declaration recognises those UNDRIP articles having a direct relationship with self-determination.⁸

The Declaration's emphasis on self-determination and access rights echoes earlier reports and enquiries focused on access to records for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Of particular importance is the landmark *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997), which contained 54 recommendations to redress the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and concluded that the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was a gross violation of human rights.⁹ The Report's key archival recommendations included urgent funding for preserving and indexing Indigenous records, embargoing the destruction of relevant materials, and the establishment of Records Taskforces in each jurisdiction to develop culturally appropriate access guidelines.¹⁰

However, two decades later, The Healing Foundation (THF), which advocates for Stolen Generations Survivors' priorities, observed that most recommendations had not been implemented, creating additional trauma for Stolen Generations Survivors, with access to records remaining inconsistent and inequitable, particularly across state and territory borders, despite being crucial for healing.¹¹ THF has called for reviews of records access across all government levels and recommended establishing traineeships for Indigenous archivists and genealogists, emphasising that 'survivors are dying' and 'we cannot wait another generation' with only 6% of original recommendations clearly implemented after almost 28 years.¹²

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration's focus on Indigenous self-determination in archives provides an additional advocacy opportunity for the comprehensive implementation of the Bringing Them Home report's archival recommendations, half of which are yet to be implemented.¹³ In 2021, Barrowcliffe and colleagues urged the Australian archives sector to align their implementation of the Declaration with existing frameworks and models of structural reform relating to Indigenous rights in archives.¹⁴ This included 'holistic models of Indigenous Living Archives on country supported and resourced from national and state budgets and involving redistribution of funding for the public archival sector' and 'Rights-based approaches, for example, the Charter of Lifelong Rights in Childhood Recordkeeping developed for the Out-of-Home Care sector in Australia, including rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Care today and the Stolen Generations'.¹⁵

Gaps in data collection, implementation and evaluation

In 2020, the year following the publication of the Declaration several key concerns were raised concerning its effectiveness and impact. Barrowcliffe and colleagues highlighted 'the lack of proactive initiative around the implementation of the Tandanya Declaration after it was published'.¹⁶ They urged the Australian archives sector to engage with the Declaration to drive transformative practice and to confront 'how the settler-colonial status quo is too often buried under the rhetoric of decolonisation and reconciliation'.¹⁷

As outlined by THF in their 2025 evaluation of the status of the 54 recommendations from the Bringing Them Home report, there has been a multi-decade failure in the Australian archives sector to implement transformative archival practice that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as was recommended in 1997 by the Bringing Them Home report.¹⁸ These institutional gaps in the realisation of Indigenous self-determination in archives are not unique to Bringing Them Home; they extend to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration as well. Without systematic tracking, it remains unclear whether institutions are following through on the Declaration's five key themes or whether the Declaration is producing real and relevant impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Learning from the lessons of the Bringing Them Home implementation, establishing processes to monitor the Declaration is important to avoid these patterns of institutional inaction.

Internationally, following the launch of the Declaration in 2019, several organisations expressed their interest and support. In an article for the ICA Flash Magazine, Raymond Frogner, Senior Director of Research and Head of Archives at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (Canada), observed that:

'Immediately following the signing, the Association des Archivistes du Québec released a public statement in support of the Declaration. The Association of Canadian Archivists made a similar public statement. [...] The Norwegian government also translated the Declaration into two dialects of Sami. [...] Beyond formal institutions' endorsement and conference debates, the Declaration has made a more subtle impact on the policies and procedures of public archives. In Canada, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

(NCTR – National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation) wrote its statement on Indigenous Data Sovereignty in full recognition of the Tandanya’s language’.¹⁹

Since then, in Australia, the Tandanya Declaration has been publicly supported or officially endorsed by several organisations, including Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA), the National Archives of Australia (NAA), and State Records of South Australia. Professional associations, including the ASA, and the National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), have also formally endorsed the Declaration.

The Declaration has the potential to be utilised worldwide as a framework for transforming research and practice. Dr Jamila Ghaddar’s work in the Archives & Digital Media Lab, a sibling organisation of the Archival Technologies Lab at the City University of New York, demonstrates this in action. The training programme, Fundamentals of Archival Management & Emergency Mitigation in Palestine, Lebanon & the Global South, grounds its curriculum explicitly in the Tandanya Declaration, using it as a tool to challenge Eurocentrism in archival practice and centre community-led practices. The programme focuses on ‘emergency preparedness, disaster mitigation, and archival first aid’ to support cultural heritage preservation in conflict settings, demonstrating how the principles of the Declaration can inform pedagogy in contexts where decolonial actions are most urgently needed.²⁰

Additionally, several public forums and talks have been organised to explore and discuss the Declaration in an Australia, Aotearoa and Pacific Islands context. For example, the *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium*, jointly led and organised in 2024 by the ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group and the Indigenous Archives Collective (IAC), was hosted by the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand Te Huinga Mahara. Chaired by Tracking Tandanya project team member Dr Lauren Booker, the event brought together voices from across the sector to share how institutions are responding to the Declaration and to foster dialogue on its implementation.

In 2024, CAARA marked the 5-year anniversary of the Declaration by collating and publishing a summary of CAARA jurisdictions’ work across each of the Declaration’s themes. The summary report details the actions taken by Australian national, state, and territory archive institutions in response to the Declaration.²¹ The report highlighted institutional responses to the Declaration and represents a significant step towards accountability by establishing a mechanism for tracking actions and commitments. However, the report also highlights persistent gaps and inconsistencies in tracking mechanisms across the sector. There is no clear baseline for measuring progress, making it difficult to assess impact and identify areas requiring urgent attention. For instance, what does the archival sector mean by ‘Indigenous self-determination’ in practical terms? Is it about governance, control over records, or shared decision-making authority? Similarly, how are changes in staff behaviours measured? These gaps underscore the need for clearer indicators and metrics, stronger accountability frameworks, and more tangible examples of how the Declaration’s principles are being embedded in everyday archival work.

These examples show that, despite endorsements from several organisations, the Declaration’s efficacy remains unclear due to the absence of consistent, comprehensive, sector-wide evaluation. Barrowcliffe and colleagues highlighted the urgent need for baseline data to understand how the Declaration is being implemented at national and international levels.²² Currently, there is no publicly accessible registry of institutional commitments, nor is there a public tracking mechanism through the ICA. This lack of systematic monitoring makes it difficult to assess uptake, identify best practices, or hold institutions accountable to the Declaration’s principles and immediate actions. This gap reflects a broader challenge across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) sector: measuring success

in Indigenous-led initiatives requires metrics that serve both institutional accountability and Indigenous community priorities and self-determination.

The literature highlights a disconnect between conventional metrics and the community-driven outcomes that Indigenous-led archival initiatives seek to achieve.²³ Traditional, often quantitative methods adapted from social sciences or library frameworks fail to capture the multidimensional nature of archival impact, particularly in relation to social justice.²⁴ Given these challenges, archival research in recent decades has increasingly focused on measuring the impact of social justice initiatives, recognising archives as active agents that shape power dynamics through decisions around preservation, description, and access. Duff and colleagues propose a multidimensional framework for assessing social justice impact, acknowledging that archival effects range from tangible (e.g., court decisions) to intangible (e.g., emotional healing) and are complex, long-term, and often unquantifiable.²⁵

The context of the archive also matters. Cifor and Lee critique neoliberal pressures that prioritise demonstrable outcomes and economic metrics, warning that social justice language can be co-opted to serve market-oriented agendas.²⁶ Such approaches risk universalising measures and reinforcing the hierarchies inherent in archival work. Yet, despite these challenges, developing nuanced evaluation methods remains critical for demonstrating value, securing funding, and fostering innovation though these methods must resist the very neoliberal frameworks they seek to challenge.²⁷

The Tracking Tandanya project literature review examined other projects that have undertaken similar measurement processes within the archival sector. A key insight from this review was the importance of self-assessment, which the team aims to integrate into future iterations of the Tracking Tandanya project. The Digital Preservation Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM) – identified through this review – provides a structured framework for evaluating organisational capacity across areas such as governance, policy, resources, and technical infrastructure.²⁸ This approach emphasises identifying strengths and gaps, enabling institutions to prioritise actions and build sustainable digital preservation strategies.

The Tracking Tandanya project

The Tracking Tandanya project was established to address these gaps by gathering baseline data on the implementation of the Declaration in Australia. Developed as a collaboration between Jumbunna Research (UTS), Monash University, and the ASA, it aims to identify both the Declaration's activation in practice and areas needing further support, resources, and advocacy.

The project uses an online, anonymised, voluntary survey to gather information from the Australian archive sector and collecting institutions on their engagement with the Declaration. The survey comprises 53 questions aligned with the Declaration's five key themes and priorities. The project seeks to answer the following questions to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in supporting Indigenous self-determination in archives:

- How is the Declaration being utilised in institutional contexts?
- Are projects being adequately resourced and evaluated?
- Are the reforms making an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- Has the Declaration created opportunities for archival practices to be reimaged?
- What trends from the Declaration's themes are being addressed?

The project team was directed in the research design by their combined experience and expertise in the Australian archives sector and the GLAM sector more broadly, and co-developed

the research questions through a critical lens to explore the potential of the Declaration's implementation as a transformative practice. Furthermore, all project team members were present at the inaugural ICA Indigenous Matters Summit in 2019, where the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration was presented as a call to 'jurisdictional archives of the world to acknowledge and adopt the themes and commitments of the Declaration for immediate action'.²⁹

The project team invited Jeff Timberly (Bidjigal) to create an artwork as the project logo. Timberly's piece, *Nudjim* (meaning 'fresh water' in the Dharawal language), serves as a vibrant visual representation of the project, reflecting on the importance of archival access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Timberly explains the meaning of the artwork and how it represents the project:

A waterhole where I had it for archives is because people go to the archives, in the archives they can put information in, and they take information out. When people go to a waterhole, as well as they can put things in and take things out, but also all the animals and everything else can utilise it. So, it's like everybody using the archives, every living thing can use the waterhole. The tracks that exist around are the same way as in records are being kept and recorded, the same way as all the tracks that are left on the trails that lead there and the mud that exists around the waterhole is the information that's left behind there, and people utilise that information.³⁰

Timberly's artwork conceptualises archives as a waterhole – an active, relational space where knowledge flows and accumulates. This metaphor highlights the project's perspective on archives as dynamic entities shaped by interaction, movement, and shared responsibility, rather than static repositories of information.

Methodology and research design

The Tracking Tandanya project is led by Indigenous Research Methodologies and is based on the right of Indigenous peoples to self-govern their cultural heritage, as established by the UNDRIP.³¹ It is firmly grounded in the principles of the Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement, especially those articulated by the Maïam Nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective, who lead this field in Australia. According to these principles, Indigenous peoples have the right to:

- Exercise control of the data ecosystem, including creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination and infrastructure.
- Data that are contextual and disaggregated (available and accessible at individual, community and First Nations levels).
- Data that are relevant and empowers sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance.
- Data structures that are accountable to Indigenous peoples and First Nations.
- Data that are protective and respects our individual and collective interests.³²

Embedding these principles into the Tracking Tandanya project required moving beyond a narrow focus on archival records access to encompass the broader dimensions of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. This includes ensuring transparency in how data are collected, managed, and shared, as well as establishing accountability mechanisms that prioritise Indigenous governance and decision-making. In this way, the project acknowledges that archives are not neutral repositories but are part of a broader data ecosystem in which power, control, and responsibility must be redistributed to uphold Indigenous rights and self-determination.

In the light of these power dynamics, the use of Indigenous Research Methodologies offered opportunities for greater transparency and accountability in implementing the Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles embedded within the Declaration. This methodological approach aligns with broader decolonisation efforts to transform collecting institutions, as scholars such as Smith, O’Neal, Caswell, and Thorpe have articulated in their work on Indigenous information practices and institutional change.³³ The ultimate goal of this project is to create data that will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their community archives, both in the present and for future generations.

The project methodology also draws on guidelines for ethical research in Australia, such as the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and its four core principles of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability.³⁴

The Tracking Tandanya project uses Qualtrics, an online platform for building, distributing, and analysing surveys. The survey was circulated among Aboriginal community archives and local and national collecting institutions across the country, and participants had 1 month to respond (the survey closed on 8 October 2025). It collected both quantitative and qualitative data through open-ended questions, enabling survey participants to share their experiences, challenges, and innovations.

The pilot survey consisted of 53 questions, taking approximately 30 minutes to complete, and was organised into seven sections:

1. Institutional Background

This section gathered baseline data on the organisation, including its type (e.g., State/Territory archives, Aboriginal Keeping Place), staff numbers, location, and the respondent’s role. It established whether the institution holds collections relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (and the context of those materials) and whether it has received funding to support implementation.

2. Awareness and Endorsement of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration

This section assessed the organisation’s familiarity with the Tandanya Declaration, including how it first became aware of it and its level of understanding. Core questions explored whether the organisation has formally endorsed the Declaration, the drivers for endorsement (e.g., organisational priorities, community requests), and the main barriers (e.g., limited resources, legal constraints). It also examined whether the Declaration informs policy development and whether Indigenous governance structures are in place.

3. Implementation of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Priority Themes

This section examined organisational practices across the Declaration’s five priority themes:

- Knowledge Authorities – Evaluated recognition of Indigenous knowledge frameworks, community consultation, provision of Right of Reply, and the existence of shared-stewardship agreements.
- Property and Ownership – Assessed acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of traditional knowledge, return of materials to communities, and support for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights.
- Recognition and Identity – Measured engagement with Indigenous peoples in record description, actions to address colonial bias (e.g., revising problematic language, adding warning statements) and acknowledgement of Country and Place.

- **Research and Access** – Reviewed protocols for research involving Indigenous materials, approaches to Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and handling of culturally sensitive materials (e.g., community decision-making, restricted access).
- **Self-Determination** – Examined the extent to which archival practices support Indigenous self-determination and actively counter colonial narratives within collections.

4. Organisational Capacity and Resourcing

This section evaluated the organisation's internal ability to implement the principles of the Declaration. It included a rating of current capacity, ranging from no capacity to high-level capability, and asked respondents to rank the resources that would be most beneficial, such as additional funding, increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing, policy templates and toolkits, or leadership support. The section also explored how engagement with the Declaration had been communicated to staff (e.g., through mechanisms such as all-staff meetings, email, or training sessions) and whether specific guidance was provided on its application in daily work, including the nature of that guidance.

5. Partnerships and Community Engagement

This section explored collaborative relationships and decision-making structures within the organisation. It asked whether formal partnerships existed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support the activation of the Declaration, including the number and type of partnerships, such as shared custody agreements, research collaborations, or community advisory roles. It also assessed the effectiveness of these partnerships and any barriers. Furthermore, the section examined whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff hold decision-making positions at senior leadership, management, or professional levels, and whether the organisation has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board, either formal or informal.

6. Training and Professional Development

This section assessed staff competency and readiness to implement the principles outlined in the Declaration. It examined the types of cultural competency training provided, including Indigenous cultural awareness, anti-racism, ICIP, and Indigenous rights training. It also asked respondents to rate how prepared the organisation was to implement these principles (from 'not prepared at all' to 'fully prepared'). Finally, the section sought input on the professional development opportunities considered most valuable, including workshops on Indigenous methodologies, legal and ethical frameworks, and leadership and change management.

7. Challenges and Future Directions

The final section focused on outcomes, challenges, and future planning. It examined how the organisation measures the impact of programmes and initiatives related to Indigenous communities and collections, using methods such as community feedback, usage statistics, or policy implementation tracking. It also considered how the organisation communicates its commitment to the Declaration's principles through channels such as website updates, social media, and community meetings. Respondents were asked to identify the three main challenges to implementation, outline their vision for the next 5 years, and suggest what support from the broader archival profession would be most helpful, such as professional standards, funding advocacy, or policy toolkits. Finally, the section invited feedback on how the Declaration could be enhanced for the Australian context and provided space for additional comments.

Methodological reflections and key challenges

The Tracking Tandanya project's research questions, outlined at the beginning of this article, aim to move beyond descriptive reporting and encourage critical reflection on the transformative potential of the Tandanya Declaration. The primary challenge in fulfilling this aim was developing an appropriate methodological approach, particularly given the absence of impact indicators specifically designed for the archival sector (ones that could be applied consistently across both mainstream and community archival contexts). This gap required the project team to build a research design that not only collects data but also encourages respondents to engage in self-assessment and reflection. The intention was to ensure that participation was not limited to answering questions but became an opportunity to consider the multiple dimensions and broader implications of the Tandanya Declaration in archival practice. This reflective process might create awareness and highlight the tension between what institutions should already be doing as baseline practice (such as digitisation or providing access to collections) and what constitutes transformative action.

The Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement has set a high standard for advancing Indigenous rights, shifting the focus from mere access to meaningful participation in decision-making. Guided by these principles, the research design focused on creating impact measures that align with and reinforce these elevated benchmarks for Indigenous rights. The consideration of these standards prompted the project team to critically reflect on the role of international bodies, such as the ICA, in advancing an Indigenous self-determination agenda. This project was developed not only to explore institutional practices but also to spark dialogue on the need for transformative action. Central to this dialogue is the tension between baseline responsibilities that international organisations should already fulfil and the deeper structural shifts required across the archives sector for genuine progress towards Indigenous self-determination.

Another methodological consideration was determining the appropriate respondent category. Individual perspectives and organisational responses offer distinct insights, yet prioritising one over the other risks overlooking critical nuances. To address this challenge, the project team designed the survey to capture both individual and organisational perspectives. However, to minimise duplication, each organisation was asked to nominate a single respondent to complete the survey anonymously on its behalf.

Resource allocation emerged as a critical consideration throughout the project, raising questions about scope and responsibility. Should the survey's primary audience be institutions with formal archival mandates, or should it extend to community archives and collecting organisations? And who bears responsibility for funding the practical implementation of the Tandanya Declaration within these diverse contexts, particularly community archives that often operate with minimal resources? Persistent gaps in resourcing and evaluation tools risk undermining the Declaration's objectives and raise fundamental questions about accountability.

These methodological challenges were discussed extensively by the research team and ultimately shaped the project's design. Addressing these issues was essential to ensure that the project did more than simply collect data or provide a superficial view of the Declaration's implementation. Instead, the goal was to generate insights that examine the depth and quality of institutional change and assess whether it leads to tangible, lasting benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Interim findings from the Tracking Tandanya project

Archives and archival practice in Australia are inextricably tied to the settler colonial state, both past and present. The Tracking Tandanya project recognises the key role archives play

in establishing and upholding the settler colonial state and highlights the need for increased transparency and accountability in the application of the Declaration in this context. If implemented effectively, the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration has the potential to be transformative for the archive sector internationally.

The collection of data from institutions and organisations engaging with the Declaration provides an opportunity to map the current scope of the Declaration's use and impact. As the Tracking Tandanya project is currently in its early stages of data collection and analysis, the key focus of this article is to provide background to the project rather than project findings. However, aligned with the 5 years of engagement with the Declaration by the project team, the following interim considerations are offered:

- What mechanisms are currently in place across the Australian archives sector to measure the impact of statements, such as the Declaration, in a consistent and transparent manner? How can we prioritise accountability for institutions and organisations that have endorsed the Declaration to deliver on their commitments?
- How do we consistently differentiate the transformative implementation of the Declaration from actions and initiatives that are already within the remit of status quo archival practice? What is performative and what is transformative?
- Can the Declaration have an impact without clear implementation strategies? Effective and sustained activation of the Declaration requires the development of institutional implementation strategies.

Conclusion

The Tracking Tandanya project is an important step towards establishing a baseline of understanding of how the principles of the ICA Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration are being applied across the archival sector, specifically in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. Launched 5 years after the Tandanya Declaration's official release, this project was established to address the lack of systematic data collection, implementation strategies, and evaluation mechanisms regarding Indigenous archival rights. By collecting self-reported data through a voluntary, anonymised online survey, the project aims to gain insights into the Declaration's implementation and effectiveness, examining the depth of institutional commitment it has generated.

This article explores the significance of this initiative, situating it within a broader historical context, particularly the persistent challenges of limited implementation and accountability following the landmark *Bringing Them Home* Report.³⁵ The Tracking Tandanya project urges greater transparency and responsibility in applying the Declaration. As a pilot project, it establishes foundational data to inform future development and implementation, calling on archives and cultural institutions to actively uphold Indigenous rights in recordkeeping practices, ensuring they support the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The analysis of the methodological approach provided a critical lens on the complexities within the archival sector in this area. A key challenge was the lack of a shared impact framework for measuring progress against the Declaration, which made it difficult to develop a cohesive, unified methodology for collecting data across institutions. Variations in terminology and existing frameworks further underscore the complexity of assessing sector-wide engagement.

Another significant challenge was the absence of clear baseline data outlining the fundamental requirements for institutions, despite the Declaration being endorsed by several organisations in Australia and overseas. This raises an important question: what is the difference

between endorsement and action? Without agreed-upon standards, it remains unclear what constitutes baseline practice versus transformative change.

In response to these gaps, the project team identified three critical questions: What mechanisms exist to measure impact consistently and transparently? How can transformative action be distinguished from performative gestures? And can the Declaration succeed without concrete implementation strategies and adequate resourcing?

Despite these challenges, the Declaration has the potential to drive transformative change across the archival sector. The Tracking Tandanya project seeks not only to establish a foundational dataset but also to generate insights into current practices, pinpoint areas for improvement, and identify opportunities for growth. Ultimately, the aim is to foster meaningful dialogue and accountability across Australia.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands where this article was written. We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders and leaders of these lands, past and present. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

Notes on contributors

Dr Lauren Booker (Garigal) is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Indigenous Archives and Data Stewardship Hub at Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research, University of Technology Sydney and a member of the Indigenous Archives Collective. Lauren has worked across the Australian Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums sector (GLAM) on projects supporting First Nations communities and organisations to access Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property held in collecting institutions. This includes working in consultation with the public library network regarding language documentation identification and the use of manuscripts in language revitalisation. Her work also focuses on planning and facilitating the digitisation of cultural heritage and photographic collections, and the organisation of digital community archives.

Dr Monica Galassi is a Research Fellow at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney. Monica's scholarship and advocacy centre on social justice, with a strong focus on the importance of access to and control over cultural heritage. Her research sits at the intersection of archival practice and theory, aiming to support research approaches that can drive meaningful institutional change in response to community needs and aspirations. Through her PhD and ongoing work, Monica has developed methodologies for knowledge translation that prioritise community-centred approaches and strengthen the impact and accountability of research.

Dr Narissa Timbery (Yuin Nation) is a senior lecturer and DAATSIA Fellow at Monash University in the Department of Human Centred Computing, Digital Equity Group, Faculty of IT. She is a founding member of the Information Empowered Communities Lab. Her research with the Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Living Archives of People and Place project, centers on connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with their records held in archival institutions; through her research she hopes to achieve the return or care of archival records based on Community protocols and needs. Narissa is the DAATSIA Fellow on the Discovery Indigenous project, Cybersecurity for Indigenous Communities. She is a qualified archivist and has worked at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the National Archives of Australia.

Dr Kirsten Thorpe (Worimi, Port Stephens) is Professor at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney, where she leads the Indigenous Archives and Data Stewardship Hub. The Hub advocates for Indigenous rights

in archives and data, and develops research and engagement in relation to refiguring libraries and archives to support the culturally appropriate ownership, management and ongoing preservation of Indigenous knowledges.

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REFLECTION ARTICLE

Wilful Ignorance, Invisibilisation and Coloniality: A Pacific Practitioner's Reflection on the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration

Opeta Alefaio*

Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA).

Abstract

This reflection critiques the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration from a Pacific practitioner's perspective, exposing how coloniality persists through exclusion, silencing, and symbolic extraction. It situates the Declaration within a broader pattern of wilful ignorance and invisibilisation that has long undermined Pacific recordkeeping and information governance. Drawing on lived experience and regional data gaps, it links archival neglect to human harm, gendered devaluation, and weakened regional solidarity. Ultimately, it argues that true decolonisation requires rebuilding Pacific-led recordkeeping systems and restoring genuine partnerships, where solidarity is measured not by rhetoric but by whether the systems we create safeguard Pacific lives and dignity.

Keywords: *Pacific archives; recordkeeping; coloniality; invisibilisation; Indigenous data sovereignty; information governance; decolonisation*

I write this from a place of both immersion and disquiet, as a Pacific practitioner who has lived through the cycles of enthusiasm and neglect that shape our regional recordkeeping landscape. My reflections are necessarily entangled with my own complicity and frustration. I've been both a participant in and a witness to the promise of solidarity and the silence of exclusion, the celebration of indigeneity and the belittlement via tokenisation and performative acknowledgement.

I want to see the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration as progress, as a shining beacon to guide us to safe and prosperous waters. But every time I look at it I see and feel coloniality using indigeneity. An aspirational and well-meaning declaration draped in the language of inclusion although formed through exclusion, and ceremonially launched with symbolic extraction. It stands apart from Pacific Island realities, disconnected from our experiences. In doing so, it ignores our challenges and compounds them as part of a process, which projects harmful hierarchies we thought and hoped had long gone. I am continually forced to face the question: How do we give life to a finely crafted declaration that appeals to

*Correspondence: Opeta Alefaio Email: opetaa@forumsec.org

our conscience, even when it overlooks our needs and did not properly include us in its creation?

This reflection is my attempt to grapple with that tension; to think through what the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration means when refracted through the lived conditions of Pacific recordkeeping, where colonial legacies compound a self-inflicted wilful ignorance causing harm to Pacific peoples, and how we might find ways to bring much-needed change.

When records fail, people die

A few years ago, the mother of someone dear to me became unwell. Her doctor suspected breast cancer and recommended surgery, but needed test results to confirm. What followed was a deeply frustrating and painful delay caused by poor recordkeeping. For almost 2 years, she returned to the hospital three times for blood tests. Each time, the results were lost. As her condition worsened, and with no diagnostic clarity, the doctor eventually said, ‘Let’s just go ahead with the surgery’.

Thankfully, she survived the surgery. But not long after, she passed away. The ordeal caused her and her loved ones deep pain and lingering anger. Why did she have to suffer the worsening of her condition because of a failure in care? Why did the system amplify her struggle instead of easing it? And the most haunting question of all: Did she have to die? If the records she needed had not been lost, twice, and she had received timely surgery, might she still be here today, cherishing her grandchildren and watching them grow?

Her doctor was also constrained by the system’s failures. Given the ethical imperative of the Hippocratic Oath to ‘do no harm’, we must consider the emotional and professional strain of repeatedly ordering blood tests for a patient whose condition was visibly worsening. Deprived of essential diagnostic data, how could he reasonably fulfill his duties? The system demanded professional standards without providing the tools required to meet them.

When records become weapons

In the lead-up to Fiji’s 2022 general elections, the FijiFirst Government under Frank Bainimarama and Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum passed the 2021 Electoral Registration of Voters Amendment Bill. This law required all eligible citizens to register to vote using the exact name on their birth certificate. Political observers viewed this move as a deliberate attempt to disenfranchise indigenous Fijians.

But the law’s impact extended beyond ethnicity, disproportionately affecting married women. To retain their right to vote, many were forced to undergo the costly and humiliating process of legally altering their birth certificate to reflect their married name – as if they had been born married, erasing the lives they lived before. The policy sent a troubling message: that their identity was incomplete without marriage, that they didn’t matter until they got married.¹

When data are suppressed, inequality grows

For over a decade, the same government collected ethnically disaggregated data while preventing its public release. Officials justified this policy by claiming ethnicity statistics were divisive and incompatible with ‘common and equal citizenry’.² In practice, it operated as a mechanism of control. Suppressing ethnic data did not eliminate inequality, it removed the

evidence needed to track how disparities were changing and where they were intensifying. National averages were used to claim progress while disaggregated patterns essential for clarity and accountability remained hidden.³

Research by Fiji scholar Mere Nailatikau (2024) shows that ethnic disparities in education, employment, and home ownership persisted throughout the 2006–2022 ban period, with some gaps slowing in improvement or widening. By blocking access to ethnicity-based statistics, the government insulated itself from scrutiny and prevented independent assessment to gauge if policy gains were equitably distributed. What cannot be publicly shared, cannot be publicly examined or contested.⁴ Data suppression thus reshaped collective understanding, allowing political narratives of equality and meritocracy to stand largely unchallenged by statistical evidence; and in the face of a very different lived reality for a growing portion of the population, namely Fiji's indigenous people.

The abuse of power became explicit in 2021 when the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBS) released Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) tables disaggregated by ethnicity and religion. The figures upset the government's narrative of race-neutral progress. Within days, FBS CEO Kemueli Naiqama was dismissed.⁵ Naiqama publicly defended the survey as an 'honest snapshot' of Fiji's poverty situation,⁶ while civil society organisations and regional observers described the dismissal as politically motivated, raising serious concerns about the independence of Fiji's statistical system.⁷

By punishing the release of disaggregated results the state sent a clear message: evidence contradicting official narratives carries consequences. This suppression dispossessed the public of data they owned, forced researchers to rely on overseas repositories to access Fiji's own census microdata, and transformed recordkeeping from a public good into an instrument of political control.⁸

The Declaration's blind spot

These examples demonstrate a core mismatch between the Declaration and Pacific island reality: the presumption of stable archival infrastructures and a sound wider information governance environment. Where the Declaration calls for recordkeeping authorities to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing and being, the primary issue for Pacific islanders is the need to establish sound and effective recordkeeping systems and safeguards to ensure the actual provision of basic public services, and to protect the public from the coercive politicisation of official government records and data.

Wilful ignorance

Sadly, the Pacific has a marked resistance to recognising official records as essential information assets vital for the proper conduct of government business, or as documentary heritage, which comprises a considerable portion of society's recorded collective memory. This is a wilful ignorance which continues to harm our people, and is a manifestation of what the esteemed Professor Epeli Hau'ofa termed 'belittlement' in his seminal essay 'Our Sea of Islands'.⁹ It was a critique of development and what he saw as a doctrine of dependency, where external dictates of the 'smallness' of Pacific Islands would be internalised and projected further by Pacific decision makers as co-perpetrators of our own demeaning. This has played out clearly in the Pacific information and knowledge management sector, which has routinely been deprioritised and defunded,¹⁰ with the predictable consequence of compromising the Pacific's evidential knowledge base.

A history of being ignored

In 2005, the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA), understanding the critical role good records play in preventing mishaps like those mentioned above, wrote to all Pacific Island Government heads and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) urging for recordkeeping to be included in the region's key strategic document, The Pacific Plan. They called for the 'Development of national public recordkeeping strategies in support of transparent, accountable and efficient governance and the inclusion of requirements to make and keep good public records in national policies and legislation on governance and access to information'.¹¹ This sadly didn't get any traction.

Four years later in 2009, the Republic of Nauru approached PARBICA for input into their own submission to PIFS, also calling for recordkeeping to be made a regional priority. Once among the richest countries in the world per capita, Nauru had since lost much of its wealth, and due to poor or non-existent records was not able to track where the money had all gone, nor take anyone to task. Unfortunately, this initiative to prioritise Pacific records, and information governance also came to naught.

Closer to home in Fiji, in 2009 the National Archives of Fiji (NAF) had finally won the attention of the Fiji Public Service Commission (PSC), resulting from a costly recordkeeping mishap at PSC headquarters. In response, NAF used the PARBICA model recordkeeping policy guideline to develop a draft Fiji National Records Management Policy for whole of government. This was forwarded to the PSC, and I departed to undertake 2 years of master's education at Monash University. During my time there, I received an email from a colleague from NAF that the PSC had issued a watered-down version of what we had submitted to them. It seems that the entire exercise had largely turned into a box-ticking exercise.

In 2015, PIFS put a call out to the region for submissions on areas of concern that should be made a regional priority. PARBICA again put its hand up with a submission, but the Specialist Sub-Committee on Regionalism which assessed submissions recommended that the submission not be forwarded for consideration by the Forum's leaders. Later in 2017, Fiji returned to national strategic planning and all departments were instructed to send submissions for consideration. Included in NAF's submission was a proposal for a proper service-wide information governance initiative to take a more strategic approach to government information. After initial positive feedback, we were then told this could no longer go ahead. After frequent attempts at securing an explanation, the central planning agency told us that such an initiative could only be accommodated under the 'enabling environment' section of the plan, but this could not happen because this section belonged exclusively to the then Attorney General (who was also the Minister of the Economy, Civil Service, Communications, and Climate Change).

The predictable consequence

Ironically, and not surprisingly for Pacific information management practitioners, the Forum and other development players have had a difficult time securing evidence, data, and information to accurately track their development targets:

'In addition, for all countries, there is a lack of comprehensive data on all the Millenium Development Goal indicators, and where data is available, there are concerns about the quality of the data.'¹²

‘Not all of the 132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators are measurable by data based on international methodologies, and for some others there is limited data available. As a consequence, only 48 percent of the indicators can be measured at this time. Of most concern is the lack of data to measure regional priorities of climate change, ocean and seas or “life below water,” and quality education.’¹³

‘Looking at data availability by goal (figure 3.1), there are significant data gaps in Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 14 (life below water) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), each with less than 30 per cent sufficient data available. Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), each have less than 50 per cent sufficient data availability.’¹⁴

‘The assessment of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is impeded by inadequate data. Out of the 231 SDG indicators, only 133 possess sufficient data to assess progress, demonstrating that the unavailability of data remains a significant impediment to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Across Asia-Pacific, on average, only 52 per cent of the indicators have two or more data points, while more than a third of the indicators lack data altogether.’¹⁵

While Pacific information and knowledge managers have been trying to lobby for the prioritisation of Pacific information and knowledge, Pacific decision makers have persistently depowered the sector while simultaneously decrying the poor state of Pacific statistics and Pacific data. They have not been able to – or are just wilfully ignorant to see that these two phenomena are connected. That one cannot have a steady, accurate, authentic, and useable flow of statistics and data without the necessary ecosystem or supply chain.¹⁶

This belligerence reflects a deeper dynamic: in the Pacific, recordkeeping and information management is often rendered invisible.

Invisibilisation

Invisible work is a concept introduced by sociologist Arlene Kaplan Daniels in 1987, describing the essential yet often overlooked labour that underpins both households and organisations. This type of work remains hidden because it falls outside formal systems of compensation, recognition, or measurement. It encompasses routine, relational, and maintenance tasks, frequently carried out by women, which enable visible productivity but are excluded from economic and institutional definitions of value.¹⁷ This perfectly encapsulates how Pacific decision makers and their advisers have treated Pacific information and knowledge over time.

Gendered devaluation

Firstly, this work is highly gendered. It is seen as ‘women’s work’ and not the type of endeavour that Pacific males should typically undertake. At the time of writing, I am engaged in a consultancy with a Pacific organisation, attached to its Information Management team with three full-time employees, all women. I am the only male, and present only in a temporary capacity. This composition is typical of records, library, and information management teams across our region.

The sector is not even considered a speciality. It is seen as rudimentary work anyone can do. So pervasive is this sentiment that it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy: collections and registries are routinely staffed by officers for whom records or library management is

an added responsibility. It is not uncommon for these roles to be handed to drivers and cleaners.

The development paradox

The development industry has also added to this pattern of invisibilisation in the Pacific. As far back as 2002, Wareham cautioned that Pacific recordkeepers would have a difficult time getting the attention of Pacific decision makers because the region is still recovering from the trauma of the spread of Christianity, and then colonisation, and is now being bombarded by the pervasive development agenda and its many initiatives.¹⁸ This is an accurate diagnosis. While practitioners try to see development ideas and initiatives as important opportunities to highlight the importance of records information and knowledge, these development initiatives are so plentiful and all-consuming that they leave little space for our concerns to be considered seriously. For example, the United Nations Development Programme Pacific office has been carrying out a Right to Information awareness programme at the University of the South Pacific over several years, but little attention is given to the creation, management, and useability of actual information. Such information is presumed to magically exist and be in good order, with little to no effort or investment put into its ongoing care.

Exclusion from national information policy initiatives

In Fiji, this pattern extends to landmark information policy. NAF was consulted neither in the drafting of the Information Bill (2025) nor the National Digital Strategy despite being government's official recordkeeping authority and custodian of the nation's permanent records, as well as the legal deposit library.¹⁹

This invisibilisation is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by Fiji government officials leaving the role of Government Archivist substantively vacant for almost 6 years. The post was made vacant in October 2019, and it was not filled until July 2025. The NAF is also the national legal deposit library, which makes it the National Library of Fiji. So the head of two of Fiji's information and knowledge institutions was left vacant for 5 years and 8 months.

Creeping coloniality

Listing these examples gives me no pleasure. In fact, it is painful to recount. But at the risk of being accused of 'admiring the problem', I feel it is important to get a proper understanding of the realities for Pacific practitioners. And while external pressures have a strong bearing on the profession, for the last decade or so these have been matched by pressures within the broader professional community as well. The impacts have been considerable, culminating in the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration.

The erosion of solidarity

The Pacific once thrived on archival solidarity. In the early 2000s, senior leaders from Australia, New Zealand, and the Islands worked collaboratively to develop the *Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* – a pioneering regional initiative that became a global reference. But this spirit of mutual empowerment has waned, and the 2019 Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, instead of reviving that solidarity, is the emblem of its erosion.

Established in 1981 with members from 20 Pacific nations and territories, PARBICA was once a vital forum where leading practitioners could meet, share insights, and address strategic priorities. It served as a critical space for action and agenda setting in the sector.

However, a troubling bifurcation has emerged. The Heads of the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and Archives New Zealand (ArNZ) have become largely inaccessible to their Pacific counterparts. Neither has participated in a PARBICA conference based in the actual Pacific islands since 2007. Where there was once collegial, direct contact among the heads of national archives across the Pacific, we have witnessed a shift: the heads of the two largest institutions now primarily engage with more developed counterparts in Europe, North America, Asia, and Australasia through the Council of Australasian Archives and Recordkeeping Authorities (CAARA). Pacific archivists now communicate among themselves in PARBICA, with the NAA and ArNZ representatives not having real decision-making powers. This has effectively created a two-tiered system where strategic concerns are discussed without Pacific Islander input at one level, and at the second level Pacific information and knowledge managers are left to do constant firefighting around operational issues, rendering us decreasingly equipped to deal with current and emerging challenges. This shift devalues Pacific information and knowledge management and perpetuates a hierarchy in which island nations are seen as lesser.

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: coloniality dressed as progress

From my perspective the Declaration looked like the International Council on Archives (ICA) response to the high visibility of the growing Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement, which itself gained impetus from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and was supposed to demonstrate a solid commitment to decolonisation in archives. Framed as progressive, it reproduced coloniality in form and function.

Three colonial dynamics were evident: exclusion, silencing, and extraction. Firstly, no Indigenous Pacific Islander was involved in the consultations or working groups that shaped the Declaration. Secondly, by excluding us, our voices were effectively silenced in a global conversation that claimed to make space for and elevate Indigenous peoples and our concerns. Thirdly, the finished Declaration was presented for Pacific delegates to support, extracting symbolic endorsement from our indigeneity without our active participation through the whole process.

Although First Nations Australians and New Zealand Māori were involved, their professional communities have not meaningfully engaged with Pacific Island archivists over time. This is a weakness of PARBICA, it has not been able to build enduring relationships between Pacific Island indigenous practitioners and their indigenous brethren in Australia and New Zealand who have their own specific needs and barriers. We hope to change this.

While I understand that not every indigenous group could be represented in the ICA Expert Matters Indigenous Working Group, several factors combine to make the manner of the authoring of the Declaration and its launch especially disappointing:

1. NAA and ArNZ are both category A members of PARBICA; they should know (used to know) how to do things in an inclusive manner.
2. PARBICA represents a region holding over 1000 languages and cultures spread across the Pacific Ocean, about a third of the earth's surface area.

3. None of the Pacific Island members were party to the authoring of the Declaration, and so it does not reflect our challenges and needs. Silenced and invisibilised by our own.
4. But our indigeneity was used to rubber stamp the Declaration at the 2019 launch, to much fanfare. This was repeated at the 2024 'Opening the Archives' joint ASA ARANZ & PARBICA Conference. There were photo opportunities and joint speaking engagements all geared at signalling to audiences a level of connection that is not there in reality. Scheduling these opportunities was probably born from good intent, by those trying to build a reconnection. But without the genuine involvement at the Director General level, these well meaning efforts are undermined and reduced to being a "shot in the dark". No follow up. High in performativity and low on substance. Indigenous Pacific practitioners exist only to be wheeled on to conference stages in sporadic fashion. Meaningful connection and consultation is only to happen among the developed institutions and countries. This is not how we used to do things.

A standard worth meeting

I come back to the lady who was made to wait. The grandmother who endured three rounds of blood tests, each time her results vanishing into a system that could not hold onto the information needed to save her life. I think of her doctor, bound by his oath to do no harm while stripped of information required to fulfill that pledge. I think of her family, left with the unbearable question: Did she have to die?

This is the standard against which I think this declaration should be measured. Not by the elegance of its language, but by this single question: Would this have saved her life?

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration speaks of Indigenous knowledge systems, of cultural sensitivity, of decolonising archives. These are worthy goals. But for Pacific island peoples where we indigenous are the majority, the crisis is more fundamental. We need recordkeeping systems that work. We need test results that don't disappear. We need birth certificates that don't become weapons of disenfranchisement, and we need our data not to be deprived us, nor used against us.

This declaration does not speak to our lived reality. It does not speak to the wilful ignorance that has depowered our sector for decades. It cannot name the invisibilisation that leaves our national archives (and national library) leaderless for nearly 6 years. It cannot confront the creeping coloniality that turned regional solidarity into a two-tiered system of haves and have nots.

While the principles the Declaration seeks to uphold, indigenous self-determination, meaningful participation, respect for our ways of knowing, these remain vital. We don't need permission to claim them. They are ours by right.

The path forward requires Pacific practitioners to strengthen our own networks, to refuse invisibilisation, to advocate relentlessly for the infrastructure our people deserve. It requires our Australian and New Zealand colleagues to return to genuine partnership and recognise that solidarity cannot be performative. Most importantly, it requires all of us to hold ourselves accountable to those we serve.

She deserved better. Our people deserve better, and we need to keep working so the systems we build can answer her family's question differently: She did not have to die. The records were there. The system worked. She lived to hold her grandchildren. That is the declaration worth making, that is the work worth doing.

Postscript

Since this article was submitted, a welcome development has occurred. At the PARBICA bureau's first meeting of 2026, the Chief Archivist of Archives New Zealand was in attendance. This is an encouraging sign of renewed interest from ArNZ's leadership. We receive it warmly and hope that this is the beginning of much needed change.

Notes on contributor

Opeta Alefaio is grateful to be a child of the Pacific Ocean (Moana/Wansolwara), born and raised in Viti (Fiji) with Tuvaluan and Fijian ancestry. Fortunate to have served in the Fiji public service at the National Archives culminating with 8 years in the Directorship, he is now a PhD candidate at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University. Opeta was the joint recipient of the 2011 Margaret Jennings Award conferred by the Australian Society of Archivists, and in 2019 was made a Member of the Order of Fiji. He is on the steering group for the Digital Pasifik, was a member of the inscriptions sub-committee of the UNESCO MOWCAP programme, is a bureau member of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA), and is a former executive board member of the International Council on Archives (ICA).

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ARTICLE

The Powerhouse & Blak Collections: Sitting with Trouble and Standing Up for Truth

Tammi Gissell*

Collections Coordinator, First Nations, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration came to the Powerhouse Museum in late 2019 and has underpinned sincere positive transformation of collection care standards ever since. Enacting its commitments allowed unprecedented Indigenous accesses and advances through the historic Powerhouse Collection Digitisation and Relocation Project, which further informed the founding of the Powerhouse First Nations Directorate in 2021. Since then, many profound improvements are being enabled by fulfilling the assertions and commitments offered in the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. This article is presented as a firsthand account of how it has informed positive developments in documentation, storage, handling and access as well as towards correct recognitions, protocol adherences and approaches to acquisition all of which affirm the rights of Indigenous people over their cultural heritage that the Powerhouse is safeguarding.

Keywords: *Museum; archive; decolonise; Blak; Indigenous*

I'd like to share a *yarn*¹ with you about Australia's largest museum group, the Powerhouse.² It's a story about growing capacity to care for Indigenous collections and how deeply the *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*³ has informed this in recent years.⁴ I'm *yarning* because I'm *Blak*⁵ Australian and raised to share truthfully on what I know with those who have ears to hear. The verb 'yarn' means simply to 'talk', while colloquially 'yarn' and 'yarning' are now synonymous with having a 'chat' or 'conversation'. Yet it's imperative to know that *yarning* as *honest talk for ready listening* has held critical significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years before endorsement in academia as a credible methodology for respectful and reliable information sharing.⁶ Shay reminds us that '*yarning is much more than conversation; yarning can be formal or informal discussions that honour and recognise the importance of story in knowledge exchange*',⁷ while Lin, Green and Bessarab significantly point out that '*Information is embedded within the story or yarn being told, with the onus on the listener or receiver of the yarn to hear and make meaning of the information being imparted*'.⁸ I yarn here as an assertion of my Blakness and to honour the responsibility this carries to communicate about important matters from a place of experience at the right time. So, here we

*Correspondence: Tammi Gissell Email: tammi.gissell@powerhouse.com.au | gisselltammi@gmail.com

are. There will be poetry. I paper-yarn for reflection in many hands, hearts and minds beyond us, beyond here and beyond now.

'Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart'

- William Wordsworth

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration [*hereafter 'the Declaration'*] has itself arisen from yarning among Indigenous leaders and archival experts across time and territory. It is their honest yarns accumulated in the rot of a shared vulnerability to dispossession, assimilation and genocide which have refined into resounding assertions and commitments for global memory institutions to fulfill.⁹ As *Collections Coordinator, First Nations* at the Powerhouse (since 2020), I am employed by the New South Wales Government to maintain accurate records and representations of individual and collective cultural histories. I have inherited a practical paper in the Declaration to do this role well. Yet, as a Blak public servant further obliged by cultural responsibility, liable for overcoming colonial narratives *and* safeguarding cultural memory in '*a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter*',¹⁰ I must recognise this Declaration as a sacred revelation and empowering paper-yarn accomplished with the breathings of many Indigenous hearts. The story of how it was introduced and still informs progressive reimagination of collection care at Powerhouse really is a *proppa*¹¹ big yarn for the books.¹² I hope it earns foxing and old-paper scent as it ferments and distils in service of collected cultural memories across time and territory, too.

*'God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine –
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget'*¹³

The Blak story

Like all colonial ventures, the Powerhouse historically benefited from extracting and exhibiting the resource, knowledge and cultural expressions of Australia's First Peoples.¹⁴ Thankfully, this has improved towards more ethical engagement since being founded as *The Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum of New South Wales* in 1880.¹⁵ Our beginning had everything to do with a lust to permanently possess the objects and materials accumulated for the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879–1880, including the earliest plunder of Blak belongings from the first years of British colonisation on these unceded lands. Despite the entire original collection being destroyed in the infamous *Garden Palace Fire of 1882*,¹⁶ the museum began re-collecting with fervour,¹⁷ reaching a critical peak of acquisitions in preparation for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria in 1897. The institute now known as Powerhouse has operated continually for almost 150 years across several incarnations and sites, but always favouring industry, applied science and technology through the colonisers lens.

It was not until the mid-1980's that a Blakfulla was formally engaged to liaise and assist in curation for the '*Australian Communities*' gallery and public events for the 1988 opening of the '*Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences – Powerhouse Museum*' at Ultimo.¹⁸ Dr. Peter Yanada McKenzie¹⁹ was bought in to consult and connect museum curators with his own La Perouse Aboriginal community in an effort to ensure genuine representation.²⁰ It takes many more years until a full-time Blak curator was appointed '*to liaise with and represent the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*'.²¹ This yarn **must** acknowledge the caretaking

and development of the collection, programming and educational capacity achieved by those who've come before us at Powerhouse. Cultural leaders like Dr. McKenzie, along with *Curator of Koori History & Culture*, Dr. James Wilson-Miller²²; *Assistant Curator*, Dr. Fabri Blacklock²³; *Indigenous Project Officer*, Graham Mooney²⁴ and *Education Manager*, Steve Miller²⁵ contributed many decades of combined service between mid-1980 and 2013 ensuring Blak history and culture did not remain on 'the unacknowledged frontiers of public memory'.²⁶ *The Dreaming*²⁷ they injected here as an enduring sense of cultural purpose was remarkable for that period. Most especially when we consider the *cultural load*²⁸ they undoubtedly carried before the groundbreaking *ATSILIRN Protocols* were first available to guide the sector 'in appropriate ways to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the communities which the organisations serve, and to handle materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content' (1995)²⁹ and even longer before the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*³⁰ was announced (2007) and began seeping into the broader socio-political consciousness. As Blak Australian museum workers they sure were sitting with trouble and standing up for truth when ethical engagements between institutions of memory and *Blakfullas*³¹ were more than unfamiliar. Powerhouse archives reveal how deeply they fostered our earliest relationships. Their caring and cultural knowing is proven in the significant belongings they revealed, acquired and protected into the calibre of Blak Knowledge Keepers engaged for public programs and revolutionary publications such as *Bayagul: contemporary Indigenous communication*³² and *Sharing a Wailwan Story*.³³ So much of our present work is informed by their toil affirming that 'to challenge colonial ideologies in the archival setting is an endeavour of generations'.³⁴ It certainly does take time, and willing people afforded the opportunity to engage and build upon the learnings of others. I'm very gratefully one such person afforded this opportunity via a chance to dance at Powerhouse over 10 years ago. It all started with a cuppa and a yarn.

Uncle Fulla, Good Fulla

The appointment of Uncle Marcus Hughes as *Indigenous Programs Producer* in 2015 was the next milestone in Powerhouse's capacity to care, and where the Declaration and I specifically enter the Powerhouse Dreaming.³⁵ Uncle Marcus softened museum authority structures over cups of tea and unhurried yarning with community, staff and executives. He re-established an 'ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration' which had been resting since Dr. James Wilson-Miller retired in 2013.³⁶ Significantly, Uncle Marcus shared the Declaration with people in power and gave it to those deserving empowerment too. Far from 'only' producing public programs, Uncle Marcus made Powerhouse feel safe and exciting for emerging and established Blak artists, academics, activists and audiences to start coming back. Our institutional archive shows that not since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games had so much thinking and resource been put towards amplifying Indigeneity as it was again from 2015. Over the next 5 years, Uncle Marcus' responsibilities evolved as he ignited a dynamic network of Blakfullas across the museum. It's beautiful to grasp now that he was future proofing Powerhouse Indigenous collections purely by warranting their loving care, and that he did it without ever being in a 'collection' or 'curatorial' specific role.

We know what we know, in the way that we know it (and that's what it's all about....)

In reflecting on the statement that 'traditional Indigenous knowledge models are built on ideas of space, community, spirituality and ecology',³⁷ I recall Uncle Marcus programming famous Aboriginal Elder, actor and activist Uncle Jack Charles³⁸ to lead tours through *the International Sherlock Holmes exhibition* in 2017.³⁹ Uncle Jack was known fondly as 'Robin Hood of the Streets' and he yarned those tours through his own *Cleverman* and cat burglar knowing.⁴⁰

He bonded the Blak with the unBlak by sassily wrapping the supernatural in the pragmatism of survival at all costs. He was teaching Australian social history and Aboriginal cultural heritage at the same fabulous time! This was an *a-ha!* moment for me. Until then, I thought museum tours were serious events speaking only to facts and data. It was charmingly obvious in realising Uncle Jack *was himself* the source of facts presented and could therefore yarn them his way. He had knowing talk and I found new ears to hear. The daring of that program, which elevated his cultural knowledge and lived experience to the same status and intelligence ascribed to Sherlock Holmes resonated deeply across my varied positionality from audience member to fellow Blak performer engaged with the museum. Initially, I delivered workshops and performed at museum events with fellow creative practitioners. We danced and sang for the Powerhouse *Reconciliation Action Plan* and *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Properties Protocols* and *Elders Residencies* that Uncle Marcus launched.⁴¹ Later I assisted him to produce an *Indigenous Science Symposium*⁴² while he initiated annual smoking ceremonies to cleanse the museum site, collection stores and staff. Uncle Marcus also ensured that *Acknowledgments of Country*⁴³ began to be spoken, published and displayed throughout Powerhouse which proudly continues today.

I appreciate now in a way that wasn't possible then, that as more Blak people and practices were re-connecting with Powerhouse, our potential to overcome penal impositions on Country and consciousness were being revealed. I've needed this time to grow the inner-sector eyes and ears to discern how imperative our creative engagement with collected memory really is to overcoming systemic oppressions on our past, present & future histories. I just felt back then being a Blakfulla at Powerhouse felt right, good and fair and so I kept coming and dancing and yarning. I'd performed in many public cultural institutions across Australia and abroad before Powerhouse. But I'd always been an Aboriginal object on show and I knew it. Dancing here was different because we were invited by an Elder we trusted, and for reasons beyond the curious adoration of strangers. We were performing ceremony *for* the Ancestors and community connected to the museum. This distinction in performance sense-ability is what responsive assertion of cultural memory looks and feels like, and it made me want to stay here and get to work for my people.⁴⁴

I honestly thought back in my first days at Powerhouse that Uncle Marcus had just convinced the museum to let Blakfullas be Blakfullas, which is no different than enacting the commitments of the Declaration when I really think about it. I see now that he was sowing institutional seeds of change into soils tilled before him, and he could only do that because the season for change was upon Powerhouse through the efforts of so many before and alongside him in that work. I am reminded that none of this work occurs in a vacuum. He, like countless other Indigenous leaders around the world and across institutions are proving that it is empowered people who make progressive changes, not papers alone. Only through enacting the Declaration over a number of years have I come to fathom that Uncle Marcus was supporting us to embody self-determination, to assert our Knowledge Authorities and get due access to our collected past. In doing so, he provided a profound opportunity to develop our sense of response-ability towards safeguarding collected heritages, and furthermore, to be acknowledged for it professionally. He was working to have all of this recognised at departmental and executive levels while simultaneously awakening them in our individual spirits. Uncle Marcus reflected '*first they come in as visitor services officers and develop a rapid sense of ownership, which gave them the confidence and skills to want to do more ... It is finding the leverage point where those young ones could be responsible for the knowledge, with integrity and authority*'.⁴⁵ That's some hefty business right there. Uncle Marcus Hughes and the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration triggered a *Deadly Blakout*⁴⁶ at Powerhouse. Lest we forget.

A paper in time (saves 9)

The announcement of the Declaration on 25 October 2019 was more than timely. I believe it was Ancestor guided because Powerhouse was set to commence audits for its historic *Collection Relocation and Digitisation Project* (CDRP)⁴⁷ in early 2020. Every article of material and every record of its half-a-million objects was to be examined. All aspects of registration, documentation, conservation, digitisation, physical labelling, licencing, access, handling and storage were to be assessed and treated, prior to relocation at a new purpose-built storage site at Castle Hill.⁴⁸ The Declaration's announcement and availability to implement as the international standard for Indigenous caring in the public archive was a guided blessing for two vital reasons: Firstly, because there was now quite the deadly *mob*⁴⁹ of blakfullas in genuine relationship with the museum who could reasonably be asked to attempt this '*once in-a-generation opportunity to transform and renew one of Australia's oldest and most important cultural institutions*'.⁵⁰ And secondly because with Declaration in hand Uncle Marcus could build the Blak assessment team and determine its foci, methods and goals on its assertions – that Indigenous peoples *do* know and have *the right to know* our cultures; and to *own* them; and that we *may seek, reclaim, speak* and be *acknowledged* for what is ours; and that we can *spend time* with and *maintain authority* over our collected past in our own *self-determined* ways. Never before had Powerhouse gathered a large team of Blakfullas from diverse cultural and social understandings to sit in the stores full-time, in self-determined visitation to triage cultural caring like they would be for the CDRP. No doubt it was a big shift for Powerhouse to hand over control so completely to non-curatorial, non-registration, non-conservation and wholly non-collections experienced staff. It was for me too when asked to interview for an assessor's role. I replied to Uncle Marcus at the time '*but I don't know anything about auditing museum collections*'. With a thoughtful nod he softly replied, '*the most important thing is that you know how to sit with these belongings and listen*'.⁵¹ I trusted the authority of his knowing and further agreed to lead a team of 8 Blak assessors for a proposed 6-month project starting May, 2020.⁵²

Paper holds weight

This team had weavers, singers, ex-park rangers. We had children of curators and activists. We had assessors who hailed from city, bush, Torres Strait, and South Sea Islands. We had some who knew everything about fashion, politics, football and art; others who knew traditional business, Lore and story, some who'd been to University, others who'd not used a computer that much. We had all come into the museum from different paths – as performers, visitors' services officers, event programmers, artists and educators. Before the CDRP, none of us had ever considered being allowed unsupervised in the collection stores or electronic record management system. Nor did we anticipate the potency of knowing in our blood and bones, or the ways this would prove so demonstrably pertinent. All of us held story that guided us as we sat with belongings to discern their materiality and all that came with them in spirit. This is why this yarn is so important for me to share at this time: the Declaration held real weight for 8 scared blakfullas in a basement packed with bad memories. It became a rock for us to cling to and a ticket to ride that we waved often. Mercifully, it was clear our team had eyes and ears for the Ancestors anchored to their belongings here. We discovered real fast what Yorta Yorta woman Kimberley Moulton meant when she wrote '*cultural belongings, whether old or new, are constantly awake, and recharged when they have community with them. There is a reciprocal channel that is opened when community connect*'.⁵³ This channel helped us manage institutional expectations, outdated opinions and assumptions which initially supposed we would assess around 600 or so objects and would finish in 6 months.

Our audit revealed more than 5,000 culturally relevant materials beyond more than 1,000 produced by Blak makers for Blak purposes. All we gathered needed sincere improvement to the attention they were receiving. The Declaration presented fundamental considerations and sector languages which helped in negotiating improvements for not only cultural belongings but for representations and appropriations too. For example, we could now explain in proppa museum lingo that a homogenised likeness of an Aboriginal warrior depicted on grandmother's silver teaspoon is an outdated racist representation; and furthermore, we had the authority to remove it from the website where it was squatting as hero shot for Aboriginal Australia since the 1950's.

I'll see your PhD and raise you this paper

I believe wholeheartedly that our assessments over 2 years could not possibly have revealed so much additional material, or bought such initial improvement to their understanding if we didn't have Blak people ethically engaged and holding the Declaration in willing hands *before* the audit commenced. Indeed, this is the entire point of this yarn. Our whole team had established commitment to the museum through our trust in Uncle Marcus; trust built from longstanding relations well prior to any of us coming to Powerhouse; and years engaged with the museum before we ventured into the collection stores. We agreed to sit with the trouble because when Uncle said we were ready and right for the job, we soon proved ourselves to be. This exemplifies what trusting in cultural Knowledge Authorities can achieve for Indigenous people and for institutions alike. Uncle Marcus reflected on this later when discussing leadership in the museum '*we just need to change the way we look at education qualification, or wisdom, and how that is built into our position descriptions... It needs to be about EQ not IQ*'.⁵⁴

In my experience, the real power of the Declaration is its capability to support radical transformation of the way things have 'always been done' in the archive. This is because it is thoroughly fair in its line of reasoning and proposals for action. Certainly, any human with a beating heart and a coherent brain must see it declares nothing more than the birthright of Indigenous people to own what they own; to know what they know; and to be who they are with self-determined authority and without interference from colonial systems of oppression and obfuscation ultimately set up by murderers, thieves and liars. I hereby assert in this yarn that *all people everywhere* deserve their history. Whether it's a history worthy of remembrance is an entirely other matter, and in no way undermines ultimate sovereign authority to know and deal with it self-determinedly. The Declaration makes this deservedness abundantly clear. It undeniably promotes rationality and equity in very manageable terms. Referring to it to justify a courtesy as modest as giving a person, place, or object their actual name back worked marvellously during our early days auditing collection. This was because we weren't archaeologists or anthropologists with PhD papers proposing the documentation, storage, or handling amendment. We weren't curators or archival specialists either which made some museum people nervous and that's fair enough, given what a colonised professional conditioning can do for trusting Black people who looked like us mob. We were a team of Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders from incredibly diverse backgrounds. But by the Ancestors we knew what we knew, even when we didn't necessarily understand it, we knew it and the Declaration supported that. We knew what we didn't know too. This gradually grew our resolve, and with time the broader museum staff witnessed the changes in pace and tone we were bringing. Uncle Marcus reckoned '*while this mob have no tertiary training, they have deep cultural connection to this business, and for that reason they have the intelligence to do the important work the museum wants them to do*'.⁵⁵ Trust was built across team disciplines as staff and assessors shared their museum knowing generously with us, too. The Declaration gave

our team certainty when having yarns with them, and permitted us to wait for correct cultural guidance. Most importantly we found that the Declaration gave Powerhouse patience to pause while we located and implemented proppa standards in the ways that our cultural guidance demanded.

Didgeri-don't

From the outset, we worked to find appropriate descriptions to establish an acceptable documentation standard. We sought Knowledge Authorities to guide us on languages and protocols. Privileging their advice thoroughly was the first step in making positive changes. Whether a traditional cultural belonging, an outright appropriation or racist representation, everything we uncovered needed careful contextual understanding. I should point out that some objects and materials had not been visited for over 30 years when we started the CDRP. Certainly, many others and their records had remained untouched, unseen, and unheard for far longer. There were several unknowns in the confrontation of challenging materials simply because the collection wasn't allowed comprehensive Blak oversight for so long. We accepted this both as our responsibility and great privilege to discover and start caring properly. We held each other through it. There were many tears as our assessments revealed how cold and unconvincingly our old people were regarded historically in this institution and beyond. No matter how much I'd danced upstairs, nothing could have prepared me for those first encounters in the Ultimo collection basement. Particularly when it came to discovering Ancestors held hostage in the earliest Australian colonial photography.⁵⁶

It was so exceedingly difficult to witness those fellow human beings – sometimes from our own traditional territories – our *actual* mob – posed unnaturally with belongings evidently not their own. So many Ancestors un-named, propped-up on chopped-down tree stumps. Sometimes captured in confidential business or sacred ceremony where their posture alone let me know their Country. How commonly our exquisite technologies and their purpose described wholly incorrect and regularly offensive.

Take for example a traditional Aboriginal woodwind instrument which originated in the Northern extremes of this continent. It is referred to variously by the many communities across that vast region in the language names distinct to each, such as *mako*, *yidaki*, *djibolu* and *riktakki*, among others. Since colonisation, the instrument has become *colloquially* known as a '*didgeridoo*' (didjeridu) and is easily recognised as a symbol of Blak Australia. While this can be seen as helping to strengthen identity, it contributes more to the misconception that all Aboriginal communities made and played this instrument and even worse, that everyone called it a '*didgeridoo*.' The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies explains:

'The didjeridu is for many Australians an iconic symbol of Aboriginal Australia. However, the word didjeridu isn't an Aboriginal one. It was coined by anthropologist Herbert Basedow in the 1920s who likened the word to the sound of it being played'.⁵⁷

To continue to forefront this word is grotesquely improper, and we as a Blak collections team no longer privilege it (or any other colonial words or their sneaky arrangements) which reinforce coloniser control. We gorged on the insight offered by Franks, Galassi and Thorpe where they showed us how the words we are using to describe our people, places and practices could either get us out of trouble or dig us deeper into it.⁵⁸ We began to challenge the Powerhouse system of recording and disseminating our truths by amplifying traditional languages when they were known. As a result, object records which once sustained the fat lie of '*didgeridoo*' have had correct language names and communities of origin reinstated, i.e.,

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'). We discovered that it is counter-intuitive to remove imposed names entirely as they are most often the term used in current research and reclamation efforts. We must also allow it to remain because we agree also that if institutions of memory don't tell the whole truth about the power imbalances of the colonial past, then they will only continue to serve and condone the atrocities those imbalances caused.⁵⁹ As current caretakers of the Powerhouse collection, we accept we must never be in the business of destroying the intact truth of the past, no matter how difficult it is to sit with, lest we never learn from it at all.

We found quickly the vast majority of legacy records stated so casually '*artist unknown*', '*native tool or weapon*', '*Australian aborigine*' or '*date unknown*'. This dismissal of Blak fact assumed and denied so many crucial details, and implied there is no way to find out who made them; where they came from; when they were made; or what they were made for – which is exactly the point of consolidated colonial memory keeping: to induce collective amnesia and affirm the invaders status as ultimate authority over all. Silence has been a hand-picked tool of serious harm in colonial record-keeping as Booker and Sentence explain '*it is not only what is written that wounds. The silences in records and archives claw just as deep*'.⁶⁰ We know it's no accident that the 'Indigenous artist' was so often 'unknown'. They were deliberately omitted because the collector and/or the institution didn't consider the maker, community or even the region of origin important enough to record. This is an outrageous omission of vital data for an institution purportedly existing for rigorous scientific enquiry and '*of interest and lasting service to the mass population*' and so we know this institution and the mob who sent them to build it were lying about their intentions from the start.⁶¹ Such dismissal of fact also results from earlier museum staff simply not having the eyes or ears they needed. This is for so many reasons – many of which are not those people's actual fault being subject to the empire themselves, plus it wasn't their Blak business anyway, so they had no hope. So, after biggest yarns our team began updating records to '*maker not recorded*', '*date not recorded*' or more accurately to '*Aboriginal fishing spear*' instead of '*native tool*' or '*artist unknown*'. This documentation standard has evolved again in more recent times to '*Ancestor not yet recorded*'. This was inspired by the *Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges*.⁶² and is our way of staying connected, and respectful to Ancestors and aspirational that they will 1 day be acknowledged fairly (See Figure 1).

BEFORE CDRP (Pre-2020)

Didgeridoo, aboriginal, wooden, artist unknown, Australia, Oceania

AFTER CDRP (2020-2021)

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'), wood, decorated, maker not recorded, East Arnhem land, Northern Territory, Australia, date of production not recorded, acquired 1997

POST 2022: With guidance from the Indigenous Knowledge Attribution Toolkit (IKAT)

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'), wood, ochre, decorated, Ancestor not yet recorded, East Arnhem land, Northern Territory, Australia, date of production not yet recorded, acquired 1997

Figure 1. Example of Indigenous collections documentation standards improvement 2020–2026, Powerhouse, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Minding business⁶³

Our next step was to devise processes to assist in upholding cultural authorities. We created a system of physical and digital labelling to help recognise where cultural protocols may be necessary for access, handling and storage. Throughout the CDRP there was a genuine fear from many well-meaning museum professionals who wanted to ‘do the right thing’. This did, however, promote a lot of fear mongering among them and scared us a fair bit too. Our team could all intuit consequences of stepping outside the bounds of our own cultural authority even when there were no words to describe them. We had to dispel fear and increase caring in ways that were practical and so, our *Cultural Protocol Labels* came to be. They were designed to help museum staff avoid cultural safety hazards such as exposure to materials they aren’t prepared, qualified or authorised to witness; or to touch or speak about. They also indicate where, and to whom the responsibility of care should fall in upholding applicable cultural protocols. Importantly, they protect Blak staff from inadvertently assuming proximity or control over what is not their cultural *Business* and empower non-Indigenous staff to take up the responsibility of care where it is appropriate for them to do so.

We worked as a team to conceive the system while assessor Jeremy Ambrum took the lead on design. We took time to yarn up with management and broader assessment teams about what cultural hazards are, and what can cause them before implementing. We’ve found these labels one of our most valuable assets in bridging gaps of understanding in the roles that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff can play in collection care because they help to dispel fear and ease worry for everyone equally. They’re now applied generously to physical tags, shelving, storage containers and as icons in the electronic record management system. With *Cultural Protocol Labels* all Powerhouse staff can see if an object or record attracts regulations before putting themselves, colleagues, Ancestors or communities in harm’s way (See Figure 2).

Presently *restricted* materials will mostly indicate sacred, ceremonial or *sorry business* and can also include images or references to Indigenous people who are or may be deceased.⁶⁴ Sometimes where an object or record can cause sadness or distress, it will be restricted until adequate measures of care can be applied. All *restricted* materials at Powerhouse may only be accessed with the explicit permission of the *Collections Manager, First Nations* under guidance of Traditional owners. Where unrestricted objects and materials are labelled *Men’s* or

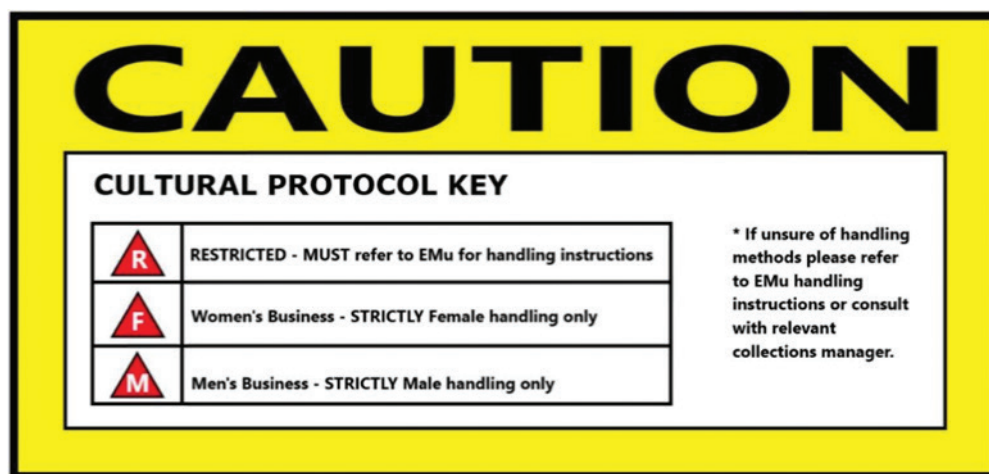


Figure 2. Cultural Protocol Label Key, designed Jeremy Ambrum, Indigenous Assessments Team, collection digitisation and relocation project, Powerhouse Museum, 2020.

Women's Business, the responsibility of care falls correspondingly for all collection caretakers. It is affirming to see non-Indigenous staff embrace caring in ways that decided by original owners, and the shared responsibility to uphold them continues to strengthen ties and trust across collection departments.

Our primary results from the CDRP came from fore fronting traditional languages, knowledges and authorities as encouraged by the Declaration. And, as it was guiding our work over 2 years its ethos was imbedding in Powerhouse perception and process as 'the way we do things now'. This meant our museum was ready to establish its First Nations Directorate in 2021.⁶⁵ The Ancestors blessed us with deadly archival decolonist Nathan mudyi Sentence as our inaugural *Collections Manager, First Nations* in 2022.⁶⁶ Like so many Indigenous sector workers, he was initially afforded the opportunity to interrogate the archive as a young Blakfulla with no prior experience, and has since gone on to serve Country, community and culture far and wide for the better part of two decades. He was mentored in conditions that empowered him to know whose truth he was telling and now he is supporting his team here to do the same. Since coming to Powerhouse, Nathan has led the *right-to-reply* in profoundly moving ways.⁶⁷ He has helped us re-imagine how we can hold, protect, produce, and preserve cultural memories instead of continuing to extract them. Nathan is watering generational seeds and making us bloom. He said to me recently 'well, if a museum is a memory house, we can just help make new and better memories, you know?'⁶⁸ The season for fruitful harvest is here indeed.

Paper is an era-plane when you know how to work it

With Nathan's experience to guide us we are better positioned to assert the *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights (ICIP)* of communities globally.⁶⁹ We've begun by ensuring uncomplicated accesses to all that Powerhouse holds of Indigenous histories and heritage. We make it our business to keep searching and connecting with international archives for what has been forgotten. We yarn hard to establish correct ownerships. Importantly, we invite Traditional Owners to spend time with their Ancestors without lust for anything back. We are nurturing new relationships through a growing network of artists, families and communities from several Indigenous territories and varied interrupted pasts and who are equally committed to this healing. We have been gifted much about what we are really safeguarding and how to go about it more respectfully. Our work is ongoing, but we aim to restore rightful authorities across all aspects of decision making and to realise more complete and accurate names and narratives associated with communities of origin as our next vital steps.

Providing opportunity for critical encounters which *fundamentally enable love, care and dignity to be returned to people's Ancestors*⁷⁰ is our life-breath in a complete resuscitation of purpose. We are turning away from an *object-based* view and towards a *relationship-based* view. A way of seeing Indigenous collection as a dynamic nexus of interconnecting relationships between Knowledges and their Custodians spanning the entire globe.⁷¹ Critical encounters are achieved here through timely, private and uncomplicated access permissions for Indigenous visitors and ensure formalised and long-term engagements for research fellowships,⁷² photographic,⁷³ choreographic, musical and new media commissions⁷⁴ and opportunities to present and publish. All of this is achieved because we have self-determined authority in the Powerhouse First Nations Directorate to let Blakfullas be Blakfullas across all aspects of our decision making.

Institutional activations which are Indigenous led are providing ample evidence that healing can occur when we creatively kick down the doors, fling back the drawers and shine the light

of true knowing into memory houses erected by conquerors. We have grown in our capacity to care through programs which support revolutionary artists like Yuki Kihara to expose colonial memory-keeping practices and inspire better ways forward. Her *Vārchive*⁷⁵ within *Paradise Camp*⁷⁶ provided an institutional wake-up for Powerhouse by allowing hope into some really dark histories held captive here. Her work allowed us to address significant shortcomings in our representations of her Samoan and Fa‘afāfine cultures in our collection, and blessed us with new ways of connecting with Pasifika communities, academics and artists through her museum activations, including *Talanoa Forum*,⁷⁷ *UpLate: BERTHA*⁷⁸ & *Queering the Climate*⁷⁹ events.

We’re blessed to have been visited in the last 2 years by Knowledge Keepers from North and South Pacific traditional territories including Aotearoa, Alaska, Canada, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati, and visitors from Argentina and Nepal. Our work is reaching out in extraordinary ways. To yarn them all here outweighs the bounds of this present article, but I wish to especially acknowledge the significant visitations we’ve received from Dr. Ngarino Ellis (*Ngapuhi, Ngati Porou, Aotearoa*), Maarama Jo Kamira (*Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri, Nga Puhi, Ngati Whakaue, Aotearoa*), Dr. Mique’l Dangeli (*Ts’msyen Nation, Alaska*) and Master Simione Sevodredre (*iTaukei, Fiji*) (See Figure 4). These Knowledge Keepers have each deeply informed our capability to care that deserve sharing in detail and in collaboration with them when the time is right. I can however share briefly about a *Critical Encounter*⁸⁰ which revealed record number A5610, acquired in 1969; and only ever described since then as ‘*Pair of Indian (Nainiamo) moccasins ornamented with coloured glass beads. Made from bear skin*’.⁸¹ These precious belongings received love and caring through visitation from Dr. Mique’l Dangeli in 2023 (See Figure 3).

Mique’l has eyes to see they’ve been danced in.⁸² The amount of hard work and resource to lovingly craft them tells us they were made especially for their original owner. Given the timing of acquisition, there is every likelihood they were removed from their community without a fair deal even if they traded or sold to a collector. Survival is a peculiar thing when your very personhood fluctuates between illegal, exotic and dangerous and where even your ideas and attire become a commodity to acquire by any means. As a cultural dancer myself, I know this all too well. These Snuneymuxw moccasins have a people and a purpose that Dr. Dangeli is working with us to understand and care better for. She sang for their Ancestors when she was here. I visit and say *yaama* often.⁸³ I really hope they get to dance again. No protocol labels yet, just love. Their record currently reads:



Figure 3. Powerhouse museum object A5610 | Image: Powerhouse.



Figure 4. Dr. Mique'l Dangeli and the author visiting with Snuneymuxw First Nation moccasins, Powerhouse Castle Hill, July 2023.

‘Moccasins (pair), bear skin / glass, by Nanaimo people (Snuneymuxw First Nation), Vancouver Island, Canada, British Colombia, date of production not recorded, acquired 1969’.

Beyond improvements to how we describe, store and access collections, we are in a position to shape formal agreements on a case-by-case basis and in deep collaboration. We confirm and record cultural rights, protocols and recognitions to be upheld in perpetuity. The Powerhouse *Deed of Deposit*⁸⁴ is an alternate acquisition mechanism which dedicates resources to safeguard Indigenous materials without the museum ever taking legal ownership over them. In addition, we have developed *Cultural Care Agreements* that are better suited towards safeguarding ICIP where the rightsholder is transferring legal title, yet where ICIP rights must remain. For these circumstances, we can draw up a *Cultural Care Agreement* to record a successor to ICIP rights and indicate associated protocols. We find recording this especially relevant to protecting digital and other intangible properties coming into the collection, and they have assisted us to protect the ICIP of Indigenous researchers within broader collaborative

research projects which have outputs that could be further archived under institutional activity, such as we discovered through the recent Australian Research Council Project *Curating Museum Collections for Climate Change Mitigation*.⁸⁵ Two new media works were commissioned and acquired throughout this project. ‘*Yamandirra*’ is a dance ceremony on film created by Wiradjuri choreographer Jo Clancy, and ‘*Ngarrama Tide*’ is a sound and visual sculpture by Awabakal musician and composer Meeghan Oliver. These works represent our first two wholly self-determined Indigenous Australian song and dance artworks acquired as ‘collected ceremonies’ and required cultural care agreements to protect them.

The *Cultural Care Agreement* originated in early 2025 when we acquired ‘*Ngabu*’ by La Perouse artist and Dharawal woman Auntie Lola Ryan (See Figure 5).⁸⁶ Auntie Lola was only a young girl when she came with her Mum and Auntie Mavis to deliver workshops for the 1988 grand-opening of the Powerhouse Ultimo site, but she remembers the excitement of having her community and shell working featured so strongly. Acquiring ‘*Ngabu*’ to join the exquisite La Perouse shellworks acquired by Dr. McKenzie in 1988⁸⁷ (See Figure 6) is a profound and moving opportunity to showcase her radical development of the form and to nourish our relationship with her important lineage of makers. Its acquisition allows us to reimagine logistics for storing contemporary cultural works that are monumental in size, made from temporary materials and contain complicated co-designed intangible properties and collaborations with non-Indigenous makers who also hold IP rights. We were able to ensure multiple contributors’ rights and heartfelt wishes were protected in this case, and this was achieved because we could set our own timelines for patient yarning with all parties. Auntie Lola was happy to donate ‘*Ngabu*’ to our collection, but it was imperative to ensure her original commissioning agency and collaborators felt the same, and that her ICIP rights would be maintained into the future as confidently as we could provide for technical schematics or fabricators notes through standard IP protections provided by law. A *Cultural Care Agreement* now protects ‘*Ngabu*’, ‘*Yamandirra*’ and ‘*Ngarrama Tide*’ in perpetuity.

Resting thoughts...

What began as a document shared by Uncle Marcus Hughes has transformed collection caring at Powerhouse. It has become lived practice for me also. Our museum now boasts a First Nations Directorate of 10 staff. We are proud of many thousands of corrected records, fairer and fitting acquisition mechanisms, evocative opportunities for critical encounters, correct recognitions and collaborative research with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Three lessons guide our ongoing work:

Paper holds real potential when it validates Indigenous knowledge: The Declaration affirmed that our embodied knowing, cultural protocols, and lived experience have equal standing with western academic credentials and could contribute profoundly to the development of contemporary museological standards. This gave our institution trust in our abilities and our abilities earned more trust.

Transformation requires structural and cultural change: We may have created Cultural Protocol Labels and documentation standards for our collection, but real growth in the museums capacity to care arose through yarning, tears, and a real willingness to sit with trouble rather than rush past it. Genuine changes must be allowed unhurried time to ferment, refine and re-align in the consciousness of the entire institutional operation. All good yarns will linger. What is unnecessary will fall away.

Sovereignty over consistency must guide collection care: A Yidaki record that differs from a Rirtakki record isn’t inconsistent – it’s accurate. Precision requires honouring specificity. Sometimes poetry works, sometimes it doesn’t. Language really matters.



Figure 5. Installation, 'Ngabu', comprising decorative panels and AR design, metal / wood / plastic / digital, concept and design by Aunty Lola Ryan, further designed with Joey Ruigrok van der Weven, fabricated by Pink Cactus, AR design by EyeJack, curated and produced by City People, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 2025 | Image: Powerhouse.



Figure 6. Object No. 86/1786-2: Model, 'Sydney Harbour Bridge', shell / fabric, made by Mavis Longbottom and Lola Delia Ryan, La Perouse, New South Wales, Australia, 1986 | Image: Powerhouse Museum.

Museological standards for Indigenous collections must not be measured for their consistency to format, but for how well they set the historical record straight, affirm real ownership and prioritise Indigenous knowledge authorities. Our primary operating principles are predicated on returning authority back to its rightful place so we can be directed in correct caring. After all, we museum workers are caretakers, not cops. What authority do we really have if it hasn't been conferred on us, by rightful owners in the first place? Evaluating our work with a philosophical yardstick of 'sovereignty over consistency' has helped honour the spirit of letting Indigenous communities own, speak and affirm their actuality among machines, labels and shelving. We encourage institutions globally to take on board the words of our Inaugural Director of First Nations, Emily McDaniel when she said '*collections should reflect the relationships we hold*' when confronting their own collecting pasts and improving their current practices.⁸⁸ Earlier this year Nathan wrote '*challenging oppressive structures is what we need to do to assist positive social change*'.⁸⁹ I couldn't agree more. How we continue to overcome and eventually dismantle the crushing structures inherent within memory institutions will determine what society all our descendants will inherit. I wasn't teasing about being a public servant. I ask you – what other service to the public is more important in a memory institution than making sure every community gets their chance to remember, and be remembered precisely? The truth is hard for a reason. Nobody ever grew from a comfort pain.

For other memory institutions which continue to hold onto Indigenous memories and materials we encourage you to consider the Declaration as conversation, not a checklist. It is a paper-yarn that requires dialog with souls who are willing to be more than an ally, but an accomplice in making public archives truthful about who really owns the past.⁹⁰ It's vital to look honestly at who holds authority over Indigenous materials and memories in colonially introduced archival spaces. Build genuine relationships based on the commitments within the Declaration before asking Indigenous communities to labour in service of sorrows they didn't start. Trust must be earned with community because so much has been stolen and lied about.

Our work evolves as we find Ancestors like Adnyamathanha and Yunkuntjara man Uncle William Austin Snr. who remained un-acknowledged here and at other international archives such as the *International Society for Meteoritics and Planetary Sciences* who originally based their records on sub-par findings presented as stone-cold facts by Powerhouse a century or more ago.⁹¹ It is our solemn duty to correct the records of other institutions who have based their authority on Powerhouse information too.

We are still learning the ways and the right protocols, but we do it now with Indigenous Cultural Authorities, Indigenous scholarship and especially the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration continuing as our guides. This paper-yarn is my offering to the ongoing labour of cleaning up the colonial record once and for all. May it help others sit with their troubles and stand up for their truths, lest they forget them forever.

Acknowledgements

This article was written on the unceded sovereign lands of the Dharug nation where the Emu Queen Marayong belongs. I acknowledge this sacred territory and the Dharug people who have cared for it since their first sunrise.

Positionality statement

I trust in transparency, so it is important to share my positionality. I am a performer and performance theorist by trade. My work in the public archive is deeply informed by three decades defining on stage and page why we behave as we do when others are watching or not. I reject notions of neutrality for those of us working to uncover, correct and safeguard Indigenous heritage held in colonial institutions. I embrace individual truth-telling in service of a more complete human story. I recognise embodied knowledge as an asset in reclaiming hidden human histories and for protecting pathways back to authentic sources of knowing.

Notes on contributor

Tammi Gissell is a long-time horizon hunter descended from Murruwarri & Wiradjuri peoples in north western NSW, Australia. She is a freshwater woman from stone Country with cultural responsibility to the Baaka River and Mt. Gundabooka. Since 2020, she's applied her understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems to the development of culturally appropriate caring as collections coordinator, First Nations at the Powerhouse, Sydney. Tammi has previously written for the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), QLD Art Gallery of Modern Art, Australian New Zealand Arts Journal, Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities, Critical Path Institute, Performance Paradigm and Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum.

Notes

1. J H Simpson, 'Yarn as a Verb Meaning "Talk" in Australian English Varieties', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2025, pp. 30–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2025.2554125>.
2. 'Powerhouse is the largest museum group in Australia. Based in Sydney, New South Wales, it sits at the intersection of the arts, design, science and technology and plays a critical role in engaging communities with contemporary ideas and issues. It is custodian to more than half a million objects of national and international significance and is considered one of the finest and most diverse collections in Australia'. Source <https://powerhouse.com.au/about>.
3. International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*, 2019, available at <https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/Tandanya-Adelaide-Declaration.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2025.
4. For more on confronting Powerhouse's institutional past see <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/right-of-reply>.

5. 'Blak' is used by some Indigenous Australians to reclaim once derogatory uses and stereotypes associated with the word black. It can be traced back to artist Destiny Deacon and her exhibition *Blakness: Blak City Culture*, 1994. See also Jack Latimore, *Blak, Black, Blackfulla: Language Is Important, but It Can Be Tricky*, Sydney Morning Herald, August 30, 2021, available at <https://www.smh.com.au/national/blak-black-blackfulla-language-is-important-but-it-can-be-tricky-20210826-p58lzg.html>, accessed 3 November 2025.
6. D Bessarab and B Ng'andu, 'Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcis.v3i1.57>.
7. M Shay, 'Extending the Yarning Yarn: Collaborative Yarning Methodology for Ethical Indigenous Education Research', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 50, 2021, pp. 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.25>.
8. I Lin, C Green and D Bessarab, "'Yarn with Me": Applying Clinical Yarning to Improve Clinician–Patient Communication in Aboriginal Health Care', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, vol. 22, 2016, pp. 377–382. <https://doi.org/10.1017/PY16051>.
9. International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*, International Council on Archives, Canberra, 2019, p. 1.
10. Ibid, 2019, p. 2.
11. *Yurirka: Proppa Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples*, University of South Australia, 2021. This policy document reflects that 'Aboriginal Peoples historically have fashioned their own style of English which is a decolonising act; hence "proppa" and not "proper" is used throughout'. See https://unisa.edu.au/SysSiteAssets/about-unisa/aboriginal-engagement/pdfs/als_engagementprotocolsdoc_21_web.pdf.
12. The expression 'for the books' originally alluded to the record books kept for sports but was soon applied to other endeavours, Colloquial; c. 1900 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/one-for-the-books>.
13. Excerpt from 'Recessional' composed by Rudyard Kipling for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, 1897.
14. For more on the historical extraction of Indigenous resource and knowledge at Powerhouse see <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/eucalyptusdom> and <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-regional-networks>.
15. For more on the founding of *The Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum of New South Wales*, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-garden-palace>, accessed 10 December 2025.
16. For more on the Garden Palace fire, 22 September 1882, see also <https://australian.museum/about/history/two-museums-and-a-garden-palace/>.
17. For more on rebuilding the Powerhouse collection after 1882 see <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/the-holding-pen> and <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/garden-palace/fire>.
18. For more on the opening of the Powerhouse Ultimo opening see 'Transforming the Tramsheds, Powerhouse Stage 1 and the Harwood Building', available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-powerhouse-ultimo-stage-one>, accessed 10 December 2025.
19. Dr. Peter Yanada McKenzie is an Eora and Anaiwan man from the La Perouse Aboriginal community in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. He was consultant and assistant curator for the 'Australian Communities' gallery of the March 1988 opening exhibitions of the Powerhouse Ultimo site.
20. M Nugent, 'National Museum Australia, reCollections', in *Displaying the Decorative: An Exhibition History of La Perouse Aboriginal Women's Shellwork*, vol. 7, no. 2, available at https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/volume_7_number_2/papers/displaying_the_decorative, accessed 10 December 2025.
21. Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, *Annual Report 1996/1997*, p. 14, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/the-act#annual-reports>, accessed 7 November 2025.
22. James Wilson-Miller is from the Gringai clan of the Wonnarua Nation in the Hunter Valley, NSW. He worked as the Curator of Koori History and Culture at the Powerhouse between 1996 and 2013.
23. Dr. Fabri Blacklock is a Nucoorilma, Ngarabal and Biripi woman who worked as the Assistant Curator of Koori History and Culture at the Powerhouse Museum from 1999 to 2008.
24. Graham Mooney is an Aboriginal and South Sea Islander who joined the Powerhouse in 1994 as an Aboriginal Project Officer. See Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, *Annual Report 1993/1994*, p. 62.
25. Steve Miller is a Wiradjuri man and previous researcher, writer, curator, project officer and education manager at Powerhouse between 1998 and 2004.
26. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, 2019, *Preamble*, p. 1.
27. *The Dreaming* is a dynamic temporal order where all that has been, is being and is to be, exists together. Passed through storytelling, the Dreaming reminds us how we are connected to Country and each other. By knowing our Dreaming, we can know the right ways to live and act. See also "'Dreamtime" and "The

- Dreaming” – An Introduction’, *The Conversation*, Christine Judith Nicholls, 2014, available at <https://the-conversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>, accessed 19 October 2025.
28. ‘According to Diversity Council Australia, cultural load is the (often invisible) additional workload borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people’. Source: <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/cultural-load-its-real-thing>.
29. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network Inc, *ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*, 1995 and 2012, available at <https://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php>, accessed 5 December 2025.
30. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, available at https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf, accessed 15 October 2025.
31. Jack Latimore, ‘Blak, Black, Blackfulla: Language Is Important, but It Can be Tricky’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 30, 2021.
32. Steve Miller (Stephen Mark James), 1957 and James Wilson-Miller and Fabri Blacklock, 1976, *Bayagul: Contemporary Indigenous Communication / Steve Miller; with Fabri Blacklock and James Wilson-Miller*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 2002.
33. Steve Miller (Stephen Mark James) 1957 and Tamsin Donaldson and Powerhouse Museum, *Sharing a Wailwan Story [Electronic Resource]: Education Kit / Written by Steve Miller; with Additional Material from Tamsin Donaldson [et al.]*, Ultimo, N.S.W: Powerhouse Museum, 1999, available at http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/publications/wailwan_education_notes.pdf, accessed 22 January 2026.
34. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, *Themes and Commitments for Immediate Action*, 2019, p. 2.
35. Uncle Marcus Hughes is a descendant of the Mununjali peoples of the Yugambeh nation in the Beaudesert area of Queensland, Australia. He held roles of *Indigenous Programs Producer* and *Head of Indigenous Engagement and Strategy* at Powerhouse between 2015 and 2020.
36. Ibid, Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, 2019, p. 2.
37. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, *Knowledge Authorities*, 2019, p. 3, 1(c).
38. Uncle Jack Charles (1943–2022) belonged to the Bunurong, Wiradjuri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Woiwurrung, and Yorta Yorta peoples. He was a celebrated actor, artist, activist, cultural leader and public figure.
39. *The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2 June – 8 October 2017, available at <https://artsreview.com.au/the-international-exhibition-of-sherlock-holmes/>, accessed 5 January 2026.
40. A *Cleverman* in Traditional Aboriginal society is one who can traverse both the physical and the spiritual world. They are a conduit between here and the Dreaming; and because of this are considered to have supernatural powers. Roles and responsibilities of the *Cleverman* vary between communities and are mostly kept secret. See <https://aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/news/personal-stories-clever-man>.
41. For more on the Powerhouse RAP Plan, ICIP Protocols and Elders Residency see <https://mgns.org.au/articles/maas-reconciliation-action-plan/>.
42. Melinda Jane Lewis, *Reflections on the Indigenous Science Symposium, Sydney 2016*, The University of Sydney, 5 September 2016, available at <https://educational-innovation.sydney.edu.au/teaching@sydney/reflections-indigenous-science-symposium-sydney-2016/>, accessed 12 January 2026.
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REFLECTION ARTICLE

The Long Road to Self-Determination

Becky Bligh*

Queensland State Archives, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Abstract

This reflective essay considers how Queensland State Archives has responded to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration since 2021. It weaves institutional reform with lived experience to examine recognition, access, and the challenges of knowledge authority, ownership and self-determination. Examples include projects such as 'Mob on Mondays', the First Nations Language Program, and the development of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols. The essay reflects on personal files and surveillance, and on archives as both sites of harm and healing. It argues that truth-telling and cultural authority must guide archival practice, and that self-determination is an ongoing, relational commitment rather than a destination.

Keywords: *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration; Indigenous archives; Queensland State Archives; Self-determination; Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property; Brisbane; Australia; Gungari; Kullilli.*

Introduction: walking Tandanya's Road

The release of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (the Declaration) in 2019 was a watershed moment. It distilled decades of advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into a global call for change. The Declaration did not emerge in isolation; it reflected generations of lived experience, resistance, and research that demanded archives to confront their colonial legacies. For Queensland State Archives (QSA), the Declaration became a compass. In 2021, QSA released its Statement of Intent, committing to embedding the Declaration's five themes: *knowledge authorities, property and ownership, recognition and identity, research and access, and self-determination*.¹ This essay considers the steps QSA has taken to follow that path. It does so through two lenses: the institutional, which traces policy and programmatic changes; and the personal, which reflects on my lived experience as a Gungari/Kullilli Aboriginal woman engaging with the archive as both a professional space and a site of family memory. The road is long and unfinished, but the journey itself is reshaping how archives in Queensland engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The current state of records at QSA

QSA holds more than 60 linear kilometers of public records, making it the largest archival collection in Queensland. Records were created about Aboriginal people and Torres Strait

*Correspondence: Becky Bligh Email: becky.bligh@archives.qld.gov.au

Islander people who were from, or lived, in Queensland. These records were created primarily through the administration of the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (and subsequent 'Protection Acts'), which allowed previous Queensland Governments extensive control over the lives of many Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. These records range from surveyors' maps and correspondence to court files, school registers, police records, photographs, and administrative series that document government decision making across the state.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples these records carry profound weight. They include evidence of removals, missions and reserves administration, exemption applications, dormitory systems, and everyday family and community life recorded through a bureaucratic lens. The preservation work of QSA means these records remain available for Truth-telling, family research, and community healing.

For more than 30 years, the Community and Personal Histories (CPH) Unit has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in navigating government records. Under the *Public Records Act 2002* [now *Public Records Act 2023*], decisions about access to records sit with the public authority that created or holds them, making it the responsibility of government agencies to facilitate requests from community. Within this legislative framework, CPH serves as the culturally appropriate mechanism through which mob can engage with sensitive restricted files. The unit's specialist knowledge not only shortens the path to discovery but also provides the necessary preparation for the emotional weight of encountering one's own file. What were once tools of control are now instruments of reclamation. Guided by the Tandanaya-Adelaide Declaration, QSA is working closely with CPH to refigure the lens so that these files are treated as living stories held with cultural authority, protocols of care, and the leadership of the families and communities to whom they belong.

Recognition and identity: naming what was hidden

Recognition has been one of the earliest and most visible commitments at QSA. For too long, archives catalogued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through deficit terms or solely through the voices of government officials. People were listed as subjects, cases, or dependents rather than as knowledge holders and authors of history. This has had profound intergenerational effects, silencing voices and reducing identities to bureaucratic fragments.

A significant shift occurred in 2021 with the appointment of Butchulla woman Dr Rose Barrowcliffe as QSA's first First Nations Archives Advisor. Her *First Nations Program Interim Report* provided a critical assessment of both progress achieved and structural limitations that remained embedded within archival systems. The report articulated the need for strengthened metadata practices through the adoption of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) subject headings and AustLang² codes, alongside improved discoverability, community-led interpretation, and sustained investment in digitisation and digital repatriation. Central to these recommendations was the recognition that geographical distance should not constitute a barrier to cultural reconnection or access to records that document lives, families, and Country.

These principles now shape QSA's service delivery for First Nations clients, marking a shift from extractive archival encounters towards relational and culturally informed practice. Recognition is operationalised through the language used to describe records, the provision of contextual and trauma-aware support, and the prioritisation of access pathways that respond to community-identified needs. In this way, service delivery becomes an ethical site of intervention: one that seeks not only to make records accessible but also to restore identity, acknowledge lived experience, and enable reconnection to family, language, and Country. Rather than

reproducing the harms of historical recordkeeping systems, QSA's evolving practice positions the archive as a space where recognition functions as both an act of repair and a foundation for institutional accountability.

Barrowcliffe's leadership was pivotal in challenging institutional habits and guiding systemic change. Under her direction, QSA began a programme of record re-description, piloting new metadata protocols that sought to remove deficit language and restore dignity in description. Public engagement strategies shifted to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices were centred. Recognition became a practice of justice rather than a technical exercise. It is important to stress that recognition does not simply correct the record; it reshapes the relational dynamics between archives and communities. To name someone correctly, to acknowledge their agency, is to restore visibility where silence was imposed.

Personal files: memory under surveillance

The Office of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals was the central administrative authority responsible for regulating nearly every aspect of Aboriginal life in Queensland under the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts and subsequent legislation. From 1941 onwards, the personal files created by the Office reveal the full reach of this control, documenting Aboriginal lives not as private or self-determining, but as objects of constant oversight.

These files contain inward and outward correspondence relating to births and deaths, forced removals, requests to marry, applications for exemption, control of wages and savings accounts, management of deceased estates, and complaints made both by and about Aboriginal people. Decisions that would ordinarily belong to individuals and families were instead subject to bureaucratic approval, delay, or refusal.

Taken collectively, these records expose a regime of surveillance that was intimate as well as totalising. Each file functions as a bureaucratic portrait of a life closely watched where movement, relationships, labour, finances, and even grief were mediated through the authority of the state. While created for administrative purposes, these records now stand as evidence of how governance was enacted through paperwork, and how control was normalised through routine recordkeeping practices.

As an Aboriginal woman I have searched these pages to follow the paths my ancestors took across Queensland, through Thargomindah, Mitchell, and Cherbourg. Sometimes these files hold the only surviving trace of an ancestor's handwriting. Reading a removal order leaves you unsettled. Holding a plea for exemption confronts you with a demand to be seen as fully human. Many families have more than one file, split across head office and regional offices, fragmenting their stories. Within this bureaucracy, there are still glimpses of love, resilience, and resistance. People wrote back, asked questions, and tried to keep families together.

This refiguring resonates in my own journey. In August 2025, my journey back to Kullilli Country in Thargomindah, revealed that reflection on Country cannot be separated from the traces found in the archive. Walking the same roads my ancestors once travelled gave weight to the names and dates I had seen only in ledgers and registers. Standing next to the same tree my father did in 2019, during his own journey back to Country, I felt the continuity of our stories across time. His return created a pathway that allowed me to follow, and in doing so, I recognised how records and memory work together to guide us home. In those moments, the records shifted from static documents into living companions that deepened my understanding of who I am and where I come from. This reminded me that archives have the power to do more than preserve; they can support practices of remembrance, self-knowledge, and healing when returned to community and placed in conversation with lived experience. My father's

journey, my own, and those my daughters will 1 day take are part of an intergenerational continuum of reflection and reconnection. This is why it is essential that archives be made accessible and contextualised – to ensure that families can use them not only to reconstruct history but also to sustain the living practice of returning, remembering, and carrying our stories forward.

Research and access: opening the doors

The theme of *Research and Access* has transformed QSA's approach to public engagement. Archives have long been imagined as locked vaults, with bureaucratic processes acting as barriers.³ For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such barriers compounded the original harms of surveillance. Over the past 4 years, QSA has redesigned its public spaces to be more welcoming and culturally safe. Initiatives such as *Mob on Mondays* have created regular entry points where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members can engage with records on their own terms, supported by staff who understand the emotional and traumatic weight of these journeys. The First Nations Language Program has demonstrated that archives are not only about paper records but also about the revitalisation of First Nations Languages. Language itself is an archive, and its presence within QSA represents both continuity and survival. I have witnessed community members in the QSA public Reading Room encountering their own files for the first time. There are moments of joy finding a grandparent's signature and moments of grief as silences are revealed, and untold stories come to light. These encounters remind us that access is never neutral. Whether deliberate or not, access can cause pain and trauma. This underscores the need for an acute awareness and careful application of both procedural and cultural care to minimise further harm and the lingering trauma embedded within the confines of the records.

When visitors walk into the archives, I want them to think beyond a building of boxes and catalogues. The archives can be approached as a space of responsibility, a place where histories live in relation to us rather than as static records to be retrieved. Historians such as Minoru Hokari,⁴ who lived and worked with the Gurindji people, reminds us that history is not only written in books or archives, and that there are modes of history that are perhaps impossible to translate into Western historical practice.⁵ This reorientation helps me articulate what I want visitors and myself to do differently when we enter the archive.

Truth-telling and healing: the policy landscape

QSA's journey has unfolded alongside broader policy developments in Queensland. The former Path to Treaty agenda and the now ceased Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry created an environment where archival records were recognised as evidence of both harm and resilience, and critical for processes of truth-telling. The establishment of QSA's Indigenous-led First Nations Strategy team reflected this shift, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership within the institution. The passage of the *Public Records Act 2023* further cemented these changes, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in the management and access of records and establishing the future responsibility of a First Nations Advisory Group to provide strategic advice to the Queensland State Archivist. While the Declaration advocates for changes to nation-state recordkeeping legislation and practice, legislation alone cannot transform relationships. Trust cannot be legislated. Trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is built or lost in daily practice through how staff engage with visitors in the Reading Room, how records are described, or how families are supported when encountering painful histories. For many communities, researching and accessing these records is itself an act of truth-telling: confronting intergenerational trauma, piecing together fragmented narratives, and reclaiming voice.

The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA), of which QSA is a member, has also endorsed the Tandanya–Adelaide Declaration and encouraged jurisdictions to implement its principles. This national alignment strengthened QSA's commitments, and moved QSA closer to its goal of being an archive that embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews, knowledge and culture. Practical work underway to do this includes prioritising the digitisation of records related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, improved metadata using AIATSIS subject headings and AustLang codes, workshops, and support for educators who will teach with the records.

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and protocols: respecting knowledge authorities

Recognising Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) requires moving from acknowledgement to action. Priorities include digital repatriation of sensitive or culturally significant records, funded Indigenous subject matter experts to guide interpretation, and advocacy for legislative reform so ICIP is recognised in law.

The Tandanya Declaration called for *recognition of Indigenous knowledge authorities*. This remains one of the most complex challenges for archives. Traditionally, archives operate on the assumption that the State is the ultimate owner of public records. For Indigenous peoples, however, authority over knowledge often rests with Elders, families, or communities, regardless of who created the record. QSA has begun the process of developing ICIP protocols to guide daily practice. This involves respecting and recognising that cultural authority may belong to those represented in the records rather than the agency that produced them. This shift requires archives to confront the reality that many of their collections were created through dispossession. Respecting and recognising ICIP may at times mean restricting access, sharing authority, or even relinquishing control. It is a shift that challenges the very foundations of archival practice, but it is essential if archives are to transform into spaces of justice and healing.

Ownership and property: the colonial bind

Models of shared custody and community-led interpretation are necessary steps while legislative frameworks catch up. True recognition of ownership will often mean surrendering authority to cultural custodians whose responsibilities are grounded in kinship and Country.

The issue of property and ownership highlights the colonial bind at the heart of archives. Government archives operate on the premise that once a record is created by the State, it belongs to the Crown. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ownership is not about possession but about responsibility, kinship, and connection to Country. At QSA, these tensions play out regularly. Communities may request the return or restriction of access to records, or the application of cultural protocols to their use. Yet legislative and government-mandated frameworks often prevent full community control. Pathways forward could include shared custody agreements, community-controlled digital platforms, with some elements dependent on future legislative reform. Yet the deeper challenge is philosophical: *how can ownership be reimagined not as possession but as stewardship?* Until this question is addressed, the long road to self-determination in archives will remain incomplete.

Self-determination: the unfinished horizon

Self-determination is both the goal and the greatest challenge. To be self-determined in archives would mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples set the terms of collection, description, access, and use. QSA has taken steps in this direction by resourcing Indigenous

leadership, embedding advisory mechanisms, and supporting community-led initiatives. But self-determination cannot be granted by institutions – it must be realised and lived into existence by communities themselves. For me, this is not abstract. In engaging with archives, I am also engaging with my family's history stories of surveillance, removal, and endurance. The archive is both a wound and bandage, both harm and healing. As Kirsten Thorpe reminds us, Indigenous archiving is not rhetorical but relational. It requires active disruption of colonial structures, and a commitment to creating archives that are useful to Indigenous peoples. This work is slow, often painful, but necessary. Self-determination is not an endpoint; it is an ongoing practice of humility, responsibility, and courage.⁶

Yarning as method and metaphor

One of the most important lessons from QSA's journey is the centrality of yarning. Yarning is not merely a method of consultation but a philosophy of relation. It is the physical practice of deep listening, reciprocity, and the creation of spaces where all voices can be heard. In practice, yarning has shaped initiatives such as *Mob on Mondays*, Language workshops, and advisory forums. In reflection, yarning offers a metaphor and mechanism for how archives might transform – suggesting circles of conversation rather than hierarchies, reciprocity instead of extraction, and trust instead of control. The long road to self-determination is best travelled through yarning, listening and action.

Honouring those before us: the legacy of Loris Williams

No reflection on QSA's journey would be complete without honouring those who came before. The annual Australian Society of Archivists Loris Williams Memorial Lecture stands as both a tribute and a call to action. Loris was a pioneering Aboriginal archivist whose career was dedicated to ensuring visibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in collections. Her advocacy carved pathways for those of us working in archives today. The lecture held in her name sharpens our vision, reminding us that recognition and cultural safety are not optional extras but core responsibilities. Listening to her story reminds me that our work must be grounded in respect, reciprocity, and courage. Every time we describe a record, welcome a community member into the Reading Room, or design a programme such as the *First Nations Languages Program* and *Mob on Mondays*, we do so in the shadow of her determination. Loris' story is not only a memory but also a directive.

Walking with our ancestors: a family journey

The themes of recognition, truth-telling, and reclamation become intensely personal when I think of my own family. In my research journey, I have traced family lines through Thargomindah, Mitchell, and Cherbourg, searching for fragments of story in the records. Engaging with these records is not only research; it is healing. It is a way of returning stories home. This work also sparked my decision to return to Thargomindah Country in August 2025, carrying with me not just files and photographs but a commitment to restore dignity to the lives captured in these documents. These family journeys illuminate why QSA's reforms matter: the archive is not abstract, it is intertwined with our bloodlines! In this sense, my return to Country is also a return to the archives each making the other more complete. Minoru Hokari reflected on a similar shift in his work with the Gurindji, moving from 'me and them' to 'me and you'.⁷ Like him, I have come to see that returning to Country and returning to the archives are not separate acts, but relational practices of maintaining history.



Figure 1. The long road to Thargomindah. Picture by Becky Bligh.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty and archival futures

Beyond institutional reform, the framework of Indigenous Data Sovereignty provides a lens for imagining archival futures. It insists that Indigenous peoples have the right to govern the collection, ownership, and application of their data. For archives, this means recognising that records relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not neutral assets of the State but elements of Indigenous identity and sovereignty. Embedding Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles requires structural change: creating governance models led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, rethinking access protocols, and ensuring that data use serves community aspirations. At QSA, early steps towards this include the development of ICIP protocols and the establishment of a First Nations Advisory Group. But the work is far from complete. Data sovereignty is not simply about consultation – it is about jurisdiction, authority, and the rebalancing of power.

Conclusion: walking together

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration continues to serve as a compass for archives in Australia and globally. At QSA, it has inspired a Statement of Intent (now replaced with Our Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples),⁸ institutional reforms, and new ways of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Significant progress has been made in areas of recognition, access, and cultural protocols. Yet the most difficult challenges – authority, ownership, and self-determination – remain ahead. This essay has sought to weave together institutional record and personal reflection, recognising that archives are not neutral spaces but active participants in colonial histories. For Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples, the archives is at once a site of trauma and a site of reclamation. It can wound, but it can also heal.

In writing this essay, I realise I am trying to do the same work I ask of others. Like Hokari shifting from ‘me and them’ to ‘me and you’,⁹ I am learning to stand within the archives not just as a public sector employee but as a participant, community member and ancestor of those living in the physical records in maintaining history. My role is to create conditions where histories are co-held with community, not simply managed on behalf of the state. The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration calls me into that responsibility to step beyond the habits of historian-centrism and into a practice of relational history-making. In this way, I too am learning to think differently about what the archive is and what it might yet become.

Conflict of interests and funding

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on where my work takes place, the Yuggera people, and I also acknowledge other nations and clans who shared this land. I would also like to pay our respects to my Elders past and present.

As the Archives are a place for learning, we also respectfully recognise the continuing role of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first knowledge keepers.

Notes on the contributor

Becky Bligh (Gunggari/Kullilli) works within the First Nations Strategy Team at Queensland State Archives. Her work focuses on culturally safe access, and community-centred engagement.

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REFLECTION ARTICLE

Reflections on Creative Responses to Archival Collections in PARADISEC

Steven Gagau and Jodie Kell*

PARADISEC, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

The Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) is a digital archive of some of the many small cultures and languages of the world, particularly from the Pacific region. The article reflects on a collaborative outreach project involving the creative response of a group of Papua New Guinean people to archival collections held in PARADISEC. The project demonstrates how reciprocity, long-term relationships and the valuing of Indigenous knowledge holders can invigorate cultural practices, adding value and meaning to the archive. This connects to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration themes and contributes to an ethical space of engagement, encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration.

Keywords: *Indigenous archives; Indigenous protocols and archives; Indigenous-led archival practice; Tandanya declaration.*

This reflection is based on a conversation between the authors about a collaborative project involving the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra and PARADISEC (the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures).¹ We discuss how the recording and documentation of the creative response of the Peroveta singers to archival materials held in PARADISEC demonstrates the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration's themes, in particular 'Recognition and Identity' and 'Research and Access'.

PARADISEC is a digital archive of records of some of the many small cultures and languages of the world, particularly from the Pacific region. As well as implementing international standards of archiving to safeguard music and language recordings, the team at PARADISEC has initiated a range of outreach programs to maximise the findability, accessibility and usability of these recordings for speaker communities and researchers. An example is the Toksave: Culture Talks podcast, a series of interviews with people who have cultural and personal connections to collections in the PARADISEC archive. Co-produced by the authors, the podcast is not just about broadcasting the final product; it demonstrates a process that aims to amplify and prioritise the voices of Indigenous collaborators.

*Correspondence: Jodie Kell Email: jodie.kell@sydney.edu.au

The PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra, formed in 1999, is a collective diaspora community initiative led by Deveni Temu. The members are predominantly from Central Province, Papua New Guinea, living in the regions of Canberra, ACT and Queanbeyan, NSW. Peroveta is a unique type of singing, also known as Prophet Songs, adopted in the Southern Region provinces of Papua New Guinea. Peroveta is a combination of Biblical scriptures, missionary histories and local customs set in traditional choral music sung with soaring and interweaving parts. The Canberra group's motivation is to maintain culture, music and language whilst abroad by sharing and performing Peroveta songs and traditional Sene² dance items, connecting the members to people and places where they come from in their homeland.

Co-author Steven Gagau connected with the Peroveta singers through the group coordinator, Temu. As an Indigenous Tolai of the Gunantuna people of New Britain Island in Papua New Guinea, Gagau has networks across Pasifika and Wantok communities, demonstrating his insider-outsider perspective as an Indigenous man working within an archival institution. Temu also worked in this space as the Pacific Collections Librarian at the Australian National University. He worked with Gagau and PARADISEC Sydney director Amanda Harris on the True Echoes project in collaboration with the British Library.³ We interviewed Temu about this project for the Toksave podcast in 2022.⁴ Then in 2023, we found two collections containing Peroveta songs in the PARADISEC archive: the MG1 collection⁵, recorded in the late 1950s and 1960s by Murray Groves and the IC1 collection⁶, consisting of recordings made by Ian Campbell in Tubuseria Village, Central Province, in 1969. Upon Gagau's initiative, we contacted Temu to share the recordings with him and plan an episode of the podcast.

The Peroveta singers engaged with the materials and requested to respond with song and dance, including interpretations of some of the songs on the recordings as well as a journey through the different Peroveta and Sene styles and the histories they tell of the Southern region of Papua New Guinea. The resulting project encompassed two podcast episodes, two films of song and dance, a PDF songbook with transcriptions and translations, a blog post, a co-authored journal article and an archival collection of these materials.⁷ This initiative from the community group broadened the scope of engagement and collaboration to a more creative and dynamic output. It added value and impact to archival enrichment and supported cultural continuity, language revitalisation and the transmission of song and dance traditions.

We believe that the collaboration between PARADISEC and the Peroveta group demonstrates ways of implementing the themes of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. We address theme #3 'Recognition and Identity' from the cultural perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. We recognise that Indigenous peoples and communities are experts in their own culture and knowledge expressed through oral traditions such as storytelling, song and dance for intergenerational transmission. Through interviews, creative performance, film production and written publication, the voices of the community members of the Peroveta group were amplified as active collaborators who were able to negotiate the form of their expression of knowledge and response to archival recordings.

In addressing theme #4 'Research and Access', we refer to the model of the archival loop we developed at PARADISEC to represent changes in archival practices.⁸ This model illustrates how qualities of reciprocity, long-term relationships and the valuing of Indigenous knowledge holders can create a flow of information, output and benefits moving between researchers and speaker communities. Its central pillars are prioritising Indigenous voices, connecting and reconnecting, building relationships and enlivening the archive.

The next section is an edited transcription of the discussion between the co-authors as we reflect on the collaborative project. We chose a conversational approach for the body of this article to prioritise Indigenous ways of communicating, through yarning, using culturally appropriate processes to engage with Indigenous voices.⁹ It also demonstrates

the importance we place on reflection, discussion and re-evaluation of our collaborative practices in the archive.

Kell:

Steven, how would you connect the project with the Peroveta singers of Canberra to the Tandanya theme of 'Recognition and Identity'?

Gagau:

This is part of our community outreach, bridging the archive to the communities. The identity of what's in the archive has been acknowledged and we reached out to the community to connect them to the archive. In that way we recognise the cultural heritage in the archive, the identity of a community in the archive, a diaspora community in Australia, who have responded to the archival materials through song.

Kell:

How does their response recognise alternative ways of expressing and transmitting cultural knowledge?

Gagau:

That's the strength I see because of our oral traditions. Rather than relying on written documentation, the ways that we are going about connecting Indigenous communities is through engaging and interacting in person and expression via performance and songs. I think it's up to us researchers who coordinate to put that into documentation practice. This is a strong aspect of connecting communities, recognising they have the cultural knowledge and making sure we tap into this. The right way to approach the process of outreach is engaging community members and letting them express their response as they want to. It can develop to things like co-authoring, enriching metadata and new archival collections.

Kell:

I felt, as an outsider, because I'm not from PNG and I'm not an Indigenous person, that facilitating the recording contributed my audio engineering skills to enable Elders to have a voice to express in their way. Steven, you sit both as an insider, as a Tolai man and as an outsider coming from an archival institution. How do you feel in your role and how does this relate to the Tandanya theme of 'Research and Access'?

Gagau:

As you'll notice in our partnership in these projects, I always step back because I must reflect the insider perspective. I'm coming in partly as an outsider, whereas I'm also an insider. I let the outsider perspective in, with how to document, promote or disseminate Indigenous perspectives and practices. But from an insider perspective, I let the Elders and their direct knowledge express it. I consolidate or add to it rather than trying to represent them in their space. They see me as representing Indigenous points of view in the space of academia or research. As an insider outsider, I mediate the colonisers' narratives. I'm in that space and I understand what that is, so I act as a bridge all the time, always mediating, always talking on their behalf. You'll see in my approach and how I always step back. The reason for that

is out of respect for the communities who have the knowledge, and I want to let them show it. It's up to us to translate and transmit it with sensitivity and appropriateness.

Kell:

Working with you, I find it's a safer space for me as an outsider, to have you there as a guide and to watch how you interact and communicate. When we went to Canberra, I hadn't met the Peroveta group before, apart from Deveni Temu who is, like you, an insider outsider in the GLAM sector research space. Having you two there as guides, interpreting language and interpreting protocols, showing me how to act around people. It was powerful and made the process more meaningful.

Gagau:

I appreciate outsiders who have an open mind. I don't think people in the past always had respectful practices. I've heard of researchers staying in villages and acting in their way rather than respecting local cultural ways. I think it's education and awareness that researchers need to consider, not coming in and imposing on people. Let Indigenous people control the narrative and express their points of view how they want. The researcher should ride with it and interpret it according to how the community people see life and the cultures they are in and how to disseminate knowledge to the next generation. What matters is how to recognise Indigenous voices.

Kell:

So many of the episodes of the Toksave podcast are initiated by yourself within community, through people you know. The episodes with the Peroveta group started that way. Then they kind of turned around when Deveni and the group were saying, 'Oh we want to do this, we want to record our songs and dances'. This was new. It wasn't just a podcast interview but became more than that, including video production and a new archival collection. To be flexible and say, 'Okay, this is what the participants want to do' and go with that. The product is more powerful and resulted in a whole new collection in PARADISEC with transcriptions and a songbook that they made. It was relevant and engaging.

Gagau:

One positive aspect is that Deveni is an insider outsider too. It was such a good balance because I've come in from podcast production, and Deveni was within the cultural group. He understood what needed to be done. The narrative that we were trying to promote was with him already. My job was easier because he was the language speaker, and he knew the group over many years. It was through Deveni and his trust in us that we could work with them that the project evolved. Without Deveni, and his insider outsider relationship, it would not have happened, and we wouldn't have reached this stage. I think it's important that Indigenous researchers or practitioners like us must always act as a bridge.

Kell:

We recorded the choir and gave flash drives to every member containing their recordings and those from the archival collections relevant to their group. We also gave a presentation about how to access the collection at a community event. What is the importance of opening access for communities like this?

Gagau:

Firstly, it's letting people know about recordings of their culture and history, raising awareness of resources like archives and how to use them. Secondly, it's about engagement. People will engage more if they have a glimpse or knowledge of 'Oh, these things are about me and my identity, my culture'. If we hadn't done this project, the community members may not have heard about the collections in PARADISEC. It was an educational process showing how we can all work together to bridge the gap and connect. It's rediscovering too and we find an emotional kind of interaction. We also saw as an outcome of this project an increase in the numbers in the Peroveta group. To me that is an impact showing that we are engaging with people and contributing to revitalisation in an evolving world of practices.

Kell:

The Toksave podcast helps to make archival materials findable. Without outreach projects like this, how would people hear about archives and access them if it's outside their world? We work with people and it's like 'here are the recordings, listen to them', and we know that they go away and talk to their family and community about them. The next thing is that they're on the publicly broadcast podcast.

Gagau:

Findability and accessibility are very relevant points. For example, I recently received an email from somebody who found PARADISEC after listening to the podcast episode about the MW6 collection¹⁰ [A collection of music recordings and interviews about music in Rabaul, Gazelle Peninsula, East New Britain Province and New Guinea Islands Region recorded in the 1990s by Michael Webb, particularly relevant to Steven Gagau as coming from his cultural background]. This person had looked up the archive and identified various videos and songs in the collection, showing how people can discover the archive through outreach. In this case, he responded to the podcast and the collection with comments such as 'that was my grandfather, that's my uncle in the video'. He knew who was singing what, the names of people and places, enriching our knowledge and metadata of the collection. I found we had common connections from back home. I know his village, and he had heard of me. I also contacted the researcher, Michael Webb. That's how we share and create trust within the archive for the Pasifika community. I feel like I am in the right place to support this big picture.

Kell:

So many times, I've seen you in action, Steven, where we meet people and straight away you start connecting on cultural, language, country, and family levels. It creates the trust that is necessary in working with Indigenous communities. I'd like you to just talk a little bit about the four pillars that you developed when talking about community and cultural engagement in outreach programs such as the Toksave podcast and the episodes with the Peroveta group.

Gagau:

At PARADISEC we've developed this archival loop, representing community collaboration. It's about engagement and cultural exchanges that we need to feature as part of our archival work. It's time to really empower Indigenous voices. Archival materials need to be connected back to where they come from, where they belong. Otherwise, there's a missing

link. In the case of Deveni and the Peroveta group, we connected cultural materials to a group related to ownership and identity of what's in the archive. That connected to another layer of people who are now joining the choir, attending these events. These outreach projects involve people as part of this big picture. We are looping what's in the archive to the communities and bringing that back into the archive again as a collection or a contribution or a response to the way they think, feel and connect with the archive.

Kell:

That's right. We first connected with Deveni through the True Echoes project. Building on that, the next time we said we wanted to interview him about Peroveta, he had more confidence in the relationship with PARADISEC. With this stronger relationship, the project could become more ambitious, and he felt confident to tell us what the group wanted to do.

Gagau:

That's right. We're talking about people to people. Not people to technology, but people to people enlivening the archive. PARADISEC founder Linda Barwick speaks about 'turning the archive upside down'.¹¹ I think we are in a process of doing that now. We are bridging through the archival loop so that whatever has been taken from community and from the cultural knowledge owners, we are returning and reconnecting. For me, preservation for the long-term, safeguarding is so important. And now it is time for institutions like PARADISEC to connect back to communities. Everybody's part of this big jigsaw puzzle. It's about enlivening the archives for the benefit of everybody through bridging to where the materials come from.

Kell:

I think of reels in boxes. Cassettes in their little cases. Physical objects that silently hold sound. When you digitise them and give access to people, it's a different thing. That's when you hear the voices and wake things up. It is an amazing process. Archives such as PARADISEC play a big role in that. But without the community, without insiders like yourself, those materials would not have the meaning they do.

Gagau:

We are all learning together on this journey of safeguarding and preserving. We need to translate, transform and transfer what we are safeguarding to make it enlivened, to make it known to people who need to know and to open access to them. It's a partnership of institutions like archives, libraries or museums, and communities. It's always important to have an insider perspective, an Indigenous perspective. That's why I connect to institutions, why I work within the archive, because I can make connections, find archival materials and help place them appropriately where they belong. I think that's our role here, I feel excited about it and believe we are contributing to the bigger, greater good of society.

The Tandanya Adelaide Declaration is a call for action to reflect on our roles and positions and work towards reimagining the archive to decolonise archival practices and embrace Indigenous approaches to preserving and transmitting knowledge. Through this conversation, we discussed how the recording and documentation of stories and songs of the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra demonstrate themes of the Tandanya-Adelaide declaration.

Including Indigenous voices in descriptions of archival collections, as well as the collaborative production of a range of outputs, contributes to recognising Indigenous social authority, cultural knowledge and identity. This connects to the theme #3 'Recognition and Identity'. Gagau reflected that through his positioning as an Indigenous 'insider-outsider' in the archival space, he can mediate between European and Indigenous ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge, addressing the theme #4 'Research and Access'. Gagau was able to work closely with the Peroveta group, empowering them to decide upon the form of their response to the IC1 and MG1 archival collections, enabling their members to participate and share their knowledge of language, place, and history through song and dance on their own initiative. Community engagement programs such as the Toksave: Culture Talks podcast demonstrate the archival loop model where long-term relationships, reciprocity and prioritising Indigenous voices can lead to greater accessibility and control over archival materials for Indigenous communities.

Notes on contributors

Steven Gagau is a cultural consultant, researcher and archivist with the University of Sydney. He is an Indigenous Tolai (Gunantuna) man from Papua New Guinea based at the Sydney office of PARADISEC. He works on metadata enrichment of Melanesian Pacific collections and is involved in a range of community access projects reconnecting people and communities to Oceanic cultures and histories. He develops strategies for community-led engagement, cultural outreach projects and relationships with archives, museums and libraries that hold materials of Pacific culture, language, music and history in the Oceania region.

Steven undertakes collaborative projects connecting diaspora speaker communities with institutions like Sydney University Chau Chak Wing Museum, Australian Museum, Museums Victoria, British Library with exhibitions and sound archives and advocacy Indigenous data management.

Steven co-produces the PARADISEC podcast 'Toksave – Culture Talks' with Jodie Kell and co-authored publications, including recently the British Library 'True Echoes' Project with 2024 book chapter 'Dispersed sound archives and diaspora communities: Reconnecting with old recordings from Hula village, Papua New Guinea', in Thieberger et al (eds.) *Keeping time: Dialogues on music and archives in honour of Linda Barwick* and community collaboration article in 2025 'Archived sound and creative engagements with Papua New Guinean cultural heritage in Australia'.

Jodie Kell is an audio engineer who manages the Sydney office of PARADISEC. She is interested in the reformulation of archival workflow to increase accessibility, findability and reusability to archival resources. Jodie has recently completed her PhD researching the role of women in music making in West Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, working with and managing the all-women's rock band Ripple Effect Band, in which she plays lead guitar.

In her work at PARADISEC, Jodie is currently involved in the Language Data Commons of Australia (LDAcA) an integrated national infrastructure that supports language research, with a particular interest in small community-based archives in remote communities in Northern Australia. She works on the *Yawulyu mardukuja-patu-kurlangu: Warlpiri Digital Space*, supporting access to archival materials for intergenerational knowledge transmission. She also co-produces the Toksave: Culture Talks podcast with Steven Gagau, a series of interviews with people who have personal and cultural connections with the PARADISEC archive.

Notes

1. Deveni Temu and the PNG Peroveta Singers of Canberra have checked and given their approval for the authors to discuss the collaborative work in this article.
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REFLECTION ARTICLE

Implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Australian War Memorial

Margaret Farmer*

Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia

Abstract

The archives of the Australian War Memorial (herein referred to as the Memorial) were established in 1917 with a national aim – to preserve as ‘sacred things’¹ the records made by the Australian Imperial Force in the war of 1914–1918. Over time, the Memorial and its archives have expanded to include Australia’s involvement in earlier British Imperial wars to recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and peacekeeping and humanitarian operations; however, the Memorial resisted, amidst intense national debate, the 40-year call for extensive coverage of the wars on Australian soil, by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were violently displaced and colonised and the nation state of Australia was formed. In September 2022, it was announced that the Memorial’s Council had made the decision that there would be ‘a much broader, a much deeper depiction and presentation of the violence committed against Indigenous people’,² and in February 2023, it was confirmed that the Memorial would have ‘a proper recognition of the frontier conflict’ in its galleries.³ This is an important endeavour that requires unwavering implementation of research and curatorial best practice in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ knowledges, cultural material, intellectual property, and experiences of war, violence, discrimination and trauma.

As the Memorial seeks to open and develop its archives to support its forthcoming truth-telling, Memorial curators are working to implement the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (2019) (herein referred to as the Declaration) and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols to establish ‘an ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration’.⁴

Keywords: *Australian War Memorial; Australian Wars; decolonising; Frontier Wars; Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols.*

The Australian War Memorial (herein referred to as the Memorial) and its collections were established with a national aim: to commemorate through understanding the service and sacrifice of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in the war of 1914–1918. Over time, the Memorial has expanded to include Australia’s involvement in earlier British Imperial wars to recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. However, until recently, the Memorial resisted, amidst intense national debate,

*Correspondence: Margaret Farmer Email: margaret.farmer@awm.gov.au

the 40-year call for extensive coverage of the wars on Australian soil. In September 2022, it was announced that the Memorial's Council had made the decision that there would be 'a much broader, a much deeper depiction and presentation of the violence committed against Indigenous people',⁵ and in February 2023, it was confirmed that the Memorial would have 'a proper recognition of the frontier conflict' in its galleries.⁶ This is an important endeavour that requires unwavering implementation of research and curatorial best practice in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledges, cultural material, intellectual property, and experiences of the Frontier Wars. It also requires trauma-informed practice with respect to experiences of violence, forcible removal and separation from Country, and colonisation when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders. As the Memorial seeks to open and develop its collection and archives to support its forthcoming truth-telling, Memorial curators are working to implement the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (herein referred to as the Declaration) and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols to establish 'an ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration'.⁷

This reflection has three parts. Firstly, in keeping with the Declaration's injunction that it is '[o]ur duty to acknowledge our colonial history'⁸ it describes the original conception of the Memorial and the lead up to the Memorial's commitment to the Frontier Wars (also known as the Australian Wars).⁹ Critically, this includes acknowledging the attitudes that informed previous decisions on representation of the Frontier Wars at the Memorial. The reflection then describes the Memorial's current work engaging in capacity uplift in relation to First Nations communities, content and knowledges;¹⁰ before concluding by reflecting on the Declaration's words 'a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter'.¹¹

Part I: '[W]e are what we choose to remember, but we are also what we choose to forget'¹²

Commemoration through understanding

The Australian War Memorial was first conceived in 1916 by Charles Edwin Woodrow (CEW) Bean, Australia's official war correspondent, who accompanied the AIF on Gallipoli and in Europe. After witnessing the carnage on the Western Front, Bean determined that the courage, sacrifice and contribution of the men of the AIF should be remembered in their homeland. Bean envisaged a memorial, museum and archive that would 'commemorate through understanding'.¹³ The Memorial was to be a place for both the living – to remember, grieve, and understand – and the fallen – as a tomb fitting of their sacrifice, and a place for their spirit to reside. For the newly federated nation of Australia, a memorial located on home soil would also be a critical assertion of national identity.

Once planning began for a museum and memorial in Australia, the Australian War Records Section was established in 1917 to collect documentation, such as commanders' war diaries, previously submitted to the British. Led by Captain John Treloar, the section quickly expanded to collect artefacts (then known as 'trophies'), photographs, film and art.

Due to the Depression, work on the building was delayed, and so the Memorial was only officially opened in 1941, after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

Two major consequences for the Memorial's institutional identity and archival collections flow from this history. These are the close connection of the Memorial with Australia's post-Federation national identity; and that the Memorial's archival collections hold relatively little First Nations-related content unless it is related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people's military service within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) or is otherwise related to activities of Australian military personnel.¹⁴ The Memorial is, however, now seeking to develop its collections in relation to the Frontier Wars.

Calls for inclusion of the Frontier Wars at the Australian War Memorial

The first proposal that the Memorial address the Frontier Wars was made in 1979 by Professor Geoffrey Blainey.¹⁵ This was given serious consideration by Memorial Council member William David Lindsay (WDL) 'David' Ride;¹⁶ however, in March 1982 the Memorial's Council received advice from consultant historian Mr A Hill, who dismissed the argument that 'the dispossession of the [A]boriginal peoples by British settlers beginning in 1788 ... was Australia's first war',¹⁷ considering it a racial rather than an international conflict.¹⁸ The Memorial's Council gave the question further consideration in 1984, following a submission by Memorial Council member and Labor Member for Lilley, Mrs Elaine Elizabeth Darling 'Concerning the Depiction of Aboriginal Wars' at the Australian War Memorial, proposing the collection of Aboriginal weaponry and representation of Aboriginal warfare in response to 'the invading races'.¹⁹ This time, the idea was rejected as being 'outside the functions and powers of the Memorial as prescribed in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980' and as being more appropriate for the Museum of Australia.²⁰

The calls continued with increasing intensity. Over time historical research established that the nature of Frontier colonial violence and Aboriginal resistance was war, as articulated in Arrernte and Kalkadoon film-maker Rachel Perkins' three-part documentary series (and now book) *The Australian Wars*, which first screened on Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in September 2022, and 'called on the Memorial to acknowledge and recognise the frontier wars and those who died as a result of them'.²¹

Commitment

On 29 September 2022, the Memorial's then Chair, Dr Brendan Nelson AO, made a public statement that 'The [Memorial] Council has made the decision that we will have a much broader, a much deeper depiction and presentation of the violence committed against Indigenous people'.²² This commitment was confirmed by the Memorial's current Chair, the Honourable Kim Beazley AC, who stated on 6 February 2023 that '[The Memorial will] have a proper recognition of the frontier conflict'.²³ Mr Beazley further stated that the Memorial has 'to have Frontier Wars reflected in it because it is by that means we [Australia] established ourselves'.²⁴

Part II: Towards 'an ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration'²⁵

An aspiration and methodology

As stated above, the Declaration offers valuable language for the Memorial's aspiration in relation to the Frontier Wars: to become, in the words of the Declaration 'an ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration'.²⁶ These key descriptors – encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration – are valuable as touchstones and methodologies that can be practised and embedded not just in the Memorial's archival collections but across the institution.

Engaging in the Memorial's first broad presentation about the Frontier Wars at the 2023 Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) Summit, in Noongar Boodja Perth, the Memorial's Indigenous Liaison Officer, Michael Bell, and its

Assistant Director National Collections, Brian Dawson, described these commitments as ‘represent[ing] the start of a new journey of collaborative, respectful truth-telling about an important element of Australia’s military history’.²⁷ Requesting community engagement, they outlined a ‘provisional concept for the new galleries’, stating that:

‘It is probable that we will concentrate on war and war-like events ...

We have not begun to determine the detailed nature of the inclusion of the frontier wars in the galleries as we want to ensure we receive the required permissions in order to conduct our truth-telling and learning in a responsible and respectful way.

We are proposing ... to focus on campaigns of resistance. ...

We would welcome engagement and working with communities and the descendants of victims and survivors of the frontier wars over the next five years during the gallery development process.’²⁸

At the 2025 AIATSIS Summit in Garramilla Darwin, Bell and Dawson gave an update of the Memorial’s progress, explaining that while an exhibition development team was yet to be appointed, it was because, in Bell’s words, ‘We’ve had to go backwards, in order to go forwards’.²⁹ He was speaking of the necessary preliminary work uplifting the Memorial’s collective capacity in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, content and knowledges, and in which the methodologies of *respect* and *encounter* are currently best embodied.

In May 2023, the Memorial adopted the Australian Museums and Galleries Association *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* (the AMaGA Roadmap). The Memorial then adopted industry best standard ICIP protocols for each curatorial area, effective 1 June 2023. For example, the archives adopted the International Council of Archivists’ Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (2019) as a guiding framework, and have looked to the National Archives of Australia’s *Our Way* protocols; and the Art Section adopted Creative Australia’s *Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts* as well as Terri Janke’s *True Tracks* protocols and the collaborative model of the International Spectrum of Public Consultation. In 2024, the Memorial worked with Indigenous law firm Terri Janke & Company to conduct a Cultural Safety and Diversity Audit. In 2025, the Memorial commenced implementing the recommendations from that audit towards increasing the diversity of Memorial staff and the cultural safety of Memorial staff and visitors; also working with Terri Janke & Company to develop a Memorial-wide ICIP Framework to be made available on the Memorial’s website.

Re-reading the archive and collection review

The Memorial is engaging in collection review, collection development and reparative cataloguing. Critical work was commenced in the 1990s to research and extend documentation of Indigenous (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, South Sea Islander and Papuan) military service. More recently, extensive collection survey and collection development work was undertaken for the Memorial’s 2016 touring exhibition *For Country, For Nation* that brought focus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ longstanding traditions of fighting for Country and of service in Australia’s military forces. Nonetheless, there is still much to be done in both areas.

During ongoing upgrades of the Memorial's Collection Management System (CMS) and Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), the Memorial's CDAMS team and curatorial areas have worked to ensure that these systems have the data fields and features required for enhanced cataloguing. For the Memorial, reparative cataloguing means improving descriptions by more accurately or appropriately identifying makers, and naming object types, by identifying and adding language and conflict terms, restrictions due to secret-sacred content, warnings in relation to cultural content and inappropriate language, and the amendment of titles to reflect contemporary language. Outdated or racist titles and descriptions are archived, to preserve the record.

In 2023, Official Records, Private Records and Published (Library) Collection curators commenced meeting monthly to identify collection content that has been created by Indigenous (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, South Sea Islander and Papuan) makers or has notable Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander-related content. Now joined by Digitised Collection curators, this group is developing Finding Aids for this Indigenous content and also for Frontier Wars-related content. Critical to this task are re-readings of the archive that are revealing documentary evidence of conflict, and documents, including valuable records of language, which demonstrate more respectful encounters and collaboration. Re-reading these records through the lens of contemporary scholarship shows how each is part of a much larger national story of violence, colonisation and defence of Country, and provides opportunities for truth-telling. Critically, as stated above, this includes re-reading the Memorial's own corporate records and acknowledging the attitudes that informed previous decisions on representation of the Frontier Wars at the Memorial.

In July 2025, the Memorial commenced a whole-of-Memorial collection review for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content.

Collection development

The Frontier Wars is a priority area within the Memorial's Collection Development Policy. There are already over 70 artworks by over 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and artist groups relating to frontier warfare in the collection, which represents every Australian state. Since the Official and Private Records commenced collecting Frontier Wars related material, the Memorial has acquired 48 documents to begin a Frontier Wars formed collection, 7 Frontier-related items for the Maps and Charts collection and a Private Record.

Training

The Memorial has invested in cultural awareness training for staff, and its senior leadership team is required to complete the AIATSIS Core Cultural Learning training. The Memorial's Senior Management Group received training in ICIP principles and protocols in May 2025, and a large staff cohort received training on ICIP and the Memorial's ICIP Framework in October 2025.

Trauma-informed practice

As an institution that works intensively with war and the impact of war, the Memorial is committed to trauma-informed practice and psychological safety.³⁰ Collectively, the Memorial is working towards methodologies that see staff and visitors 'safely in and safely out'.

RAPWG film screenings

In 2026, the Memorial's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (RAPWG) is in its sixth year of running an internal film screening programme that aims to increase staff understanding

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges. The Memorial's RAPWG screens 4–5 films per year, followed by a Question-and-Answer (Q&A) session. The Memorial's RAPWG Film Programme convenors have frequently reached out to film-makers for the benefit of their participation in the Q&A session, which allows Memorial staff to learn from creatives and professionals who have worked in collaboration with community utilising best practice. For example, the RAPWG screened the three episodes of Rachel Perkins' 2022 documentary series *The Australian Wars* in May 2023, and after the third episode, Memorial staff were deeply honoured to be joined for discussion by Rachel Perkins, the late historian Professor Lyndall Ryan OAM, and Wiradyuri historian Mina Murray. In 2024, RAPWG Film Screening attendees were joined by the National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA) Indigenous Engagement Team, including Gillian Moody and Caitlyn Le Roy, who talked about their work with the Strehlow Research Centre. Memorial staff have twice appreciated the insights of Professor Tom Murray in relation to cross-cultural collaboration when making his films *The Skin of Others* (2020) and *Dhakiyarr vs The King* (2005).

Consultation and community engagement

The Memorial has established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group that assists in the Memorial's Gallery Development programme. The Memorial's ICIP Framework and other stakeholder engagement policies set out commitments and methodologies for community engagement.

Research and participation in communities of practice

The Memorial seeks to learn from recent cultural projects that have brought focus to and understanding about Australia's Frontier Wars. Since the 1990s, there has been a stream of significant exhibitions and cultural projects that have articulated the nature and events of these wars, their impact and the ongoing strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultural practice. The Memorial is researching these projects and beginning to engage with the creators of past and similar initiatives to discuss methodologies.³¹ Memorial staff are also increasingly attending and participating in conferences such as the annual AIATSIS Summits, the *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium* (2024), the *Dhuluny: 200 Years of Wiradyuri Resistance Conference* (2024) as well as specialty area and Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum (GLAM)-sector conferences. The Memorial is grateful to be part of a community of practice, from which it can learn and to which it can contribute.

Part III: Towards 'fair and healing remembrance'³²

Reflecting on implementing the Declaration at the Memorial towards and alongside the presentation of broader and deeper content on the Frontier Wars, it is clear that the opportunity and challenge for truth-telling at the Memorial is to contribute to the collective understanding about the wars at the heart of the Australian story, to enhance our capacity to live in better relationship with each other.

Of the violent colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Rachel Perkins said, 'until it is recognised as a war and memorialised as a war, it will never be entirely over'.³³

Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi public intellectual Stan Grant wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28 March 2019 that 'A nation is ultimately a story; a story that binds people in ways that law cannot'.³⁴ Grant argued for 'a truth telling that sets us all free', expressing his view of the importance of 'acknowledging a shared history that could – told honestly and well – bring us closer together'.³⁵ Those participating in the 2017 National Constitutional Convention wrote in the *Uluru Statement From The Heart* of truth-telling and a Makarrata as

capturing ‘our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination’.³⁶ Dr Samuel Duckett White, Army Visiting Fellow at the Australian War Memorial (2024–2027), has written that ‘Understanding and accepting the violent colonial experiences of the past is necessary for makaratta (truth-telling) and to inform the Australian public about critical modern issues ...’.³⁷ He continued to say, ‘by re-evaluating the colonial experiences, Australians can approach modern issues demonstrating what the Wiradyuri call *yindymarra winhaganha* – a process of self-reflection to better the world we live in’.³⁸

There is a strong stream within Australian academic and cultural production of reflective practices that aim to better the world we live in, and I suggest that there is resonance between these reflective practices, the Wiradyuri concept of *yindymarra winhaganha* – defined as ‘the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in’,³⁹ and the purpose of the Memorial’s foundational and ongoing role of ‘commemoration through understanding’.

Finding common ground is a critical part of the methodologies of *negotiation* and *collaboration*; important now, and necessarily ongoing in relation to the presentation of Frontier Wars content at the Memorial. For key to what is being undertaken is the slow development of trust.

Dr Kate Warren has observed that, ‘cultural practices of memorialisation are tied up as much with imagining possible futures as they are about commemorating the past’.⁴⁰ I think this is true of the Memorial and is why people hold such strong and varying views about its work. It is what is at stake in the work towards presenting broader and deeper coverage of the Frontier Wars at the Memorial, which will bring new inflection and renewed meaning to the Memorial’s founding purpose and guiding principle of ‘commemoration through understanding’.

Bean envisaged the Memorial as a warning of the grievous human cost of war and as an ‘object lesson’ of the need to work for the conditions for peace; saying in 1923, ‘The collection ... [is] ... an object lesson of the idea for which those men strove – that is, to rid the world of the dreadful system which settles disputes by warfare’.⁴¹ In keeping with this ambition, the Memorial is located on a line of sight that extends from Mt Ainslie to Parliament House to ensure that those with the authority to commit Australia to conflict look upon an inescapable reminder of the consequences of war. Implementation of the Declaration and presentation of the Frontier Wars at the Memorial as ‘a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter’⁴² will result in an important extension of this line of accountability.

Notes on contributor

Margaret Farmer is a New Zealand-Australian curator, writer and editor. As Senior Curator, Honour Rolls, Official and Private Records at the Australian War Memorial, and a member of the Memorial’s Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group, she is involved in several capacity building and research initiatives towards the Memorial’s presentation of Frontier/Australian-Wars-related content. These include being project manager of the Memorial’s Cultural Safety and Diversity Audit (2024) and the development of the Memorial’s Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Framework (2025). Margaret was lead curator of the Memorial’s special temporary exhibition *The Courage for Peace* (October 2019–June 2020), and four-part exhibition series *A Home on a Southern Hill* (November 2016–August 2018). Previous exhibitions include the City of Sydney public art program *We Make This City* (November 2011 – May 2012), and the UNSW touring exhibition *Terra Alterius: Land of Another* (2004–2006). Margaret’s abiding interest lies in creative and curatorial practices that build connection and possibility in relation to complex histories and threatened futures.

Notes

1. C.E.W. Bean, 'Australia's Records: Preserved as Sacred Things – Pictures Relics and Writings', *The Anzac Bulletin*, vol. 40, 1917, reproduced on the Australian War Memorial website, available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/australias-records-preserved-as-sacred-things>, accessed 17 February 2026.
2. Brendan Nelson, quoted in 'Press Conference at The Australian War Memorial', The Hon Matt Keogh MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Personnel, E&OE Transcript, Joint Press Conference, Australian War Memorial, Thursday, 29 September 2022, available at: <https://minister.dva.gov.au/news-and-media/minister/press-conference-australian-war-memorial>, accessed 13 October 2025; Patricia Karvelas, 'The Australian War Memorial's Promise of a "Deeper Depiction" of the Frontier Wars Signals an Important New Chapter', *ABC News*, Sunday, 2 October 2022, available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-02/australian-war-memorial-frontier-wars-national-history-chapter/101490802>, accessed 13 October 2025.
3. Kim Beazley, quoted in Christopher Knaus, 'Kim Beazley Backs "Proper Recognition of Frontier Conflict" at Australian War Memorial', *The Guardian*, Monday, 6 February 2023, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/06/kim-beazley-recognition-frontier-wars-conflict-australian-war-memorial>, accessed 13 October 2025.
4. International Council of Archivists, Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, 2019, available at: <https://www.ica.org/?s=tandanya>, accessed 22 April 2026, p. 2. Hereafter, International Council of Archivists.
5. Nelson, Op. cit.
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7. International Council of Archivists, Op. cit., p. 2. M. Farmer, 'Implementing the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration at the Australian War Memorial', Presentation, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium*, Ōtautahi Dunedin, New Zealand, 25 October 2024; M. Farmer, 'The Frontier Wars at the Australian War Memorial: Commemorating the Past, Creating Possible Futures', Presentation, *AAANZ 2024 Conference Past, Present, Possible Futures*, Canberra, Australia, 6 December 2024; M. Farmer, 'Truth-Telling and Future-Shaping Exhibitions', AIATSIS Summit 2025, Garramilla Darwin, Australia, 4 June 2025; M. Bell and B. Dawson, 'The Australian War Memorial's Journey to Broader and Deeper Representation of Frontier Wars in the Memorial's Galleries', AIATSIS Summit 2025, Garramilla Darwin, Australia, 4 June 2025.
8. International Council of Archivists, Op. cit., p. 2.
9. At the time of writing, it is Memorial style to use 'Frontier Wars', accordingly, this term has been utilised throughout.
10. This is being led by the Memorial's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (RAPWG), which for the period January 2018 to January 2026 has been championed by the Head of the Memorial's National Collection branch, MAJGEN Brian Dawson OAM (Ret'd), and guided by the Memorial's Indigenous Liaison Officer, Michael Bell, along with, for the period October 2024 to February 2026, Hollie Gill, Indigenous Assistant Curator, Art Section. The author is a member of the Memorial's RAPWG and is contributing to this work through a number of initiatives, and it is in that capacity that she has written this reflection. The author would like to thank Michael Bell, Brian Dawson, Hollie Gill and Thomas Rogers for their comments on this article.
11. International Council of Archivists, Op. cit., p. 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Michael McKernan, *Here Is their Spirit: A History of the Australian War Memorial 1917–1990*, University of Queensland Press in association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1991, p. xii.
14. Here the term 'First Nations' is used to refer to the First Nations peoples of all nations. Within this article, the term 'Indigenous' refers to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, South Sea Islander and Papuan peoples. This is consistent with Australian War Memorial use of the term 'Indigenous', arising from Australia's military history, to refer to the Indigenous peoples of territories that have been administered and/or occupied by Australian forces. When referring to specific communities or language groups, the Memorial seeks guidance from those in authority about respectful and appropriate language protocols.
15. Geoffrey Blainey, Letter to Robin Wade, 2 April 1979, AWM315 234/003/007 02. McKernan, Op. cit., p. 293.
16. WDL Ride's suggestions for 'Primary Displays' and 'Themes within topics of Primary Display', circulated to the Memorial Executive, July 1979, AWM315/234/007 03. Throughout this reflection, for simplicity, the word 'Council' is used to refer to the Australian War Memorial Council, noting that this has formerly been constituted as the 'Board'.

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18. Hill, *Ibid.* McKernan, *Op. cit.*, p. 294.
19. Elaine Darling, 'Submission Concerning the Depiction of Aboriginal Wars at the Australian War Memorial by Mrs Elaine Darling', undated, circa 1984: AWM315/271/004/100. Mrs Darling served as the Member for Lilley, Queensland, an inner metropolitan seat in Brisbane, for 12 years from October 1980 to February 1993, and on the Australian War Memorial Council from 1983 to 1987: *Parliamentary Handbook*, available at: <https://handbook.aph.gov.au/Parliamentarian/UD4>, accessed 17 February 2026.
20. 'Extract from Minutes for Council Meeting held on 12 November 1984', AWM315/271/004/100.
21. M. Bell and B. Dawson, 'The Australian War Memorial's Journey to a Broader and Deeper Representation of the Frontier Wars in the Memorial's Galleries', AIATSIS Summit 2023, Noongar Boodja Perth, 6 June 2023.
22. Nelson, *Op. cit.*
23. Beazley, *Op. cit.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. International Council of Archivists, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Bell and Dawson (2023), *Op. cit.* The paper further canvassed 'the exhibitions, installations, publications and commemorative sculptural works that have been developed to acknowledge and commemorate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service and the impact of frontier wars'.
28. Bell and Dawson (2023), *Ibid.*
29. Bell and Dawson (2025), *Op. cit.*
30. While Memorial staff do not follow any one particular model of trauma-informed practice, they learn from workshops such as those run by the Australian Society of Archivists or by the Blue Knot Foundation.
31. This work and preliminary findings were described in M. Farmer, 'Truth-Telling and Future-Shaping Exhibitions', AIATSIS Summit 2025, Garramilla Darwin, Australia, 4 June 2025.
32. International Council of Archivists, *Op. cit.*, p. 2, which specifies 'fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter'.
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35. *Ibid.*
36. Available at: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>, accessed 12 February 2026.
37. S.C. Duckett White, '(Flint)lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels: A Modern Military Interpretation of Frontier Economic Warfare', *Journal of Historical Encounters*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2023, pp. 52–62.
38. *Ibid.*
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40. Kate Warren, Anthea Gunn and Mikala Tai, 'Artists, Institutions, Publics: Contemporary Responses to Conflict', published in the 2020 *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Special Issue: War, Art and Visual Culture, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14434318.2020.1764227>, accessed 22 April 2026.
41. 'Mr C.E.W. Bean's View', 1923 AWM 93 12/12/6; C.E.W. Bean, 'Note on the Principles Governing the Exhibition of Relics at the Australian War Memorial', 1953, AWM315 328/001/004.
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REFLECTION ARTICLE

A Reflection from the Digital Preservation Coalition on Implementing the Tandanya Declaration in the Rapid Assessment Model

Jenny Mitcham  and Robin Wright 

Digital Preservation Coalition, York, UK and Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration provided important guidance to the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) in the latest revision of the DPC Rapid Assessment model (DPC RAM). The DPC is a collaborative global charity whose members work together to bring about a sustainable future for digital assets. One of its key resources is a maturity modelling tool for digital preservation – the RAM. This reflection explains how elements of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration were incorporated into the latest version of the DPC RAM and led to the DPC centring and promoting a more ethical approach to digital preservation within RAM.

Keywords: *Digital preservation; Maturity modelling; Ethics; Good practice; Indigenous Data Sovereignty*

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) is a global community of organisations working together to bring about a sustainable future for digital assets. Our members are brought together by a commitment to developing and sharing expertise on how to implement effective long-term preservation. The DPC provides support for the digital preservation community, and its resources focus on supporting good practice in digital preservation. The DPC established an office in Naarm, Melbourne, Australia, in 2020 and now has 28 members across Australasia and Asia-Pacific.

In 2023, the Australian Federal Government released its new National Cultural Policy ‘Revive’.¹ The report aimed to direct the next 5 years of Australian cultural development and contained a national commitment to ‘placing the stories and cultures of First Nations communities at the heart of everything we do’.² The DPC saw that digital preservation would play an important role in delivering this cultural commitment. The work of First Nations academics, researchers and practitioners³ had also drawn our attention to the challenges faced by memory organisations established on colonial models of archival practice when dealing with Indigenous material. The DPC was concerned that these practices should not enter the emerging

*Correspondence: Jenny Mitcham, Email: Jenny.Mitcham@dpconline.org

digital world unchallenged and was committed to listening to our Indigenous colleagues to learn about the changes needed in our own practices and across the wider digital preservation environment to address these problems. It was also recognised that, as a legacy of colonialism, many DPC members outside Australia held Indigenous cultural materials in their collections, and thus we had an opportunity to influence curatorial practices beyond Australia.

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (Tandanya Declaration)⁴ had been released by the International Council on Archives (ICA) Expert Matters Indigenous Group in 2019. It called for a ‘remodeling of traditional archival principles’ and for organisations to ‘challenge colonial ideologies in the archival setting’. The requirements of the Tandanya Declaration and the principles asserted in the 2018 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit Communique⁵ were increasingly being incorporated into policies and protocols adopted by Australian cultural institutions.⁶

In 2023, the DPC held a series of digital preservation workshops with member organisations in Australia and New Zealand. In a workshop at the offices of the Queensland State Archives (QSA) in Brisbane, there was a panel session with a presentation by Dr Rose Barrowcliffe,⁷ the inaugural First Nations Archives Advisor at the QSA, who was then leading a key change to archival processes and providing access to Indigenous material within the organisation. The presentation by Dr Barrowcliffe was an opportunity for the DPC to listen to what was being done to incorporate Indigenous voices into archival practice and consider the place of digital preservation resources within this process. As a result, the DPC decided it would begin a process to address these concerns and the call for action contained in the Tandanya Declaration as part of the planned 2024 revision of its key digital preservation tool, the Rapid Assessment Model (RAM).

Introducing DPC’s Rapid Assessment Model

The Digital Preservation Coalition’s Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM) is a resource providing information and practical direction, which enables organisations to conduct a self-assessment of their digital preservation capability. It was developed in 2019 as part of a collaborative project between the DPC and the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). A key element of the project was to develop a methodology for measuring progress as the NDA established digital preservation policies and workflows. To do this, the DPC developed a widely applicable digital preservation maturity model called the RAM. The model was built on a Digital Preservation Maturity Model originally published by Adrian Brown in 2013.⁸ It is divided into 11 sections. The first six describe organisational capabilities (covering issues such as organisational viability, policy and strategy and IT capability), and the last five describe service level capabilities (focusing on the more technical elements of digital preservation, such as metadata management, bitstream preservation and discovery and access). For each of these sections, the user of the model is encouraged to reflect on their maturity and assign a level, which ranges from ‘minimal awareness’ to ‘optimised’. The resource includes downloadable worksheets, provides examples and links to further information and enables users to output visualisations of their results.

The first version of the RAM was complete and launched in 2019 at the iPRES conference in Amsterdam.⁹ It was very much a collaborative community effort; however, it was recognised that the model would need to evolve over time as the community grew and good practice in digital preservation continued to emerge. In 2021, after DPC RAM had been in circulation and use for over a year, it was revised and updated to version 2. The edits focused on increasing clarity and consistency and adding more examples to the model.¹⁰ The model was expanded to include new areas such as environmental sustainability and user needs. The *Legal basis* section

was extended to include adherence to ethical codes as well as laws and regulations, but the title of the section was not altered to reflect this.

DPC RAM and the Tandanya Declaration

Having a presence in Australasia and Asia-Pacific meant that the DPC was increasingly exposed to issues influencing archival practice in the region. The DPC always hoped that this would challenge and change our understanding of good practice for digital preservation. A series of visits to Australia and Aotearoa, New Zealand, by DPC staff and the growing influence of Australasian members expanded our understanding of the importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty¹¹ and the associated issues faced by archives and other collecting organisations in the region. The panel discussion held at the QSA in 2023, exploring the impact of the Tandanya Declaration, led to the DPC having an improved understanding of the issues and the needs of Indigenous communities.

Other activities and initiatives, taking place outside of Australasia, reinforced and added to the picture. In particular, the work of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada in preserving and providing access to records relating to the history and legacy of the Canadian residential school program, which was awarded the Research Data Alliance Award for the Most Outstanding Digital Preservation Initiative in Commerce, Industry and the Third Sector at the Digital Preservation Awards in 2022.¹² This project created a digital infrastructure and work plan for the preservation of its digital holdings to make these materials meaningfully available to Indigenous communities in support of the rights and dignity of Indigenous peoples.

As a result of these insights, the DPC recognised a significant gap in our resources in relation to the latest thinking on Indigenous Data Sovereignty. The wider industry discussion around the Tandanya Declaration and the importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Australia and Aotearoa, New Zealand, showed us that despite the inclusion of ethical issues in version 2 of the RAM, there was a need for further development and a stronger impetus to address concerns around archival processes and First Nations content, access and representation within organisations engaged in digital preservation.

The DPC became aware that insights from the Tandanya Declaration could help to provide not only guidance on how to do digital preservation better but also on how to improve the tools we use to evaluate how well we are doing digital preservation, particularly the DPC RAM, which was due for revision again in 2024.

An Ethical Review of RAM

The methodology used when revising DPC RAM to version 3 was different from the previous revision, with the Tandanya Declaration providing the biggest influence on the process. The DPC team drew extensively on the wording of the Tandanya Declaration to revise the resource, considering the problems identified in the Declaration around existing archival practices based on colonial assumptions about preservation, description and access to knowledge and culture.

Initial work focused on a thorough review of the Tandanya Declaration, taking each of the points in turn and considering whether there were learnings that could be incorporated into RAM. The CARE principles for Indigenous Data Governance provided additional input into this work.¹³

As work progressed on a further revision of DPC RAM to align it with the Tandanya Declaration, it became apparent that this wouldn't be a straightforward mapping. DPC RAM provides a broad and high-level framework to articulate what digital preservation good practice looks like and enables organisations to reflect on their current capabilities and set targets to improve. However, it does not include all the finer details of implementing every aspect

of digital preservation. When revising the model, it was necessary to strike the right balance between a high-level framework and precise detail, concisely articulating the most important concepts and themes rather than trying to incorporate every element.

Another challenge for us is related to one of the original guiding principles of RAM – that RAM should be applicable to any organisation with content of long-term value, regardless of sector or geographic location. DPC RAM is used around the world in many different contexts, and we worked to generalise and translate the principles of the Tandanya Declaration to ensure they would be widely applicable around the world without diluting their value. For example, some organisations (such as the NDA for whom RAM was initially designed) may not specifically deal with Indigenous Data Sovereignty in their daily activities. But their work is still likely to relate to marginalised community groups or other parties, and they will benefit from a framework that supports them to work ethically and respectfully with these groups and their digital materials. The ethical review of DPC RAM using the Tandanya Declaration as an inspiration has helped us to build the human perspective into DPC RAM in a way that can be applied widely, regardless of context or geographic location. As Paul Wheatley has explained ‘We wanted to specifically reference the preservation and management of content created by or about Indigenous people, but at the same time also make the RAM examples relevant to content by or about many other communities around the world. Particularly those communities that have also had their voices silenced or misrepresented by wider society’.¹⁴

As noted above, the previous revision of RAM had expanded the *Legal basis* capability section of RAM to include ethical issues as well as legal ones. But as we moved towards creating version 3, with the Tandanya Declaration as a guide, we knew this section would need further development. One of the key changes of this revision became a fuller and more obvious embedding of ethical issues into this section, reflected in the change of title from *Legal basis* to *Legal and ethical*. This was perhaps the most noticeable change to the model, ensuring that ethical issues were more prominent within that capability. There were, however, many more changes with the inclusion of new and revised examples across a range of RAM capabilities. As well as the *Legal and ethical* section, there were also edits and additions to the *Policy and strategy*, *Bitstream preservation*, *Metadata management* and *Discovery and access* capabilities. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss all the changes to RAM, which stemmed from this review, but by way of illustration, this paper includes some examples of changes made and the direct influence of the Tandanya Declaration on this revision.

Several changes were made to the *Legal and ethical* section of RAM to align it more closely with the broad themes of the Tandanya Declaration. These include the need to identify parties with legal rights and responsibilities or other forms of custodianship of digital content (e.g., Indigenous rights or community ownership) and the importance of trusted and collaborative relationships with custodians of Indigenous or community content.

In the *Policy and strategy* capability of RAM, a new example was included under the Optimised section of the model as follows:

‘A process has been established to assess, plan and return content (e.g. where ownership or custodianship is questioned).’

This was directly influenced by Section 2b of the Tandanya Declaration, stating that ‘the process of defending intangible cultural heritage must be placed in the stewardship of the elders, knowledge keepers and Indigenous representatives from the communities where the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills” originated, not the nation states responsible for the assimilation and erasure of their cultures; this recognition includes the replevin of archival materials when requested by the originating community’.

At the optimised level of the *Metadata management*, a new capability was created as follows:

‘Content description of, or about, Indigenous or marginalized communities is authored in collaboration with them.’

This was a response to Section 3b of the Declaration, noting that ‘Indigenous social authority must participate as collaborators and co-authors in the description of records in the custody of public archival institutions whenever those records directly concern the identity of a particular Indigenous community’.

The *Discovery and access* capability of RAM also included a number of new examples, recognising that as noted in Section 4 of the Declaration, access to archival records is ‘a socially mediated process and a conceptual site of conflict between European and Indigenous ways of knowing’. Section 4c of the Declaration recognises that ‘access to records containing traditional Indigenous cultural expression, sacred belief, social and legal knowledge must recognise and apply the social, legal and cultural protocols of the affiliated communities. This should be done in consultation with the affiliated community’. The *Discovery and access* capability of RAM was therefore edited to reflect this, with a new example included at the Managed level of RAM stating that ‘Access to content of, or about, Indigenous or other communities is informed by relevant social, legal and cultural protocols and is mediated in consultation with the community’.

The fact that these revisions touched so many sections of the model showed the relevance of ethical considerations across multiple areas of digital preservation practice and strengthened the overall messages that arose from the DPC’s engagement with the Tandanya Declaration.

Once we had a clear idea of the proposed changes to DPC RAM, we consulted with regional and Indigenous representatives to ensure that we had interpreted and translated the principles correctly. We were very grateful to receive constructive feedback from Indigenous community representatives, and the model subsequently went through a final round of revisions with the DPC community in response to the comments received.¹⁵

Conclusion

The expansion of the DPC in Australasia since the initial development of DPC RAM has provided the DPC and the wider international digital preservation community with an opportunity to learn and benefit from emerging archival good practice from Australia and Aotearoa, New Zealand. The DPC’s 2024 revision of RAM has translated and generalised concepts from the Tandanya Declaration to centre a more ethical approach to digital preservation, foregrounding the more human aspects of our work. A new understanding of the importance of social and cultural rights and responsibilities and consultation with Indigenous and other marginalised communities is now included as a key part of the RAM.

Currently available in nine different languages, we know that DPC RAM is used widely across the global digital preservation community. Through the inclusion of ethical considerations derived from the Tandanya Declaration, users of the model are encouraged to consider how the guidance derived from the declaration can be applied to the communities that they work with. We anticipate that digital preservation activities across the world will be fairer, more ethical and more human centred as a result.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Paul Wheatley for leading the ethical review of DPC RAM and the Indigenous and regional community representatives, including

Associate Professor Kirsten Thorpe, Ms Kathleen Smeaton and Ms Tui Raven who kindly provided feedback on our proposed edits to the model.

Notes on Contributors

Jenny Mitcham is Chief Digital Preservation Officer at the Digital Preservation Coalition. She works closely with the members of the Coalition on their digital preservation challenges, as well as organising events and producing publications and other resources to help the community move forward with their digital preservation goals. As one of the original co-authors of the DPC's Rapid Assessment Model, co-chair of the NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation Steering Group and a member of the CoreTrustSeal Assembly of Reviewers, she has a particular interest in certification and maturity modelling. She is interested in finding ways of lowering the barriers to digital preservation for those who are just getting started in this field, as well as promoting and encouraging good practice. Social media: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jenny-mitcham-205b406a/>.

Robin Wright is the Head Australasia and Asia-Pacific for the Digital Preservation Coalition and has a particular interest in the intersection of copyright law and digital technologies. She has worked in libraries and legal services in the tertiary sector and as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Media and Communications Law at Melbourne Law School. Robin has managed several digital research projects involving GLAM and educational organisations, is on the board of the Australian Digital Alliance and is Co-Lead of Creative Commons Australia. Social media: www.linkedin.com/in/robin-wright-8560a351.

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ARTICLE

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

Jamila J. Ghaddar^{1,2,*}, Ana Roeschley³, Mariam Karim⁴, Hanine Shehadeh⁵,
Rima Ghanem⁶, Fatima el-Bazzal⁷ and Rami Zurayk⁸

¹Archival Information & Digital Humanities, Media Studies Department, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands; ²Founding Director, Archives & Digital Media Lab, Beirut, Lebanon; ³Archival Studies Program, University of North Texas, Denton, USA; ⁴Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South, Northwestern University in Qatar, Doha, Qatar; ⁵New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE; ⁶Archives and Digital Media Lab, Beirut, Lebanon; ⁷Lebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon; ⁸Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon

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.*

*Correspondence: Dr. Jamila J. Ghaddar, director@archiveslab.org

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 colonality 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 eurocentrism 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.

Notes on contributors

Dr. Jamila J. Ghaddar is a South Lebanese archivist, historian, and educator. She is Assistant Professor in Archival Information & Digital Humanities at the University of Amsterdam, founding director of the Archives & Digital Media Lab, and a Research Affiliate at the American University of Beirut's School of Architecture & Design. Ghaddar serves as Co-Chair of the International Council on Archives' Palestine Archives Task Force; and Chair of the MELA's ARM Training & Advocacy Group. Ghaddar serves as a co-lead with Dr. Rami Zurayk and Dr. Hanine Shehadeh of the project, *Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza's Genocide and the War on Lebanon*.

Dr. Ana Roeschley is Assistant Professor and Director of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Science at the University of North Texas. She is the founder and Co-Director of two research labs: the Archives Learning Lab – dedicated to investigating the relationships between people and archives in an ever-changing world; and the Computational Humanities and Information Literacy Lab – an interdisciplinary lab focused on the exploration of social and technological issues impacting human culture, heritage, and the arts and humanities. Her research on personal and participatory archiving practices, as well as her own experiences as a refugee, led Roeschley to her role as the Principal Investigator of *Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs (RoR)*, an applied

research study aiming to close gaps on the documentary and archival needs of refugees in the United States. Through her work with RoR, Roeschley co-founded the Our Refugee Stories Archive, a community-based archival initiative to create digital collections for and by refugees, as well as openly available resources on best practices for archiving personal records for personal use.

Dr. Mariam Karim is a Global Postdoctoral Scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South at Northwestern University in Qatar (#IAS_NUQ) and the founder of the digital humanities project, Nasawiyyah: Arab Media History. She is a member of the Steering Council of the Archives & Digital Media Lab where she also serves as a Feminist Histories & Archival Fellow. Karim completed her PhD at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information (iSchool) and the Women and Gender Studies Institute (WGS). She served as an inaugural graduate fellow at the University of Toronto's Critical Digital Humanities Initiative (CDHI) and was the recipient of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) doctoral award. Her research agenda explores Arab Feminist Media from the 20th century. She situates contemporary uses of digital media through historical inquiry and studies Arabic mass-media in the context of media imperialism and colonialism. Read her work in *Communication, Culture & Critique* and *First Monday*.

Dr. Hanine Shehadeh is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Humanities at NY Abu Dhabi. Her research focuses on the intersections between settler colonialism, climate change, and new media. She is deconstructing the global framing of climate change and environmental justice, exploring how these issues are intricately tied to the settler-colonial reality in Palestine. Her academic work interrogates how new media landscapes can reinforce or resist digital colonialism, particularly in relation to indigenous identities and colonial subjugation. She contributes to a collaborative project with the Center for Advanced Mathematical Sciences at AUB, examining the dynamics of settler colonialism and its socio-political implications. Dr. Shehadeh earned her Ph.D. in Intellectual History from the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. Her dissertation, which explored the historical construction of the 'dishonorable Jew' in European Christian antisemitism and Zionism, was nominated for Columbia University's Salo and Jeanette Baron Prize in Jewish Studies. She is also a recipient of Columbia University's Humanities War and Peace Initiative award for her work on affect formation in settler-colonial societies.

Rima Ghanem is a Lebanese archivist. She holds a Master in Archival Studies (MAS) from the University of British Columbia and a Master in Tourism and Cultural Management from the Saint Joseph University of Beirut. Her previous work experience includes a variety of roles within the heritage and cultural sector: she served as Research Assistant at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, as Cultural Sector Research Analyst at a tech company specialized in information management and heritage software development, and as Lead Archivist for the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. Rima currently works in archives and information management in the humanitarian sector.

Fatima el-Bazzal is a doctoral researcher at the Bibliotheca Arabica project (2024–). She holds a Master of Arts in Information Sciences and a Bachelor of Arts in Library and Information Management from the Lebanese University. She has extensive library and archival experience, having worked as a Metadata and Reference Librarian at the Lebanese National Library, where she contributed to cataloging, policy development, and the relocation of the library's collection. Fatima has also participated in archival projects like the Virtual Museum of Censorship with MARCH Lebanon and the Feminist Library of the Knowledge Workshop, as well as a project on the personal library and archive of the late Professor Hassan Chalabi, in Beirut. Her Ph.D. project focuses on the manuscript heritage of the Jabal 'Amil

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.

Dr. Rami Zurayk is a professor at the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the American University of Beirut, Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management Department. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) of the Committee of World Food Security (CFS) from 2015 to 2019, and a commissioner on the EAT-Lancet commission on sustainable diets from sustainable food systems. He is a founding member of the Arab Food Sovereignty Network, an advisory board member of SEAL (Social and Economic Action for Lebanon), and an advisory board member for the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development. He has worked and written extensively on the Arab World, focusing on the political ecology of Arab food security and its linkages with the agrarian question. His latest work on the subject includes: *Crisis and Conflict in Agriculture* (CABI, 2018), *The Agrarian Roots of the Arab Uprisings* (with Anne Gough, Cambridge, 2014); *Control Food, Control People: The Struggle for Food Security in Gaza* (with Anne Gough, IPS, 2013) *Food, Farming and Freedom: Sowing the Arab Spring* (Just World Books, 2011). He obtained his BSc and MSc from the American University of Beirut and his DPhil from Oxford University.

Notes

1. bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, Routledge, New York, NY, 2003, p. xiv.
2. The introduction is written by Dr. JJ Ghaddar, while the remainder of the article incorporates collective writing, editing, ideas, work and translation by all the authors. Please cite the authors in the order listed.
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5. hooks, p. xiv.
6. The Declaration was prepared by the International Council of Archives' Expert Group on Indigenous Matters and launched in October 2019. It calls on the jurisdictional archives of the world ensure that Indigenous peoples are central to understanding, accessing, and caring for collections that pertain to them.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
10. Jodi Melamed, 'Racial Capitalism', *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2015, pp. 76–85; see also Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011.
11. hooks, p. xv.
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 14. Kuecker et al., p. 10.
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