

Reparative Processing of the *Luis Alberto Sánchez papers*: Engaging the Conflict between Archival Values and Minimal Processing Practices

Alexandra deGraffenreid, Pennsylvania State University

Abstract: This essay uses the reprocessing of the *Luis Alberto Sánchez papers*, the collection of a prominent Peruvian politician and author housed at Penn State University, to argue that ethical and reparative processing needs should be prioritized within an archives' overall extensible processing program. The author explores the tension between two differing threads within the archival literature of 1) using minimal or extensible processing practices to efficiently process backlogs and 2) of acknowledging the power of archivists in shaping the historical record and their ethical responsibilities towards communities represented within their collections. This essay argues that archivists should prioritize collections where archival practices have perpetuated in obfuscating or marginalizing the records of traditionally underrepresented communities. It also argues that prioritizing this work capitalizes on the inherent flexibility within an extensible processing framework.

Introduction

The archival literature includes two divergent discourses on collection arrangement and description: grappling with overwhelming backlogs through minimal or extensible processing practices; and acknowledging the archivists' ethical responsibilities towards those represented within records and their role in shaping archival collections. Minimal processing methods are resource and priorities-centric, pushing archivists to arrange and describe all collections at the highest hierarchical level. These techniques forefront archival collections as products to be put before researchers as quickly as possible and prioritize additional work primarily based on use. At the same time, other archivists advocate for approaches that confront institutional practices which further marginalize communities, obfuscate historical evidence, and perpetuate injustices. Within the current archival literature, these discussions are disparate, with one foregrounding efficient resource allocation and the other centering the relationships between archivists, communities, and records subjects as central to archival practice. This essay hopes to bridge these two discourses by emphasizing the need to proactively invest in inclusive practices and promoting using the tenets of efficient processing to prioritize revising historically marginalizing practices. This essay will use Penn State University's recent reprocessing of the Luis Alberto Sánchez papers as a case study to argue that these philosophies are not mutually exclusive and that archivists should utilize the flexibility inherent in extensible processing to prioritize reparative arrangement and description.

Across the Disciplines

A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing

<https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2021.18.1-2.04>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

ISSN 554-8244

Across the Disciplines is an open-access, peer-reviewed scholarly journal published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by [Colorado State University](http://www.colostate.edu) and [Georgia Southern University](http://www.gsu.edu). Articles are published under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs) ISSN 1554-8244. Copyright © 1997-2021 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

Archivists should engage with the tension between these two discourses to critically consider balancing practical realities with ethical, person-focused archival practice. Processing approaches which encourage efficient, high-level arrangement and description are a legitimate method for confronting unprocessed backlogs and prioritizing broad access; however, these techniques can also force archivists into shallow relationships with collections. Limited understanding of records risks “projecting the (in)visible default onto these collections, which, in turn, influence[s] the outcomes of our processes, and the way we provide access to, and (mis)represent, information” (Arroyo-Ramírez, Elvia, 2016, n.p.). This shallowness perpetuates arrangement and descriptive practices created to buttress traditional academic practices which have predominantly excluded or silenced the perspectives of diverse communities. Intentionally redressing these practices and investing in affected collections is essential to create a more diverse, equitable record. For too long, collections documenting diverse communities have been “hidden,” reinforcing their marginalization and the perception that these materials are special and rare, rather than being presented as programmatically part of preserving a more complete and accurate historical record.

Archivists can work within an extensible processing framework to elevate reparative work by refocusing prioritization from a resource- or use-centered criteria toward more inclusivity or care-centered criteria, thereby allowing archivists to embed reparative work programmatically into iterative processing workflows. Archivists must adapt archival description practices to discuss collections’ troubling histories, expose archival interventions, and ultimately elevate the experiences of archival subjects. To be more responsible custodians, archivists must engage deeply with troubling collections to peel away at layers of imposed archival practices, including confronting how their own attempts at remediation can perpetuate elevating archival practice over creators’ voices.

Archivists must approach collections imbued with trauma by dedicating time to confronting and foregrounding the impact of legacy archival practices. Archivists should integrate reparative practices within overall extensible processing workflows to balance baseline collections’ accessibility, confront marginalizing past practices, and, most importantly, to more effectively serve a diverse researcher community. The Luis Alberto Sánchez papers at Penn State University help demonstrate this necessity. Despite documenting a significant and turbulent period of Peruvian history, these papers were under-described and difficult to access, camouflaging their research value. Improving accessibility and disentangling the papers’ complicated custodial and curatorial history required additional in-depth processing. Prioritizing this collection based on its need for ethical redescription allowed archivists to re-process the collection, create bilingual description, and increase the collection’s discoverability.

Minimal and Extensible Processing: An Introduction

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) defined processing as: “the arrangement, description, and housing of archival materials for storage and use by patrons” (Pearce-Moses, Richard, 2005, p. 27). Processing traditionally involved meticulously arranging and describing collections, leading to increasingly large unprocessed backlogs. Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner (2005) formalized using minimal processing techniques to eliminate backlogs in their work “More Product, Less Process” (MPLP). This work argued that traditional detail-oriented processing exacerbated backlogs and advocated for a “golden minimum” of “the least we can do to get the job done in a way that is adequate to user needs” (Greene & Meissner, 2005). They argued that adopting MPLP was important towards both establishing intellectual

control over all holdings and making all collections available to users at a basic level (Greene & Meissner, 2005, p. 240).

While controversial, other archival scholars concurred that MPLP is necessary for promoting access. Christine Wideman expanded this view by arguing that minimal processing at accessioning would be sufficient towards providing access (Weideman, Christine, 2006). Matt Gorzalski (2008) concurred that MPLP would become standard professional practice and emphasized the importance in how MPLP reduced overall costs while allowing archivists to reprioritize processing funds and make larger collections available more rapidly (p. 187, 192). Greene & Meissner (2010) defended the need for minimal processing by stating that MPLP “is not about specific processing actions. It is about resource management... Our collections comprise the stock of capital goods upon which we rely to accomplish our mission of public service” (p. 175). Daniel Santamaria (2015) expanded this into the concept of extensible processing. Extensible processing consists of six principles, including approaching the processing program holistically, managing archival materials at a high level, and focusing on iterative processing which prioritizes more in-depth processing systematically and flexibly. He outlines this in-depth prioritization as “the first criteria to consider when making decisions in moving beyond baseline processing and description should be frequency and type of use” (Santamaria, 2015, p. 102). Resource considerations and frequency of use are preferential over other deeper values such as research value.

Many institutions, including Penn State, adopt minimal or extensible processing techniques by applying levels of control and processing work time guidelines. An overview of institutional manuals, including those from Emory University, Harvard University, and University of California, demonstrates both the adoption of efficient processing techniques by practitioners and also the real commitment of resources such as time and preservation supplies required to more intensively process collections. These manuals provide insight into the challenges facing archivists in prioritizing more-intensive processing work given competing resource priorities such as staff availability, time, and preservation supplies funding. Penn State’s institutional manual outlines four levels of control, each with separate guidance for the extent of description, arrangement, and appraisal work to be done: collection-level (minimally processed), series-level (moderately processed), folder-level (highly processed), and item-level (intensively processed) (deGraffenreid & Rizzo, 2019). Each of these levels has a separate estimation of the total processing time commitment, for example a collection-level of control requires only 1-3 hours per linear foot to fully process, whereas the highly processed folder-level requires approximately 9-20 hours per linear foot (deGraffenreid & Rizzo, 2019). While these workflows are expedient, emphasizing efficiency fails to consider the ways in which high-level processing goals can create harm by failing to describe collections with sufficient depth to make materials discoverable, effectively obfuscating their existence and preventing access. While a necessary business and resource management tool, extensible techniques permit enough flexibility to consider how such practices could impede the ethical and moral duties of archivists and prioritize transparency and inclusive processing.

Archives & Power: A Brief Overview

Predating and concurrent with efficient processing techniques are calls for archivists to acknowledge the ingrained power dynamics implicit in archival work and be transparent about their mediation of the archival record. This began with a reckoning surrounding understanding the archives as a manifestation of power and the authority archivists assert on the historical record (Carter, 2006; Cook, & Schwartz, 2002;,

Nesmith, 2002; Zinn, 1977). Power emerges both from the archives themselves, which “wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity” and archivists who “as keepers of archives - wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation” (Cook, Terry & Schwartz, Joan, 2002, p. 2). Verne Harris (2002) goes further in referring to what remains as the “archival sliver” (p. 84-85), a concept which argues that the archival record should be “best understood as a sliver of a sliver of a sliver of a window into process”. According to Harris (2002), the record “is a product of process, it must be acknowledged that process...if archival records reflect reality, they do so complicitly, and in a deeply fractured way” (p. 65). This concept acknowledges that many actors impact what is preserved as part of the historical record, and that no interventions —from choosing to record and save an item, to choosing to preserve it in an archive and describe it in a catalog—are neutral since they are products of process and choice. Archivists’ power over the historical record emerges at every point in the archival continuum, from appraising records to include in the archives, to selection, arrangement, description, and reference.

This increasing awareness propelled archivists to think more critically about their role in curating archival material and in challenging traditional practices. T-Kay Sangwand (2018) bluntly calls out this process as inherently political, whether archivists are acting intentionally to prioritize elite voices or working subversively to center Indigenous epistemologies in archival practice. In addition to making material “archival” and elevating stories, these processes of curating archival material can also have the power to silence or further marginalize voices. Gabriel Daniel Solis (2018) calls this process symbolic annihilation and declares that it “has been a pervasive and destructive force in the construction of memory and narratives...a ruthless tool to suppress, silence, and erase the lives, cultures, and histories of marginalized communities...” (p. 2). Similarly, Rodney Carter (2006) expands on archival silences as inherent to all archives, but “once archivists are aware of the silences in their archives, they can take measures to try to allow for multiple narratives to fill some of these gaps, to make users aware of the silences, and to attempt to understand and respect the choice of certain groups to keep their silence” (p. 217). Acknowledging these dynamics is an important first step toward addressing the damage inflicted by legacy practices on the ability of marginalized persons and communities to find themselves within the archive and towards moving on to an understanding of how archivists can mitigate these silences and elevate the voices of archival subjects. Although interrogating archivists’ power over the historical record is intimately connected with the techniques of arranging and describing collections, within the literature discussions of efficient and minimal processing are siloed from these discussions of power: the efficient and minimal processing literature take place within overall discussions of resource limitations and prioritizing investing in collections as commodities to be used as quickly as possible, whereas discussions of power take place within overall discussions surrounding archival ethics and the need to create a more diverse historical record.

Promoting Ethical, Honest, and Transparent Practices

Archival records help tell stories and inform historical narratives. Archival silences and traditional practices create “tacit narratives” where personal and institutional contexts such as culture, politics, and economics both unconsciously and consciously inform how individuals appraise, process, and understand archives (Ketelaar, 2001, p. 136-137). K.J. Rawson (2018) argues that archival rhetoric “provides powerful, although often invisible, frameworks for our orientations to the past” and that these frameworks ostensibly created to facilitate access to materials instead have significant rhetorical impacts (p. 330-332). All description is

inherently biased and socially constructed, as archivists cannot fully replicate multi-faceted collections into descriptive tools such as finding aids; instead, archival description always subjectively includes information deemed “important” and intentionally excludes other information (Duff, & Harris, 2002; Rawson, 2018; Ketelaar, 2001; Yakel, 2003). Wendy Duff and Verne Harris (2002) urge practitioners to accept this subjectivity as natural and to use liberatory descriptive standards to make archivists more accountable, expose these biases, and open historical interpretation to competing narratives and reinterpretation over time. Jennifer Douglas (2016) refines this view into an argument for “honest description,” which “acknowledges the various ways in which archives are shaped over time, even when these ways conflict with traditional archival thinking and methods” (p. 27-28). Honest description moves beyond an acknowledgement that archival power exists and towards exposing interventions by creators, custodians, and archivists, thereby making such labor and its impact more transparent to users.

Proponents of honest description propose several methods of making archival description more transparent in order to elevate the voices and roles of archivists, curators, and users (Douglas, 2016; Light & Hyry, 2002; MacNeil, 2009). Heather MacNeil (2009) argues that demonstrating the history of the archival record is essential towards preserving the authenticity of the record and for enforcing archival accountability. Jennifer Douglas (2016) proposes expanding on traditional custodial history notes to demonstrate that collections have histories originating with the work done by creators and custodians, as well as archivists by demonstrating how authors and literary custodians sometimes carefully curate archival material before transferring it to the archives. Jarrett Drake (2016) pushes honest description further by challenging archivists to rethink concepts of provenance in archival description and spurs archivists to think about how reflecting the creators of records in archival description can perpetuate violence, inequality, and injustice, and “instead users should expect archival description that reflects the autonomous naming decisions of people and communities, including and especially if they wish to withhold their names” (para. 11). Honest archival description should not solely be about exposing collection histories and archival work, but about ethically reflecting the ideals and self-identifications of communities represented within the record.

Informed by critical race, feminist, and queer theories, archivists are further questioning their own ethical responsibilities and how they should impact archival workflows. The necessity of interrogating these responsibilities is clear. Bergis Jules (2016) contends that traditional practices of neutrality reinforce legacies of dehumanization and silences, and that perpetuating them is a failure of care to marginalized peoples. Tonia Sutherland (2017) further argues that silences, absences, and delegitimizing alternative types of records are a form of amnesty which discards the past and leads us unable to document or prove human rights abuses. Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) propose concepts of radical empathy, which acknowledge affective responsibilities between the archivist and various stakeholders including creators, subjects of records, users, and unseen others in the broader community. Reconceptualizing ethical duties around these different affective responsibilities of care challenges archivists to think more broadly about how their work of arranging and describing collections can impact not only the creators and users of records, but also those documented within the record. Foregrounding the people at the center of records in archival practice forces processors to more critically consider how legacies of marginalization and trauma are reflected in the records and description. It also forces processors to reckon with how their practices may perpetuate those historical traumas and challenges them to change workflows and traditional practices in order to better empathize and care for the communities and persons documented within the archive.

Going Further: The Call for Reparative and Anti-Racist Practices

Archivists are recognizing the need to go beyond honest description and towards active reparative work which confronts past practices and revisits legacy collections to revise coded, offensive, or obfuscating arrangement and description. Lae'l Hughes Watkins (2018) argues that the iniquities in the archives make

archivists co-conspirators in oppression and that repositories must engage past practices and materially repair harms done to historically disenfranchised and excluded communities. She argues this reparative work is an “ethical imperative” for all traditional and academic repositories which “does not pretend to ignore the... discriminatory traditions of mainstream archives, but instead acknowledges these failures and engages in conscious actions toward a wholeness” (Hughes Watkins, 2018, p. 4). Initiatives responding to demands for reparative work are emerging, including informational resources which identify insufficient traditional practices and outline types of reparative actions such as the [Anti-Racist Description Resources, Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives](#) poster, and [Reparative Processing: A Case Study in Auditing Legacy Archival Description for Racism](#) presentation. These projects challenge practitioners to fulfill our ethical obligations to communities which previous generations of practitioners overlooked or sidelined.

Much of this work is currently focused on legacy archival description. Jackie Dean (2020) refers to this process of revisiting legacy description to refocus on more accessible and inclusive language as “conscious editing” (p. 41). Conscious editing is vital and subversive, as description can “be harnessed as a powerful tool to address the power imbalances between creators and subjects of records” (Chilcott, 2019, p. 368). Further reparative actions can include describing whiteness, naming the subjects of records in addition to creators, contextualizing racist or problematic language, and being accountable by preserving evidence of racism in legacy description (Bolding, 2018). Since no actions can be perfect, Alicia Chilcott (2019) suggests a “good, better, best” model as a starting point to address offensive terms and misrepresentation in archival description flexibly in recognition of varying resources. All of these resources and recommendations call for archivists to be “reparations activists” who both acknowledge the traditions of power and white supremacy within archives and who work to confront these structures to aid in transitional justice (Robinson-Sweet, 2018).

It is essential to reflect on the role of the archivist in silencing the voices of collection creators and in perpetuating power dynamics by imposing methods of arrangement and description created by overwhelmingly white practitioners onto collections created by marginalized individuals whose lives are shaped outside of American academia. It is also essential to move beyond reflection as the silences and erasures created by legacy practices are “a direct assault on the unspoken oath of archivists and the institutions in which they reside” (Hughes-Watkins, 2018, p. 1). It is insufficient to merely acknowledge power imbalances and silences. Modern archivists must move towards reparative reprocessing and re-describing of collections documenting trauma, historically marginalized communities, or which have troubling custodial histories. Addressing collections to understand their layers of trauma, recover the voices of creators, acknowledge silences, and to confront the legacy of paternalistic and white supremacist archival practices requires an investment of time and labor which conflicts with the practicalities of a “golden minimum.” Addressing legacy practices requires that considerations of archival subjects as people and communities must be placed at the center of archival practice as opposed to prioritizing resource considerations. When approaching these types of collections to address problematic custodial histories and to apply anti-racist and anti-colonial practices, archivists must grapple with how the archival profession impacts and irrevocably alters the ability of patrons to use the collections and to understand their recreators.

The following section focuses on applying the concepts of reparative and transparent practices to the reprocessing of the Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, highlighting efforts to mediate between the creator’s and custodians’ voices within the collection, increase transparency of its complex custodial history, and facilitate access through dual-language description. In this case study, the need for reparative work is apparent and forces archivists to consider that thoughtful, more in-depth processing of similar collections is essential and should be prioritized within an overall extensible processing framework.

Luis Alberto Sánchez papers

Luis Alberto Sánchez was a Peruvian author, politician, and leader of Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), Peru's first political party. Sánchez joined APRA in 1931, and ultimately served as a Peruvian Senator, President of the Senate and Vice President (Henderson & Pérez, 1980; Polo Miranda, circa 1989). During Sánchez's lifetime, he also accumulated what was considered to be the largest and most important library related to Latin America and Peruvian literature and politics (Shapiro, 1969). His papers document the overlapping literary and left-wing political networks of mid-20th century Latin America, containing correspondence with notable literary and political figures. The papers also document the development and inner workings of APRA, with substantial correspondence with founder Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre and party leaders. Dr. Sánchez lived through a period of intense political turmoil, including periods of military dictatorship, political persecution, and violence which resulted in Dr. Sánchez spending much of his life in exile. These events and their impacts are reflected throughout Dr. Sánchez's papers. Much of the correspondence is written under pseudonyms while one or both correspondents was living in exile and includes significant discussions of traumatic experiences such as coups, exile, political violence, and suicide. Not only is the collection itself complex and difficult both contextually and in its contents, but its arrival at Penn State and its subsequent curation is similarly layered and imbued with its own disruptions.

In 1969, book dealer S. R. Shapiro travelled to Latin America and negotiated the sale of Dr. Sánchez's personal library and papers to Penn State University (Shapiro, 1969). The library consisted of approximately 14,000 volumes about law, history, literature, politics, and other topics related to Peru and Latin America, as well as complete runs of several Latin American journals. Approximately 30% were autographed by the authors and are part of limited, small print runs (Sánchez, March 17, 1969). Penn State agreed to purchase the entire library of 14,000 volumes delivered in three separate shipments within seven years. In addition, Dr. Sánchez promised to deposit his "private papers, manuscripts and documents as the Sánchez Archive in the Library of Pennsylvania State University." Penn State agreed that the "library and archive of Dr. Luis Alberto Sánchez will be preserved intact at the said University Library and will be known as 'The Luis Alberto Sanchez Collection'" (*Memorandum*, March 27, 1969). An additional memorandum states that Dr. Sánchez will deposit his papers with the exception of those of Manuel García Prada, which he already deposited in the Biblioteca Nacional del Perú and outlines that Penn State will personally consult Dr. Sánchez on the arrangement and interpretation of his papers (Sánchez, March 25, 1969). Although the purchase and transfer history of the library is clearly outlined in correspondence between Dr. Sánchez, S. R. Shapiro, and Penn State officials, the transfer of his papers is not. Dr. Sánchez's personal papers arrived in multiple shipments between 1973-1991, with the bulk likely arriving in 1977 as a letter advises Penn State that Dr. Sánchez has hired Professor of Paleography and archivist Marlene Polo to compile, select, and classify his correspondence as well as the letters of Alfredo González Prada (Sánchez, April 26, 1977). Between 1976-1977, Penn State negotiated and purchased an additional approximate 2,500 books and other materials. These sales resulted in the collection being geographically far from Peruvian researchers and therefore difficult to access.

In reviewing the collection, one cannot ignore Dr. Sánchez's careful curation of his own papers. The papers' survival, given the upheaval of Dr. Sánchez's life, is almost miraculous. As he states: "I know they are in poor shape but the reason is what [sic] many letters were hidden for years, others were kept by friends of mine who didn't give them much care" (Sánchez, 1973) [Figure 1]. In this letter, Dr. Sánchez clearly states his own order for the collection as well as the necessity of continually consulting him throughout the description process: "The fact is there are three series of papers: literary, political, and personal. Most of them have fake signatures or nicknames so I must be consulted for a final classification and in some cases, to explain the original circumstances and give a summarian information about when they were written and to whom" (Sánchez, 1973). At every stage, Dr. Sánchez carefully curated his work and what he felt was important to include (or exclude) from his collection: "I have eliminated papers overly personal such as

certifications of residency, of marriage, family letters, which do not belong in the archive” (Sánchez, 1977). Henderson

continually consulted Dr. Sánchez to clarify correspondence and “unmask” pseudonyms present throughout the papers, such as in the letter in Figure 2. Dr. Sánchez’s work to curate and decode his collection is critical for researchers’ ability to use and understand the collection. He epitomizes the concept that creators are not passive collectors, but actively engaged in shaping their own legacies. Dr. Sánchez prioritized his political legacy over other aspects of his life, leaving his personal life nearly absent from his own archival record. The thoroughness with which Dr. Sánchez shaped his own legacy is vital towards understanding the resulting collection.

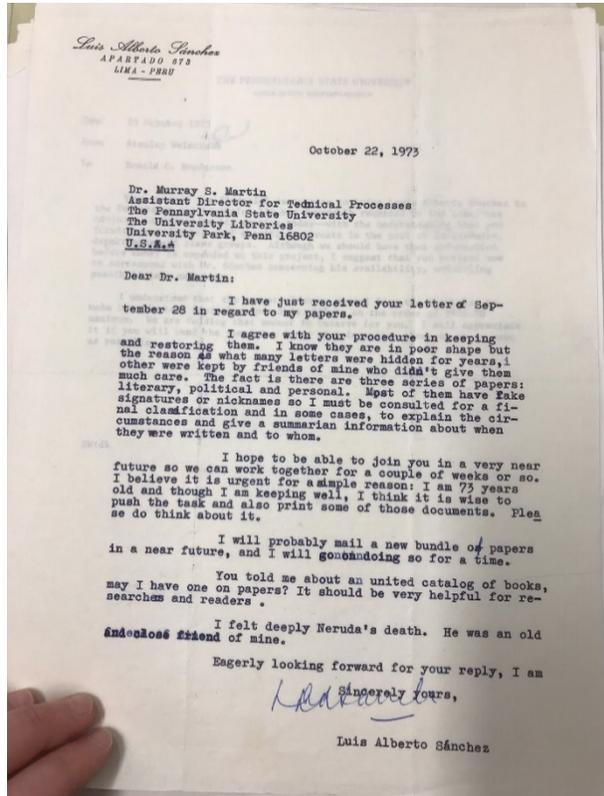


Figure 2: Letter from Luis Alberto Sánchez to Murray Martin discussing his papers, book catalog, visit to Penn State, and Pablo Neruda’s death

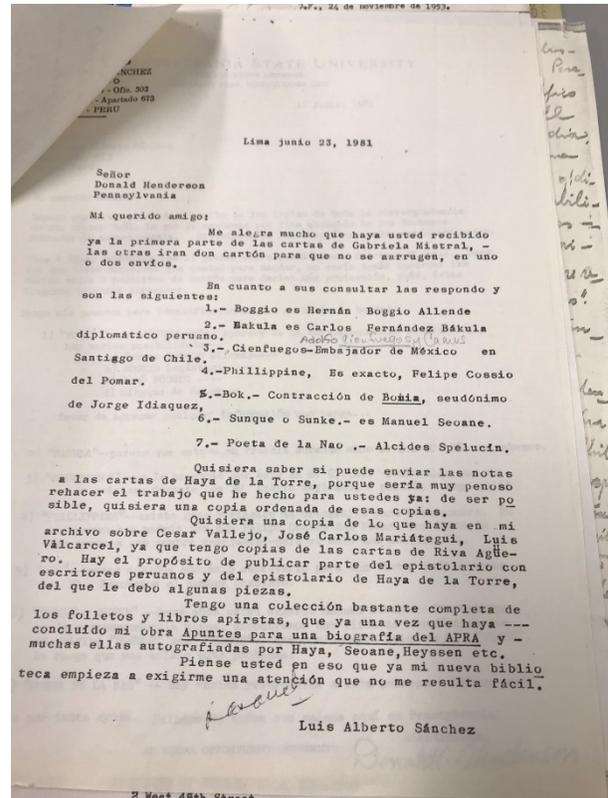


Figure 1: Letter from Luis Alberto Sánchez to Donald Henderson in response to Henderson’s questions about pseudonyms present in his papers and request for copies of letters

Despite Dr. Sánchez’s attempt to control the archival process, Penn State librarians Don Henderson and Grace Pérez’s influence is also now indelibly part of the collection.¹ Dr. Sánchez’s original arrangement was disregarded, and the collection was rearranged with correspondence ordered alphabetically and subsequently chronologically by correspondent. In addition, archivists subsequently deposited unrelated Latin American political history-related materials as well as interfiled the collection file records (such as correspondence between Dr. Sánchez and Penn State) into the collection. Additional traces of curatorial work are present throughout the collection as 1) librarian-supplied notes and exhibit labels about collection materials were also added and 2) Penn State published separately an annotated calendar cataloging correspondence at the item level, providing a brief summary of each letter. Although many pieces of

correspondence were received after the calendar's publication, they were interfiled with previously received materials, demonstrating that processing of continued accruals further disregarded original order. These practices illustrate the power of archivists to impact archival materials and influence future researchers' interactions with the record. However well-intentioned, these actions actively disrupted Dr. Sánchez's work and ultimately suppressed his voice by disregarding the original classification and arrangement of the materials, disrupting Dr. Sánchez's own interpretation of his relationships and networks.

Ultimately, the finding aid contained no intellectual arrangement and minimal contextual information, the Alfredo González Prada correspondence was interfiled with Dr. Sánchez's correspondence, and Dr. Sánchez's library books were distributed throughout the libraries' collections. Librarian José Guerrero worked to identify Sánchez Library materials, add provenance information to catalog records, and piece together the collection's custodial history. In consideration of the complicated curatorial and custodial history, the trauma imbued in the collection contents, its inaccessibility to its original community due linguistically and geographically, and Guerrero's work surfacing these issues, archivists decided to reprocess the collection using a reparative framework.² Although most collections at Penn State are processed at a collection- or series-level, meaning they would retain their current arrangement and stable housing to encourage efficiency and minimize project cost, confronting these past practices required intentionally dedicating an unusually large amount of time and preservation supplies to this project. While item-level processing is increasingly rare and discouraged as overly time-consuming and supplies intensive, investing in a more detailed description was deemed necessary towards ethically redressing these disruptions, improving accessibility, and facilitating future digital project work.

Based on custodial and curatorial history research, and in consultation with the University Archivist and Head of Collection Services, the Processing Archivist established a plan to rearrange and re-describe the collection, including:

1. Retaining the correspondence between Dr. Sánchez and Penn State within the collection;
2. Creating dual-language archival description to make the collection more accessible to native Spanish-speakers;³
3. Intellectually arranging the collection into the unofficial series created by previous archivists and establishing an additional series for *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA)*, *Alfredo González Prada*, and *Pennsylvania State University* to highlight these materials and be transparent about the collection's custodial history; and
4. Creating detailed custodial history, processing and series-level scope and content notes to expose the collection's history and archivist interventions and to highlight collection themes, important individuals, and events previously obscured by description.

The Processing Archivist disturbed previous work as little as possible aside from moving correspondence into item-level folders. This included retaining all assorted archivist notes, original folders, and not disturbing the physical order. Although she identified Dr. Sánchez's original intent in his correspondence with Penn State, she determined that it would be impossible to reprocess the collection into this original arrangement because she could not conclusively identify which materials Dr. Sánchez had classified into each grouping and consequently that the archivists' rearrangement was too substantial to be disrupted. Although Alfredo González Prada's materials were interfiled with Dr. Sánchez's correspondence, she decided to intellectually (but not physically) separate these materials into their own series to elevate his voice. She also reprocessed the collection at the item-level to prepare for planned digitization initiatives, stabilize delicate items, and increase collection transparency. Furthermore, although donor-library correspondence is traditionally part of a separate collection folder, she retained it within the collection because this correspondence had already been accessible to researchers, documented the over 20-year

relationship between Penn State and Dr. Sánchez, documented Dr. Sánchez's original curation, and contributed to the framework of ethically surfacing the collection's complex and troubling history. The actions of current and past archivists illustrate the professional discourse surrounding power, archival intervention, and the need to surface archival labor. The actions needed to repair or surface the layers of custodial and curatorial disruptions exemplify the many points in the archival life cycle where records are interpreted, influenced, and shaped both by creators and archivists themselves. This collection demonstrates how the archivist's perspective and actions are inseparable from a collection's arrangement and description, and how elevating this work is vital to a researcher's understanding of the collection's context and accessibility.

Penn State uses an extensible processing framework, and most collections are processed at a higher collection- or series-level to efficiently balance resources (chiefly staff time). This limits in-depth work, such as handling materials at the item level, preserving stable original enclosures, and describing materials more collectively. In this case, archivists prioritized the need to redress disruptive archival practices and highlight the voice of the collections' creator over limiting demands on staff time and preservation supplies, allowing the Processing Archivist to focus on this collection's needs over other queued collections. Although prioritizing the Sánchez collection required diverting work away from potentially processing a larger volume of materials, we felt that this more in-depth work was necessary to make this collection accessible to Spanish-speaking researchers. Reprocessing with an ethic of repair required a higher investment of resources for the collection's size, including over 150 hours of work and hundreds of new folders. We also acknowledge that this reparative work remains incomplete, because despite being more intellectually and linguistically accessible, it remains largely physically inaccessible to Latin American researchers since the collection is not yet digitized and visiting American archives can be prohibitively expensive and bureaucratically difficult for international researchers.

Using ethical needs as a prioritization factor actively works towards institutional goals of promoting equitable access to a more diverse set of collections while also acknowledging the realities of resource restrictions and staff capabilities. In this project, ethical needs superseded other factors such as frequency of use because institutional past practices directly impacted researchers' ability to discover the collection and the lack of remediation perpetuated the deleterious effects of previous archival interventions. Reprocessing the collection using a reparative framework was necessary to increase accessibility as its disrepair meant that researchers could not be drawn to the collection without first engaging in this work. This more intensive project worked within extensible workflows by reframing prioritization away from primarily active use-centric factors and instead toward ethical-centered factors. Every decision about processing prioritization and intensity is an active choice to work on one collection over others. These decisions are highly specific to individual archivists and institutional limitations. Resources like preservation supplies, processing staff, and staff time limit all archivists' ability to fully arrange and describe their collections. Using ethical redescription needs as a prioritization factor of equal (or even greater) importance to other factors allows archivists to balance their limitations with collection needs. Reparative reprocessing does not necessarily require item-level processing but does require a commitment to transparency about archival practices and to more ethically describing materials using language preferred by and recognizable to communities represented within the records. As with all archival practices, flexibility is key to deciding how best to serve our collections and our researchers.

This collection's difficult and convoluted history as well as its displacement from Peru required an investment of additional care to begin to repair the violations of original order and provenance, its inadequate description, and overall inaccessibility. To peel away the layers of history, curatorial disruption, and surface the disturbing and traumatic themes reflected in the record required a commitment to slowing down and thoroughly studying the collection's history and the materials themselves. Per Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson (2019), "It is in the slowing down that we can start to see modes of ethical archives that reflect accountability, engagement, relationality, and reciprocity that work alongside, within, and in

opposition to settler structures and archival logics of displacement and dispossession” (p. 99). This increased care requires an increased investment of time and resources to redress the institutional failures that create archival silences and practices which perpetuate racist and white supremacist attitudes.

Conclusion

Archivists acknowledge that all aspects of archival work are choices that reinforce institutional values and priorities. Project prioritization involves choosing to work on certain projects over others and is already standard practice. Extensible processing currently chooses to make all collections discoverable at a “golden minimum” level and considers whether to invest additional processing resources based on local factors such as usage rates. However, if minimal description insufficiently describes collections’ originating communities or inadvertently obfuscates the content of materials, then these collections are unlikely to have high usage rates. If patrons discover offensive descriptions, or descriptions which clearly depict a failure to consider their communities’ concerns as important, why would they visit the archives? Using the flexibility of extensible practices, this essay argues that reparative work should be factored within the constraints of archival programs, considered alongside existing backlogs, and elevated above other prioritization factors as a method to redress past harms.

It is in the institution’s best interest to make their archives more accessible and welcoming for researchers from historically marginalized communities. Initiatives to diversify collections at traditional repositories cannot succeed if communities cannot identify themselves within the repository’s current holdings or trust repositories to be responsible stewards of their communities’ memories. Collections in which traditional archival practices perpetuate harms and create silences must be prioritized for more in-depth processing and description as a first step toward repairing institutional relationships with these communities and creating a more robust, inclusive, and accessible historical record. While the collections of wealthy individuals have been invested in for centuries, society’s changing conceptions of history have changed to better reflect humanity more broadly. Archives’ priorities must adapt accordingly to better serve researcher needs and their communities.

The work of repairing and alleviating past harms requires analyzing, disrupting, and dismantling layers of legacy, institutional data, and structural practices. Ethical, reparative work requires practitioners to recover the voices of record creators and subjects, expose curatorial histories, and construct new discovery tools that acknowledge these past harms, highlight the voice of the archivist, and ethically represent historical materials to the communities they represent. This work is not fast, and it requires an intentional dedication of resources embedded within normalized processing workflows. Reparative work which seeks to redress the violence, silence, and symbolic annihilation imposed onto communities by centuries of traditional archival practice and white-supremacist world views must be a priority.

References

- Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia’s Anti-Racist Description Working Group. (2019, October). *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources*.
https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf
- Arroyo-Ramírez, Elvia. (2016, October 30). *Invisible defaults and perceived limitations: Processing the Juan Gelman files*. Medium. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/invisible-defaults-and-perceived-limitations-processing-the-juan-gelman-files-4187fdd36759>
- Bolding, Kelly. (2018). Reparative processing: A case study in auditing legacy archival description for racism. Presentation at Midwestern Archives Conference, 2018. goo.gl/uwjQpg
- Brilmyer, Gracen M. & Caswell, Michelle. (2017). *Identifying & dismantling white supremacy in archives: An incomplete list of white privileges in archives and action items for dismantling them*. Poster in *The Library Quarterly*, 87 (3). http://www.gracenbrilmyer.com/dismantling_whiteSupremacy_archives3.pdf

- Carter, Rodney G. S. (2006). Of things said and unsaid: Power, archival silences, and power in silence. *Archivaria*, 61, 215-233.
- Caswell, Michelle & Cifor, Marika. (2016). From human rights to feminist ethics: Radical empathy in the archives. *Archivaria*, 81, 23-43.
- Chilcott, Alicia. (2019). Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives. *Archival Science*, 19, 359-376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09314-y>
- Christen, Kimberly & Anderson, Jane. (2019). Toward slow archives. *Archival Science*, 19, 87-116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09307-x>
- Cook, Terry & Schwartz, Joan M. (2002). Archives, records, and power: The making of modern memory. *Archival Science*, 2, 1-19.
- Dean, Jackie. (2020). Conscious editing of archival description at UNC-Chapel Hill. *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists*, 16, n.p. http://www.ncarchivists.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/jsnca_vol16_dean.pdf
- deGraffenreid, Alexandra & Rizzo, Caitlin. (2019). *Collection Services Manual: Archival Arrangement and Description*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Douglas, Jennifer. (2016). Toward more honest description. *The American Archivist*, 79(1), 26-55.
- Drake, Jarrett M. (2016, April 6). *RadTech meets RadArch: Towards a new principle for archives and archival description*. Medium. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/radtech-meets-radarch-towards-a-new-principle-for-archives-and-archival-description-568f133e4325>
- Duff, Wendy M. & Harris, Verne. (2002). Stories and names: Archival description as narrating records and constructing meanings. *Archival Science*, 2, 263-285.
- Dunbar, Anthony W. (2006). Introducing critical race theory to archival discourse: getting the conversation started. *Archival Science*, 6, 109-129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-006-9022-6>
- Gorzalski, Matt. (2008). Minimal processing: Its context and influence in the archival community. *Journal of Archival Organization*, 6(3), 186-200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740802421915>
- Greene, Mark A. & Meissner, Dennis. (2005). More product, less process: Revamping traditional archival processing. *The American Archivist*, 68(Fall/Winter), 208-263.
- Harris, Verne. (2002) The archival sliver: power, memory, and archives in South Africa. *Archival Science*, 2, 63-86.
- Henderson, Donald C. & Pérez, Grace R. (1982). *Literature and Politics in Latin America: An Annotated Calendar of the Luis Alberto Sanchez Correspondence, 1919-1980*. The Pennsylvania State University Libraries.
- Hughes-Watkins, Lae'l. (2018). Moving toward a reparative archive: A roadmap for a holistic approach to disrupting homogenous histories in academic repositories and creating inclusive spaces for marginalized voices. *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, 5, article 6. <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol5/iss1/6>
- Jules, Bergis. (2016, November 11). *Confronting our failure of care around the legacies of marginalized people in the archives*. Medium. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/confronting-our-failure-of-care-around-the-legacies-of-marginalized-people-in-the-archives-dc4180397280>
- Ketelaar, Eric. (2001). Tacit narratives: The meanings of archives. *Archival Science*, 1, 131-141.
- Light, Michelle & Hyry, Tom. (2002). Colophons and annotations: New directions for the finding aid. *The American Archivist*, 65(Fall/Winter), 216-230.
- MacNeil, Heather. (2009). Trusting description: Authenticity, accountability, and archival description standards. *Journal of Archival Organization*, 7(3), 89-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740903117693>
- Meissner, Dennis & Greene, Mark A. (2010). More application while less appreciation: The adopters and antagonists of mpls. *Journal of Archival Organization*, 8(3-4), 174-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2010.554069>
- Memorandum on the Library of Dr. Luis Alberto Sanchez*. (March 27, 1969)., Collection control folder, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Nesmith, Tom. (2005). Seeing archives: Postmodernism and the changing intellectual place of archives. *The American Archivist*, 65 (Spring/Summer), 24-41.
- Pearce-Moses, Richard. (2005). *A glossary of archival and records terminology*. Society of American Archivists.
- Polo Miranda, Marlene. (circa 1989). *Cronología: Vida y obra de Luis Alberto Sánchez*. Unpublished manuscript, Box 14, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.

- Rawson, K. J. (2018). The rhetorical power of archival description: classifying images of gender transgression. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 48(4), 327-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2017.1347951>
- Robinson-Sweet, Anna. (2018). Truth and reconciliation: Archivists as reparations activists. *The American Archivist*, 81(1), 23-37.
- Sánchez, Luis Alberto. (1969, March 17). *Luis Alberto Sánchez to S.R. Shapiro* [Memorandum]. Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Sánchez, Luis Alberto. (1969, March 25). [Memorandum adicional]. Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Sánchez, Luis Alberto. (October 22, 1973). [Letter]. Box 13, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Sánchez, Luis Alberto. (June 23, 1981). [Letter]. Box 14, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Sánchez, Luis Alberto. (April 26, 1977). "Statement about Miss. [Marlene] Polo" [Letter]. Box 13, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Sangwand, T-Kay. (2018). Preservation is political: enacting contributive justice and decolonizing transnational archival collaborations. *KULA: knowledge creation, dissemination, and preservation studies*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.36>
- Santamaria, Daniel A. (2015). *Extensible processing for archives and special collections: Reducing processing backlogs*. ALA Neal-Schuman.
- Shapiro, S. R. (March 25, 1969). [Letter] Box 13, Luis Alberto Sánchez papers, 01764, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
- Solis, Gabriel. (2018). Documenting state violence: (Symbolic) annihilation & archives of survival. *KULA: knowledge creation, dissemination, and preservation studies*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.28>
- Sutherland, Tonia. (2017). Archival amnesty: In search of black American transitional and restorative justice. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 1(2), n.p. <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.42>
- Weideman, Christine. (2006). Accessioning as processing. *The American Archivist*, 69 (Fall/Winter), 274-283.
- Yakel, Elizabeth. (2003). Archival representation. *Archival Science*, 3, 1-25.
- Zinn, Howard. (1977). Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest. *MidWestern Archivist*, 2(2), 14-26.

Notes

¹ Although the existing correspondence demonstrates the long relationship between Dr. Henderson and Dr. Sánchez, Ms. Pérez' voice is silent. However, Don Henderson mentions her work with the collection to Dr. Sánchez in his letters, she appears in photographs during Dr. Sánchez's visit to Penn State, Dr. Sánchez wrote her a personal thank-you letter for her work, and she is listed as a co-author of the *Annotated Calendar...* Therefore, although only traces of her work exist, the author considers her as an important contributor to the collection who cannot be excluded from the discussion of its curatorial history.

² The author would like to thank José Guerrero for his work and advocacy surrounding this collection, which was essential towards raising the awareness of the collection's needs and ultimately its prioritization.

³ Finding aids available at: Guía a los documentos de Luis Alberto Sánchez (<https://libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/1764es.htm>), Guide to the Luis Alberto Sánchez papers (<https://libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/1764en.htm>)

Contact

Alexandra deGraffenreid
Processing Archivist

Eberly Family Special Collections Library
Pennsylvania State University
Email: aad5597@psu.edu

Complete APA Citation

deGraffenreid, Alexandra. (2021, November 8). Reparative processing of the *Luis Alberto Sánchez papers*: Engaging the conflict between archival values and minimal processing practices. [*Special issue on Unsettling the Archives.*] *Across the Disciplines*, 18(1/2), 33-46. <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2021.18.1-2.04>