Building Critical Decolonial Digital Archives: Recognizing Complexities to Reimagine Possibilities

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of theoretical and practical methods and approaches of my ongoing critical decolonial digital archiving research project in a Rhetoric and Writing Studies PhD program. The article is written through the intersections and interstices of theory and praxis of Critical Digital Humanities, Literary Theory, and Cultural Studies and it introduces my research which is conducted on two levels: theorizing the performance of digital archiving and building a digital archive. The article insists upon making digital archiving practices and theories critically aware, contextually situated, and culturally responsive. By discussing challenges, negotiations, and strategies involved in the act of decolonial digital archiving, this article provides a framework for other researchers interested in building digital archives through post/decolonial orientations and invites them to recognize complexities and reimagine possibilities of digital archiving work.

Introduction

This article argues that the methodical practices of archiving and digital archiving began as powerful corporate, educational, or/and research entities. Therefore, archiving requires a careful, reflective, critical, and non-hierarchical inter/outerdisciplinary engagement among academics and non-academics to decolonize digital archives. This collaborative engagement allows researchers and practitioners of digital archiving to be aware of inquiries regarding an agency to access, study, produce, create, build, and disseminate information and knowledge about the cultures of non-mainstream Others through digital spaces in general and digital archives in particular. By discussing the complexities involved in this specific performance of digital archiving, my article aims to invite students, teachers, and researchers to create collaborative ways to reimagine and restrategize the humble and open-ended rhetorical praxes of decolonizing digital archives. I call such practices critical digital archiving.

The performance of critical digital archiving does not pretend to offer one final solution or approach to decolonize digital archives. Rather, critical digital archiving requires a performance of techne–which points to "a heterogeneous history of practices performed in the interstices between intention and subjection, choice and necessity, activity and passivity" (Beisecker, 1992, p. 156). Critical digital archiving encompasses a poststructuralist approach of looking into the

history of decolonial digital archiving performed through the non/dominant non/mainstream spaces without hierarchical binaric monumentalizing of one over another. Because as we do not have access to the one final definite way of building an ethical decolonial digital archives, we have to train ourselves to learn from every effort made towards it, from a heterogeneous history of practices. That is why, the critical digital archiving practice requires one to work through the intersections of inter/outerdisciplinary methodologies, theories, and praxes. And on that urgent needfulness of an inter/outerdisciplinary collaborative dialogue, Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) writes, "[N]ow, more than ever, we need experts in the social sciences and digital humanities to engage in dialogue with activists and organizers, engineers, designers, information technologists, and public-policy makers before blunt artificial-intelligence decision making trumps nuanced human decision making" (p. 8). Therefore, as acknowledged by Noble, these intersections and interstices of inter/outerdisciplinary methodologies, theories, and praxes are opportunities to study digital archives in multiple ways and through multiple vantage points. To do so, it is crucial to recognize that critical digital archiving requires not only technical capability to build archives in digital spaces, but also the theoretical enquiries about a digital 'product', what happens while building it, and the rhetorical ecologies that give birth to certain product and processes.

Digital archiving performed through historically marginalized and oppressed locations is radically non-linear, because it is not something that is performed entirely from outside of the oppressive system. Rather critical digital archiving uses the language, medium, platform, and tools of the system/institution to decenter the same system/institution. It critiques colonial/patriarchival (re)presentation via the act of archivization itself (Kurtz, 2006; L'Internationale, 2016). To further elaborate on this odd affinity between postcolonialism and archiving, I quote Matthew Kurtz (2006). He writes, archiving is "a literal re-centring of material for the construction and contestation of knowledge, whereas postcolonialism often works toward a figurative decentring of that same material" (p. 25). My research project engages with such complex questions to exhibit the nonlinear journey of performing decolonial archives and to envision possible futures for digital archives as a location of resistance.

Thus, in this article, I present the synopsis of negotiations, challenges, and strategies involved in theorizing and building a decolonial digital archive. For that, I will first provide a conceptual and methodological overview of my research project and then present a brief autobiographic account, which is dynamically at play while working in this project and at the same time, a crucial aspect of the exigency of the project. After that, I will engage in the critical inquiry of theory and praxis of archiving and digital archiving and explain why I am naming my methodology critical digital archiving by presenting my experiences while building the prototype of my digital archive. While doing so, I will offer the discussion of complexities involved in the decolonializing digital archive as a way towards strategizing possibilities.

Methodological Overview of Critical Digital Archiving Project

In my critical digital archiving project, I study the space of digital archiving through postcolonial orientations by engaging in conversations with scholarship in the Digital Humanities, Literary/Critical Theory, and Cultural Studies. While doing that, I venture into this digital space by engaging in a performance of creating a digital archive of my street photography in Kathmandu (non-West) from the physical location of US academia (West)[1]. Methodologically, I relate my research project with what Gayatri Spivak said about deconstruction in one of her interviews: "That's what de-construction is about, right? It's not just destruction. It's also construction. It's critical intimacy, not critical distance. So you actually speak from inside. That's deconstruction" (qtd. in Paulson, 2016, "So you see this book"). My attempt in my research project of building and studying critical digital archiving is to perform this critical intimacy. Rather than studying the digital archives only from a distance, I interact with this process from within by building an archive there and documenting and theorizing the process and revealing how the meanings that are being constructed are already under erasure or already deconstructed. This method allows me to find out and exhibit the possible narratives that usually remain hidden under the surface and which are accessible to a certain extent only after that critical intimacy. I find Natasha N. Jones, Kristen R. Moore, and Rebecca Walton's (2016) discussion of antenarrative quite apt here. Jones et al. delineate, "Part methodology and part practice, an antenarrative allows the work of the field to be reseen, forges new paths forward, and emboldens the field's objectives to unabashedly embrace social justice and inclusivity as part of its core (rather than marginal or optional) narrative" (p. 212). And this antenarrative of the act of critical decolonial digital archiving, as mentioned earlier, is radically nonlinear in nature because of its situatedness in the post/de/colonial and de/patriarchal circumstances. It is the constant interplay of complexities, precarities, negotiations, and affordances (and definitely not in this order).

Thus, in my critical digital archiving project, the critical intimacy and antenarrative are intimately intertwined with the constant reflection of my own situatedness in the project, which is largely shaped by my being-in-the-world and by post/de/colonial and de/patriarchal circumstances. Which is why, I also work through critical autobioethographic framework. While theorizing and building the prototype of my digital archive with post/decolonial and feminist orientations, I reflect upon my own situatedness/positionality in this project and other undeniable factors that are shaping my project simultaneously. This reflection will allow readers and researchers to recognize the situatedness of my project (or any project for that matter) in particular and the technology, digitalism, and design in general. Regarding the significance of such reflection upon positionality, Natasha N. Jones (2016) writes, "narratives not only allow other voices and points of view to be heard and understood, but it pushes the

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[1] The prototype of my digital archive is available at http://cassacda.com/

researcher and scholar to examine his or her own positionality and enactment of power and agency in a reflexive manner" (p. 351). I propose this unrelenting critical reflexivity as one of the ways to decolonize the digital archive: performing critical examination of process, narrative, and positionality. As an initiation of that, in my next section, I briefly narrate one of the episodes I encountered after moving to the US to give context to my critical digital archiving project.

Exigency for Critical Decolonial Digital Archiving Project

In this section, I will provide one particular incident to introduce and contextualize myself and my project, though this was not the only incident that triggered my critical decolonial digital archiving project. It happened in my first semester in my PhD program and during my second month living in the United States. I was waiting for the campus shuttle to get back to my apartment. Just then, a guy came up to me and started talking. After some casual exchanges, he asked,

> "Where are you from?"
> "Nepal," I said.
> "Where is that?" He asked.

I felt like he had to know Nepal without any further references. Then, I remembered that there are countries I don't know either. Because "no one" talks about them. [The question here is also who is/are "no one?"].

> And I said, "It's in South Asia."
> "You mean Philippines?" He asked.
> "Isn't that a different country? Maybe you wanna Google Nepal," I told him.

At this point, I just wanted to be done with this conversation.

> "Yeah, you are right. I will," he said.

I smiled and turned my head to the street, continuing to wait for the bus. And right then, something even more dreadful occurred to me. I remembered what Google might say about Nepal aside from providing some tourist guide kind of thing. Earthquake? Flood? Chhaupadi system? Discrimination against women? Some local "exotic" rituals? And so on.

Well, all of these statements are true. Who is denying that? But is that all that's true about Nepal? What about other multiple narratives that are easily overshadowed by the dominant and much disseminated algorithmic exotic or damaging narratives? I feared that this person from the bus stop might Google Nepal and start feeling sorry for me the way I never felt. I might feel sorry for myself in many ways, but not in the way Google would prepare a 'stranger' to feel sorry for me.

I hastily turned towards the stranger and said, "Actually, I don't recommend you googling. Google doesn't tell you much about the places you don't know and wanna know more about." I knew he wouldn't Google anyways.

Perhaps, he did not even remember my country's name anymore. But from then on, I knew that I would never again say to a stranger, "Why don't you google Nepal?"

I always knew there was something 'wrong' with Google. But the representation of Nepali "culture" in digital spaces started becoming a major concern for me after I moved to the United States. It felt like post/decolonialism and its debates started making much more sense to me after my move. People would already conclude things about me based on my skin color and the way I speak English in an "un-English" way. Why would or what makes someone conclude things about me in an absolute manner before even waiting to know me? What does it mean or why should it even mean something to be a Nepali woman, for instance? These questions are so pertinent to me after coming to the United States. Why should it mean absolutely something to be someone from some place? I also remember some people being surprised when they learned this is my first time out of my country. They comment, "It does not look like this is your first time. You are so global." I still do not know what that means. Why is it hard to conceive that being global (whatever that means) is also a Nepali way, among many other ways?

These questions and experiences and, equally important, the lack of significant number of digital archives about Nepal built by Nepali either on a personal, institutional, or semi-institutional level prompted me to undertake this particular project. The first digital archives that I encountered while researching about already available digital archives about Nepal were built by westerners and archived in western institutional online locations. For instance, Digital Archaeology Foundation (n. d.), 2015 Nepal Earthquake (n. d.), The Thak Archive (Macfarlane & Harrison, n. d.), and Birds of Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp, n. d.). In these digital archives, the knowledge that is produced and disseminated about Nepal has a very simplistic dimension: exotic and/or damage-based. However unintentional and well-intentioned they are, these digital archives about Nepal are no different than what Edward Said (1978) aptly remarked vis-à-vis Description de l'Égypte, the "great collective appropriation of one country by another" (p. 84). These digital archival epistemological-ontological performances cannot be separated from Said's interpretation of Orientalism as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it," which in short means "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). Nepal is produced in these Western institutional spaces and that Nepal is disseminated across media.

Overwhelmed by these experiences, I decided to study theories and praxes of digital archives and to build a critical digital archive about Nepal to problematize simplistic portrayals of Nepal, to demonstrate the situatedness of these epistemic performances, and to make it evident that every structure of meaning is already full of gaps and fissures. My desire to create this archive is stirred by my interest in understanding these questions as intimately as possible: Who produces knowledge and what kinds of knowledge are produced the most, specifically about Non-Western worlds? And what kinds of knowledge are disseminated far and wide? These questions cannot be understood or answered through disciplinary hubris or constraints. They need folks from different non/academic locations and disciplines to come together, raise questions, problematize normative narratives about digitalism which is accessible only to powerful institutional locations, complicate simplistic representative portrayals about Others, and work together to transform the face of digital rhetoric and composition through/toward ethical epistemological performance. This kind of demand and desire for interdisciplinary methodologies in research and study is particularly essential to understand the shifting epistemological-ontological-axiological ecologies of knowledge production and dissemination.

To give a hint of that shift in as few words as possible, I quote Jentery Sayers' reading of Amy Earhart's works. Earhart teaches Africana Studies at Texas A&M University and works with digital humanities. This quote provides a glimpse of what is involved in that shift toward digital archiving. Regarding Earhart's enquiries and studies sprouting from the conversations with both of her academic practices (Africana Studies and Digital Humanities), Sayers (2016) writes,

> [S]he convincingly shows how the vexed relations between race, representation, and digital technologies must be addressed through multiple layers of project development, from support (e.g., grants), digitization (e.g., encoding manuscripts), and metadata (e.g., Dublin Core descriptions) to expression (e.g., visualizing data), narrative (e.g., in online scholarly exhibits), discovery (e.g., through search engines), and storage (e.g., sustaining the shelf life of web-based resources). (para. 22)

I bring this quote to draw attention to the complexity that archiving constitutes once it reaches from the physical domain to digital. With that movement, archiving becomes the space that manifests intricate interrelationships among financial capital; the interest/purpose/demand of that institution that has the power to decide whether or not to offer those grants; metadata styles (what/how to describe archived artefacts); another level of digital/technological technicalities once composition and data storage move in digital space; (lack of) 'sufficient' digital 'literacies' needed to fulfill the purpose of digital archiving; and the issues of production-distribution-accessibility-usability.

Regarding this shifting epistemological-ontological-axiological ecologies of knowledge production and dissemination, David Berry (2012) writes in

"Understanding Digital Humanities," "it is becoming more and more evident that research is increasingly being mediated through digital technology" and this shift in "mediation is slowly beginning to change what it means to undertake research, affecting both the epistemologies and ontologies that underlie a research programme" (p. 1). And this context must be understood differently, not as an opposite of physical-analogue space but as a space that is shaped by and shaping the physical space. And the way the "cultural artifacts" are translated, represented, archived also highlights the necessity, especially for the researchers, to theorize "the digital 'folding' of memory and archives, whereby one is able to approach culture in a radically new way" (Berry, 2012, p. 2). I am naming that new way critical digital archiving. But before discussing that, I briefly offer different ideologies and histories behind theories and practices of archiving and digital archiving in the following section. Because, like Ellen Cushman (2013) recognizes, there is a necessity for scholars "to understand the troubled and troubling roots of archives if they're to understand the instrumental, historical, and cultural significance of the pieces therein" (p. 116). Decolonial digital archival scholars must understand the institutional history behind archives and museums to understand this present institutional investment on cataloguing and archiving the culture, history, people, and countries of Other worlds.

What Is (or Why) Archiving and Digital Archiving?

Discussing the historical development of nineteenth and twentieth-century "[m]useum, galleries, and, more intermittently exhibitions," Tony Bennett (1995) writes:

> [They] played a pivotal role in the formation of the modern state and are fundamental to its conception as, among other things, a set of educative and civilizing agencies. Since the late nineteenth century, they have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all developed nation-states and have proved remarkably influential cultural technologies in the degree to which they have recruited the interest and participation of their citizenries. (p. 66)

While reading this, we cannot overlook the close ties between colonialism-orientalism, the forceful beginning of corporate and institutional archival practices, and the ideology behind the necessity of cataloguing and archiving of Other people, cultures and places. I will continue this discussion by first bringing in a very interesting definition of archives offered by an English historian Vivian Hunter Galbraith in 1948. He writes that archives are "the secretions of an organism" (p. 3). This seemingly innocent definition also reveals a lot about the colonial/imperial rhetoric of archives. The definition of the archive offered by an English historian in 1948 tries to make archives appear natural, neutral, unbiased, and untainted by human intervention. So, what this metaphorical description of archives means is that what they portray as their own culture and Others' culture is unmediated, objective, and organic.

A similar sort of philosophy regarding archives can be palpated in Kate Theimer's (2012) definition. She says, "[W]hat constitutes an 'archives' is, consciously or not, a debate over the importance of authenticity… the preservation of context" (para. 21). And she also writes, "Archivists select and preserve 'archives' . . . which is to say aggregates of materials with an organic relationship, rather than items that may be similar in some manner, but otherwise unrelated" (para. 14). As it is evident in Theimer's definition, one of the prominences archivists put on is not only the preservation of the materials or artifacts but also the context those artifacts belong in and become with. It assumes the maintenance of an organic inseparability of artifacts from their context via physical archives. This is the same reason why many archivists critique digital archives. One of such critiques can be witnessed in Theimer's words. She argues that digital archives built by digital humanists are "a grouping of materials that had been purposefully selected in order to be studied and made accessible" (para. 7). And she adds that these digital archives are not the archives of the subject of study but of archivists themselves. Basically, they trouble digital archives for the latter's lack of human non-intervention.

And that's why, this assumed "organic" objectiveness of archives regarding the preservation of artifacts and their contexts makes me want to bring up the quote of Hayden White (1987) that Gayatri Spivak includes in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*:

> That language . . . is the instrument of mediation between the consciousness and the world that consciousness inhabits [White writes with some derision] . . . will not be news to literary theorists, but it has not yet reached the historians buried in the archives hoping, by what they call a "sifting of the facts" or "the manipulation of the data," to find the form of the reality that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write "when all the facts are known" and they have finally "got the story straight." (qtd. in Spivak, 1999, pp. 125-126)

Therefore, in terms of non-neutrality and non-objectiveness, physical archives and digital archives are no different from one another. Deciding to archive something already is a human, institutional, and/or organizational intervention. The moment one decides and selects to "preserve" something, there is an intervention. There is an interruption in the organic phenomenon by making something present at the cost of the absence of another. There are always interests in the work of archivists. To assume otherwise is naïve and dangerous. The act of archiving is not a disinterested act, rather it is a discursive practice (Derrida, 1995; Foucault, 1972; Vosloo, 2005). Jacques Derrida (1995) summarizes the connection between political or state power and its accessibility to perform with archiving. He cannot assume political power without its control of the archive and "the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (p. 11). On archiving being a discursive activity, Michel Foucault (1972) writes that archiving "causes a multiplicity of

statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated" (p. 130). This reading of archives puts emphasis on the point that archival activity cannot be viewed apart from the power, production, and dissemination of discourse. There is nothing neutral about archives. And this is voiced by Robert Vosloo (2005) in his article "Archiving Otherwise: Some Remarks on Memory and Historical Responsibility." He claims the assumption that archiving can be neutral is "[f]alse" and "naïve" and "technical structure of the archive also determines the structure of the archivable content" (p. 384). The technology and discourse-knowledge-information are not two separate entities; rather they inform and shape one another. Vosloo insists upon recognizing the inseparability of form, medium, and content in the construction of what we understand as an archive.

Hence, archives are not just a recording of data, but also a production of data as it "produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida, 1995, p. 17). Archiving is not only storing or preserving what is out there, but also a production of the out-there. It is about making the choices and decisions regarding, for instance, what cultural artifacts need to be stored and preserved; it is about affiliations and constraints involved in those decisions. Whatever appears on the surface as an archive is the interplay and the tussle among these multiple factors that is usually hidden underneath the surface as an underlying structure. These conversations are necessary to expose that the archives, memories, past, history, and any kind of logocentrism are vulnerable and are in need of relentless interrogations. It gives way to weaving different antenarratives of historically, structurally, or/and strategically marginalized Others and defying simplistic single narratives woven by patriarchal-colonial-imperial forces to serve their interests.

Cushman (2013) exposes a connection between archivists' (un/conscious and un/witting) rhetoric of preservation and an imperial rhetoric of Other cultures, which is as if Other cultures are static entities fixed in the past, which can be collected and preserved in their absoluteness like the secretions of an organism. Keeping the inevitable non-neutrality of archiving in consideration and problematizing archivists' prideful insistence upon their practices' potential for preserving artifacts and context, Cushman (2013) advocates for the ethical way of performing digital archives for decolonial purposes. In her article "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive," Cushman argues for the potential of digital archives not despite of but because of the same reason that digital archives cannot (and rather should not) promise to preserve contexts as if context is an inert phenomenon that can be preserved. She writes, "one way to decolonize the archive [is] through historiography that seeks to re-place media in the languages, practices, and histories of the communities in which they are created" (p. 116). Her insistence is upon contextualizing archives to battle against "the imperial archive's penchant for collecting, classifying, and isolating" (p. 116) and to problematize "imperialist archives that establish Western tradition by collecting and preserving artifacts from othered tradition[s]" (p. 118). In this

context, I offer critical digital archiving as a desideratum for decolonizing digital archives.

Critical Digital Archiving: Terminological, Conceptual, and Methodological Shifts

I would like to begin the conversation vis-à-vis critical digital archiving by quoting Vosloo (1995):

> to burn with a passion for the past, a passion for the archive, is to aim for faithful testimony. . . . It also implies that the attempt at faithful testimony is not to be separated from justice. . . . The faithfulness to the past, faithful testimony, is not without implications for the present (and the future). (pp. 390-1)

This passion to know the past differently and to do archiving differently is an attempt to ethically intervene in the past, present, and hence, future from the otherwise centers, from the multidimensionality of the Other worlds that are pushed into oblivion. I call these theoretical interrogations and the methodological performance of archiving in digital spaces "digital archiving against the grain," a recognition of complexities to reimagine possibilities. In the prototype of the digital archive I am building, I am training myself to remain faithful to the past, present, and future. I am trying to do that not only by bringing in as many diverse pictures of Nepal as possible, but by admitting/confessing the precarities and negotiations involved even in the most faithful intentions of working toward a justice-oriented future. I do that via documentation and theorization of all the complexities I am experiencing in my archiving performance. For instance, while I was building a prototype of my archive, I faced a dilemma regarding which photography collection to start with. I wanted to start with the collection that I found very interesting while doing my street photography. It was of Shivaratri, a Hindu festival celebrated every year in honor of the Hindu god Shiva. That photography journey was different than much of the other "mundane" everydayistic street photography I was doing before that. That day stood out to me. Even while working on those photographs later, I had a different experience. I wanted to start with this collection. But one fear never left me. Am I exoticizing Nepal like most of those colonial texts? Am I producing yet another colonial text? Am I becoming a native informant?

The dilemma concerning the first photography collections was so powerful that I could not start uploading photographs for some time. The dilemma made me aware of the constraints created by my present geographical situatedness. If I am not starting with photographs of the Shivaratri festival–the collection I would have started with if I were building this archive in Nepal–it means I am already letting my situatedness in the US academic institution and the burden of colonialism make my decisions. I am already surrendering my freedom to choose. I had to remind myself so many times of the reason behind this project. I am not offering the audiences of my digital archive a holistic picture of Nepal (and I doubt if such a picture exits), but offering the antenarratives of what

happens while building decolonial digital archives to make it evident that every picture is already fragmented. I am building a critical decolonial digital archive to recognize complexities by documenting and theorizing them so that reimagination and invention of affordances become possible. My insistence through this project is not to present the final version of a decolonial archive. But I aim to raise questions, discuss possibilities, and avoid pretending giving final answers. Because there is no final answer but only precarities and possibilities.

One of the ways I am beginning to reimagine possibilities is by writing research articles about precarities and complexities as nakedly as possible. These articles are the platform to inform others about my work, to ask for help, and to invite collaborations for discussing possibilities. The next dilemma I faced in building my platform was related to the metadata spaces in my digital archive. Metadata is "the term applied to information that describes information, objects, content, or documents" (Drucker, 2013, para. 7). I am building my digital archive in Omeka, which is a "web publishing platform and a content management system (CMS), developed by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University" and "developed specifically for scholarly content, with particular emphasis on digital collections and exhibits" (Bushong and King, 2013, para. 1). And Omeka uses the Dublin Core metadata standard, "one of the simplest and most widely used metadata schema," which is "comprised of 15 'core' metadata elements" (UC Santa Cruz, n.d., para. 1-2).[2] The next step in my project is to study more about (Dublin Core) metadata and find ways to provide antenarratives of all these precarities, negotiations, and affordances through these metadata spaces. For instance, what was going on when I was deciding to start my digital archive with a photo collection of Shivaratri from the geographical and academic location of the United States? Why did I decide to go with that collection? Would I have gone with that collection if I didn't have access to theorization through these research articles and that metadata space? These are the stories that I hope my metadata can help me tell.

Raising questions relentlessly is extremely important in recognizing and foregrounding the impossibility of the existence of the final signified. This recognition allows us not to take things for granted, not to remain in self-congratulatory mode, not to be self-contended, and not to let anything pass unexamined. This is even more important for the scholars who are engaging in the performance of studying the theory and praxis of (digital) archiving with decolonial orientations. Cushman (2013) emphasizes on asking certain questions: "Why archive in the first place? What types of mediation and information make collecting and displaying possible? What types of knowledge work do archives make possible and limit?" (p. 118). I spent a lot of time contemplating questions like these. And after waiting quite a while before uploading photographs to my archive, finally I decided to start with the collection of Shivaratri. Paradoxically the limitations that I was fearful of started appearing before me as possibilities too. The same photography collection is allowing me to

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[2] See also Dublin Core (2016)

ask these questions and gave me opportunities to reflect upon and offer the precarities involved in archival practices especially, as mentioned before, when the ecologies of such archival performances are emerging from complicated phenomena of post/de/colonialism and de/patriarchy.

These reflections also protect us from another complacency that writing in digital spaces and building digital archives achieves the end goal of justice. That is why, emphasizing the importance of careful and critical engagement with digital space and digital archiving, L'Internationale (2016) cautions against unreflective technoutopian archiving: "Digitisation and online sharing of vast amounts of archival documents can however, when they are done with no reflection, easily turn into a pseudo-democratic end in itself, resulting in an overload of the material available online" (Decolonial Archives, p. 6). Selfe and Selfe (1994) too caution against an oblivious technoutopianism and draw our attention to this aspect of technology that "computers are associated with the potential for great reform–they are not necessarily serving democratic ends," and they "are also sites within which the ideological and material legacies of racism, sexism, and colonialism are continuously written and re-written along with more positive cultural legacies" (p. 484). In arguing how the work of technical communication cannot be imagined by dissociating it from the nexus of power and ideology, Barton and Barton (1993) write, "visual signification serves to sustain relations of domination. . . . Ideology performs such service with a Janus face–it privileges or legitimates certain meaning systems but at the same time dissimulates the fact of such privileging" (p. 49). Thus, unreflective performance with technology, however benevolent the intention might be, can actually solidify imperialist interests in, as Said (1978) argues about Orientalist projects, "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3) and further othering of the Others.

And as I have been emphasizing since the beginning of this article, this critical and ethical reflection requires one to move beyond disciplinary walls. This critical reflection needs an exhaustive analysis, which makes one seek more ways of asking questions to avoid from falling into oblivious gratification of any sort. And that critical reflection and exhaustive analysis require interdisciplinary and collaborative ways of asking questions and seeking possibilities. Despite some digital humanists' *hack and/or yack*[3] binaric debate–for instance, Stephen Ramsay, at the 2011 annual Modern Language Association convention, declared, "If you are not making anything, you are not . . . a digital humanist" (as cited in Gold, 2012, p. x)–there are digital humanist scholars who are treating hack and yack or building and theorizing in a non-binary manner. One of them is Johanna Drucker (2012), who writes,

> The insights gleaned from poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and deconstruction altered our understanding of notions of meaning, truth, authorship, identity, subjectivity, power relations, bodies, minds, nations,

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[3] See Nowviskie (2016)

intelligence, nature, and almost any other ontological category of cultural thought. Computation and digital techniques have been subject to plenty of rich discussion along deconstructive and postcolonial lines. But the distinction on which I am trying to call for a next phase of digital humanities would synthesize method and theory into ways of doing as thinking. (2012, p. 87)

This passage resonates with the argument of Jamie "Skye" Bianco (2012), who asserts, "we are not required to choose between the philosophical, critical, cultural, and computational; we are required to integrate and to experiment" (p. 101), and he adds, "This is not a moment to abdicate the political, social, cultural, and philosophical, but rather one for an open discussion of their inclusion in the ethology and methods of the digital humanities" (p. 102). The rupture of disciplinary boundaries and hack-yack binary–as advocated by Drucker, Bianco, and many other scholars–and a critical reflection and an exhaustive analysis are the first steps toward critical digital archiving.

Conclusion

The first and the most crucial thing that drew me towards working in and with digital archiving and digital humanities is the urgency to make their practices and theories critically aware and culturally responsive. Therefore, in this article, I consistently put terminological insistence upon calling my methodology critical digital archiving and critical digital humanities to reinforce the idea of paying attention to questions of power, epistemic violence, exploitation, and subalternity executed through archiving and digital archiving as built through powerful, logocentric, and centralizing colonial-patriarchal locations. Through this article and project, I hope to initiate dialogue with the audiences and researchers working towards building a collaborative space in pedagogical institutions with these essential resources and infrastructure and exhibiting diverse voices in digital archives and digital humanities initiatives with an assertion upon contextually situated and critically aware technology, digitalism, and design. In short, this is an attempt at recognizing complexities to reimagine possibilities.

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