

Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive. Edited by Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley. New York: Routledge, 2017. 199 pp. Index. Softcover. \$44.95.

A robust book either affirms recognition of its ideas and sources or, by virtue of its eloquence, compels the reader to do further exploratory reading of the same. This volume, a reflexive exercise by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and South Asianists based in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, is aimed at undergraduate and graduate student researchers in their fields, and it excited my curiosity. The community's dialogue about the ways to conceptualize, use, and interpret archives and archival sources addresses many of the issues surrounding ethics, diversity, and inclusion that information professionals confront within our silo. This book may help serve as a corrective to our tenets of "authenticity" and "neutrality," both of which its contributors challenge, but as none of its authors are archivists, the divide between researchers and practitioners remains unbridged.

The erratic degrees of engagement with or understanding of institutional archival principles and practices described by the authors also reflect this divide. Their starting points are necessarily, for the most part, large, venerable state archives that tend to present bureaucratic barriers to access, as well as opaque methods and decision-making. Archivists like to see themselves as mediators of transparency and open access to information, but this reputation is not widely shared, or perhaps even deserved, outside of our own professional communities. Not only were some of the authors' experiences at archives off-putting, but their references and bibliographies include a paucity (although not a total lack) of archival literature. This indicates that we are not widely read by the communities who avail themselves of our services, which ultimately reflects poorly on the way we and our work are perceived and understood. Instead, the writers rely on their colleagues in the humanities. Half of the eight authors discuss and/or cite philosopher Jacques Derrida's writings on the power of the archive. Foucault and Althusser also appear repeatedly. Although Verne Harris's work does get a look in, there is no sign of Randall Jimerson or Mark Greene, who loom just as large for archivists. Philosophical critique and interpretation of archival work are valid and useful, but our own scholarship has something to add.

This book is part of an eight-volume series that intends to bring researchers into closer contact with ways to approach a wide spectrum of primary source materials from different geographical areas and eras. Interestingly, this volume was published coevally with *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* as part of the Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources series.¹ While the authors in this volume often discuss their roles as "colonist researchers," it might have been an even more intriguing book if it had included contributions from the *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* authors, many of whom are indigenous and the "beneficiaries" of imperial recordkeeping and its discontents.

The chapters are organized into three thematic sections: part 1, "Empires, Archives and Power" (the relationship between power and the colonial archive and potential for democratizing/decolonizing); part 2, "State and Official Archives" (key "source genres" generated by colonial states); and part 3, "Tracking 'Subaltern' Voices" (the extent to which it is possible to trace, hear, or recover peripheral narratives). These foci allow the authors' experiences to be channeled into a pedagogical framework, but are not necessary for the nonstudent audience. Also, due to the authors' chosen topics, parts 1 and 2 overlap to a large degree. The book rests on the premise that the imperial archive not only reflects colonial power, but that the creation of the records in the archive actualize their subjects

within the power relationship. For example, the bureaucratic documentation conceptualized, produced, and then maintained by the state created whole categories of previously nonexistent persons. Most of us understand this through our experiences of being either subject or mediator of census records; an example used to great effect in anthropologist Alexandra Widmer's chapter on French and British colonial census efforts in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu).

Other standout chapters include historian Catherine Colborne's systematic questioning of the "completeness" of the archive; a concept that should be familiar to those of us who have worked with the archives of peripatetic individuals, large states, or very long-standing organizations that, over time, have been dispersed, rehomed, or variously centralized and decentralized within a bureaucracy. The archive is never complete, but this concept is often difficult to explain to researchers. Colborne comes closer to understanding the "why" of our practices and procedures when she explains how lacunae and absences exist. Her chapter also acknowledges the role of the researcher as arbiter of the record, who, through his or her methods and writing choices, makes decisions that create a lens into the information within the record. South Asianist Penny Edwards's writing on her experiences sourcing materials on colonial Cambodia and Burma (Myanmar) points out the double-edged sword of digitization and Internet access: more materials are made available, while unrealistically raising expectations of completeness. She also writes of the researcher's experience of "spying" on the record and the life it describes, as well as the way it can be mediated by the built environment in which the record is physically accessed—experiences all too common to archivists. Anthropologist Abdelmajid Hannoum's essay on archival secrecy in relation to colonial Algeria sources describes in detail how researchers bring their own agendas to the archive while simultaneously "privatizing" state archives by selecting, copying, and collecting subsets of records. His discussion of researcher appraisal of archives and of archival collusion with the state apparatus is uncomfortable, anticapitalist, and refreshing.

Why should archivists read this book? We need to increase our copublications, copresentations, and other collaborations with our patrons so that they can better advocate for us and so that we can understand how they see our work and its impact on the historical record and on the power and politics of archives. Conceptualizations of archives by nonarchivists have a real impact on their research experiences and interpretation of our practices. Even those of us in academe do not spend enough time engaging with the theoretical (we are busy, it's true), but this is to our detriment given that we serve theoreticians who interpret and publish about our work, workplaces, and collections. This book argues that decisions made by researchers surrounding appraisal and description of, and access to, archival materials via their scholarly products have a real-world impact on people and their identities. It serves as a timely reminder that archival decisions do as well.

Sarah R. Demb
Senior Records Manager/Archivist
Harvard University Archives

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1. Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, eds., *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* (London: Routledge, 2017).