

## Archival Maintenance in the American Southwest: Exploring the Coproduction of Anthropology and Settler Colonialism on the Ground

### Introduction:

In recent years, U.S. archival institutions over-encumbered with anthropological materials concerning Indigenous peoples have become topics of debate in and outside of the academy as interested parties contemplate who should use these materials and how. The corpuses of anthropologists have become particularly generative sites of discussion (Darnell 2015). A central contention of the following rumination is that thinking about anthropological archives—their process of formation and reformation—requires an exploration of the history of settler colonialism and the often-elided labor of archival maintenance. In this paper, I explore the ways in which an anthropological archive and settler colonialism are coproduced in the American Southwest. Additionally, I identify the ways in which the labor of archivists gets implicated in this process of coproduction. Anthropology as a discipline and set of practices has long been accused of undermining Indigenous groups, especially in North America (Deloria 1969). More recently, anthropologist Audra Simpson has explored the ways in which the anthropological desire to apprehend difference is made to “[wed] elegantly, effortlessly, and very cleanly with the imperatives of *settler colonial* projects predicated upon a desire for territory” (Simpson 2014). Following the late historian of anthropology Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism can be understood as a specific system of domination, which first emerged out of the larger project of European imperial expansion. In contrast to its close allies (e.g. direct colonial, indirect colonial rule, genocide, ethnic cleansing, economic imperialism), settler colonialism involves a mass population movement, the appropriation of Indigenous land, and the construction of *permanent* settler polities on that land (Wolfe 1999). Native American historians Philip Deloria (1998) and Jean O’Brien (2010) have argued that the production of knowledge about and representations of Indians is a key component in the imagining and naturalizing of settler-colonial nationhood in the United States as such practices frame Indigenous peoples as “proto-Americans.” In doing this, settlers are no longer imagined to be *settlers*. Through a narrative slight-of-hand, settlers become another installment in an “ancient” form of American nationalism. The critique offered by Simpson is that anthropology has been particularly complicit in this process, that anthropology and settler colonial power are a classic case of the “coproduction” of knowledge and politics (Jasanoff 2004).

Simpson’s characterization is one that can be traced empirically and historically when looking at the formation of anthropologically driven institutions in Arizona, namely the Arizona State Museum (ASM). By capturing, storing, and displaying the Indigenous past and present, such institutions have shaped and been shaped by settler colonial formations. However, when we shift from a broad historical lens to an ethnographic lens, the relationship between anthropology and settler colonialism as traced through the development and use of archives becomes less certain. I draw the reader’s attention to a recent project carried out by the Pascua Yaqui Indians of Tucson and the archivists at the Arizona State Museum (ASM) in which the maintenance and use of the Edward H. and Rosamond B. Spicer papers (commonly referred to as the Spicer Archive) has both affirmed and undermined settler colonial dynamics. In other words, I suggest that when it comes to the everyday work of maintenance, the wedding of anthropological archives and settler colonialism is not as elegant, effortless, or clean as we might suspect. In fact, it is laden with ironic outcomes that have much to teach us about how the interrelations of

anthropology, politically sensitive technological infrastructures, and settler coloniality play out on the ground.

Origins:

The cultivation of knowledge about the Indigenous Southwest is itself a historical phenomenon made possible by the co-construction of institutions and settler statehood at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Arizona State Museum (ASM) is a premier site of Southwestern Indigenous history. Established in 1898, ASM (like many Arizona institutions) was made possible by two significant projects: the development of Indian reservations and the subsequent arrival of the transcontinental railway systems. Unlike New Mexico, the Arizona territory lacked a significant Spanish colonial legacy (Sheridan 2012). Following Mexican independence from Spain, non-Indigenous presence in the region became even less pronounced. In 1853, the U.S. purchased the bulk of the Arizona territory but a harsh desert environment, limited water, and a lack of transportation made settlement slow. As a result, Arizona remained dominated by politically autonomous Indigenous groups for the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to curtail Indian power and promote settlement, the U.S. constructed 20 reservations from 1859 to 1872. With the Indigenous populations aggregated on tracks of land, the territory could be freed up for the construction of the transcontinental railroads that would connect Arizona and its extractive industries (i.e. agriculture and mining) with the rest of the union (White 1991, 2011).

With the advent of these political and economic transformations, Arizona became a romantic site in the national imaginary and a destination for settlement. Between 1880 and 1920, the population of Arizona increased dramatically while the region's emergent industries and natural landscape became points of interest for settlers (Sheridan 2012). The pre-Columbian Native American ruins that dotted the desert landscape attracted amateur archaeologists such as Byron Cummings, a native of New York and professor of classics from the University of Utah. With the aid of his ties to the political and business elites of the Southwest, Cummings was named the director of ASM in 1915 (three years after Arizona achieved statehood). In the same year, Cummings founded the School of Archaeology (now School of Anthropology) at the University of Arizona and the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society. In 1927, Cummings and his growing network influenced the passing of the Arizona Antiquities Act, which gave the state museum authority to manage archaeological expeditions on state *and* federal land (Hauray 1960). This assemblage of institutions and laws was made possible by settler colonial developments that freed up the land for sustained archaeological and ethnographic exploration and institution building.

Importantly, this assemblage also fed back into these dynamics as it enabled Arizona to develop a form of a regional "cultural nationalism" (Snead 2001) that tied the newly formed state into the larger national imaginary. This was accomplished through the representation of "ancient" Indigenous cultures. Following early national intellectuals and proto-ethnologists (Deloria 1998, Hinsley 1981), Cummings saw Native American history as something that could be (or should be) subsumed within a settler-colonial national narrative. Reflecting on his foray into pre-Columbian archaeology and institution building, Cummings once opined, "I felt it was a duty of the western institutions to make a closer study of *this chapter of American history*" (Snead 2001, 79). By declaring Indigenous history to be but a "chapter" in a larger "American history," Cummings effectively (re)imagined Indigenous peoples of the Southwest as the first "Americans," which in turn (re)imagined Arizona not as a recent product of settler colonial practices on the edge of a larger inchoate polity, but as an epicenter of a primordial American nationhood. By claiming the Indigenous past for "America," Cummings effectively downplayed

any counter-claims to the land that contemporary Indigenous peoples (or any other ethnic group for that matter) might have made. Thus, the cultivation of knowledge about the indigenous past was part and parcel of an ongoing process of constructing settler identity and naturalizing settler presence in the region.

Importantly, Southwestern anthropology of today is not what it once was. During the 30s and 40s, regional institutions began to move out of their archaeological mold to embrace sociocultural anthropology of living Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) populations. In Arizona, this shift was marked by the arrival of Edward Spicer in the 1930s. Trained in both archaeology at UA and in cultural anthropology at the University of Chicago, Spicer participated in the growing interest in acculturation studies that would come to dominate mid-century American anthropology. Following his death in 1983, Spicer's numerous papers were relocated from his Tucson home to ASM, an institution that he worked closely with over the years. Spicer and his Archive are perhaps most associated with the Pascua Yaqui Indians of Tucson, a heterogeneous community of cross-border Indians that first arrived in significant numbers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century following the pull of agriculture/railroad work and the push of Mexican state violence. The Yaqui achieved U.S. federal recognition in 1978 with the aid of Spicer's testimony and an assemblage of lawyers, supportive Arizona politicians, and other anthropologists associated with the network of institutions first established by Cummings (Castile 2002; Meeks 2007; Miller 2004). With the addition of the Spicer papers, ASM has since become a site of great interest for the Pascua Yaqui Indians and those interested in the community's history.

Unlike representational practices of the past, ASM does not try to claim Yaqui history for Anglo-Arizonans. However, this does not mean that the museum has shuffled loose its settler colonial coil. In the time since ASM's founding and Cummings's tireless efforts to build Arizona anthropology, settler colonial politics in the U.S. (and other nation-states) have shifted from outright assimilation to a paradigm of selective recognition (Barker 2011, Coulthard 2014, Povinelli 2002, Merlan 1998). Under this new set of political dynamics, neoliberalized settler politics actively acknowledge Indigenous peoples as "Indian tribes." While this paradigm shift has enabled new forms of political mobilization for individuals and groups, it is not without a "darkside" (Shah 2010). As John and Jean Comaroff note (2009), recognition of tribalness in the present has a tendency to turn internally heterogeneous and dynamic communities into internally homogenous and marketable brands. In order to secure political rights and economic viability in the market place, courts, and executive branch, Indigenous peoples are compelled to "go in active pursuit of what they believe themselves to have lost to history" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 75). This can lead to the construction of institutions that treat "'culture' as a domain set apart from mundane life—and, simultaneously, as a resource to be salvaged, systematized, disseminated..." (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 75). Under this politics of Indigenous recognition, museums like ASM, once again, become "organizational [sites] central to identity" (Silverstein 2003). In other words, they are reconstituted as nodes within a larger process of recognizing some forms of Indigenous difference (e.g. "Indian tribes") while obfuscating others. Therefore, the shift in curatorial practices at ASM (e.g. the incorporation of the Spicer Archive) can be seen as materializations of the present iteration of settler colonial politics.

#### Coproduction on the Ground:

At first glance, this broad historical overview of the state museum and its archival holdings would appear to confirm Simpson's thesis: anthropology and settler colonialism coproduce each other. However, when we look at this relationship on the ground and in the present, things become more complicated.

Consider this: In November of 2015, the Old Pascua Museum and Yaqui Cultural Center of Tucson opened an exhibit devoted to Edward Spicer and his longtime collaborate and spouse Rosamond Spicer. The exhibit was a joint partnership carried out by the tribal museum, the Edward H. and Rosamond B. Spicer Foundation, myself, and a small group of archivists at ASM. It featured facsimiles of fieldnotes, correspondences, and photographs culled from the Archive at the state museum and placed under a plexiglass tabletop. The intention behind the project was to alter these selections on a bimonthly basis so that visitors to the tribal museum, specifically Pascua Yaqui youth, could learn about the history of the community—a particularly difficult task in a state that has actively tried to eliminate ethnic studies in public schools. The opening of the new exhibit coincided with the School of Anthropology’s centennial celebration in which a trip to the tribal museum became a stop on the departmental tour.

Unlike the typical museological practices described by Comaroff and Comaroff, the Spicer exhibit interrupts the logic of (settler colonial) recognition. This is in no small part because the version of Indigeniety that the Pascua Yaqui chose to put on display exceeds the essentialized parameters of the “Indian tribe” as understood in the popular imaginary and federal law. The exhibit embraces the internal heterogeneity of the Yaqui peoples, their Catholic roots, their migratory history, their fight for federal recognition, and their partnerships with anthropologists like the Spicers. The exhibit does not present the Yaqui as an (ethno)national unit that emerged from the primordial ooze of “Indian tribalness.” Rather, the exhibit and the museum at larger present the Yaqui as a dynamic people who have made and remade their identity time and time again.

While a significant portion of this must be attributed to the tribal museum that first conceived of the project, I would like to consider the archivist from ASM and how their labor helped to enable this non-normative materialization of Indigeniety. Because the exhibit was designed to spotlight materials from the Spicer papers, access to the archive at ASM was essential. However, a problem occurred early on in the project’s conception. Earlier that year, the state legislature slashed funding for ASM in addition to the public school system, which led to layoffs and reduced hours of operation. The archival wing of the museum lost one of its longtime employees. With reduced staff and reduced hours of operation, the remaining archivists found themselves overloaded with unfinished projects, open house events, and emergency staff meetings. Rather than buckle under the neoliberalization of the state, the archivists went out of their way to make the exhibit possible. For example, the fired archivist came back to the museum to work as a volunteer allowing the remaining employees to shoulder the responsibility of guiding visiting researchers (such as myself and the tribal museum director) through the 65 boxes of materials that constitute the Spicer papers. The archivist agreed to hold an after hours meeting with myself and the Spicer Foundation to discuss future editions to the exhibit and the prospect of applying to funding bodies so that they might digitize the collection in the near future. All of this additional labor—the labor that made the materialization of the exhibit possible, the labor that stabilized the network of actors and artifacts surrounding the Spicer papers—was rendered invisible in the final presentation of the exhibit. The archivists took no credit for the project. Their all-important efforts were rendered invisible, and they did not seem to mind.

In highlighting the labor of the archivists, I do not mean to overly valorize anthropological institutions, which are themselves active nodes of knowledge and politics within larger entanglements of settler coloniality. Nor do I mean to re-center the experiences of settlers at the expense of Indigenous peoples. Rather, I mean to interrogate the notion that anthropology and its associated institutions are forever destined to “hold hands” with settler colonial politics. If

we conceptualized the two as being in a relationship of coproduction than we would do well to consider the individuals and groups who are charged with maintaining the conditions of possibility for such a relationship. This labor is often heterogenous. This labor is often made precarious. This labor, like the labor that maintains most larger classificatory systems and infrastructures (Bowker and Star 1999), is often (rendered) invisible. Moreover, as the example of the Spicer exhibit illustrates, this labor can enable new possibilities for representations of Indigenous peoples—representations that challenge the essentialized modes of recognition that have become hegemonic in the present. Therefore, just as we must consider the ways in which anthropological archives and their associated institutional networks have shaped and been shaped by settler colonial processes, we must also recognize the ways in which those same institutions can and do transform settler coloniality on the ground and through (what might appear to be) the most mundane of institutional practices and technological developments.

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