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Indigenizing Transcriptions:

Imagining an Oral History Process for Indigenous Knowledge Inclusion

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in American Indian Studies

by

Marina Perez

2022

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Indigenizing Transcriptions:

Imagining an Oral History Process for Indigenous Knowledge Inclusion

by

Marina Perez

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Nancy Marie Mithlo, Chair

This thesis analyzes the development of oral history scholarship and transcription production through an interdisciplinary context. A common practice within institutional oral history projects involves the transference of recorded oral histories to written records, most commonly referred to as transcriptions. Institutional methods of transcription often resemble transactional and extractive forms of narrative documentation that neglect Indigenous forms of knowledge. In this research, I argue for a reimagined transcription process that prioritizes an Indigenous transcription framework that is collaborative, community-engaged, and culturally responsive. Additionally, this research examines variables and strategies for indigenizing transcription with care and consideration for speakers, Native communities, and Indigenous ways of knowing.

The thesis of Marina Perez is approved.

Paul V. Kroskrity

Shannon E. Speed

Nancy Marie Mithlo, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

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I would also like to extend my gratitude to the faculty and staff of the American Indian Studies Interdepartmental Program and the American Indian Studies Center for supporting my graduate studies. I appreciate all the care and consideration the faculty members provide my cohort during our graduate studies. Pampariyutsi/Thank you!

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## Introduction

In the summer of 2020, I had the opportunity to work as a graduate student researcher on an Indigenous arts archive with Chiricahua Apache professor, Dr. Nancy Marie Mithlo, in collaboration with the UCLA American Indian Studies Center Librarian Joy Holland. The archive project titled *Indigenous Archival Methodologies: The Venice Biennale Native Art Exhibition Archives* included materials recently donated to the American Indian Studies Center Library at UCLA. The *Indigenous Archival Methodologies* project analyzed and cataloged collection materials relating to Native-led exhibitions and projects presented at the Venice Biennale from 1997 through 2019.<sup>1</sup> Due to the university safety protocols and the rapid development of COVID-19, the project operated remotely, and the research team shifted our focus to assessing digital collection materials. Through these new project goals, I had the opportunity to engage with audio and video-based materials by listening and transcribing recorded conversations and zoom interviews. The interviews were facilitated by Dr. Mithlo and included discussions with artists, curators, and her colleagues who contributed to the global presence of Indigenous arts at the Venice Biennale.

Although I do not have any formal training in archival studies, I was introduced to Indigenous-based archival methods that prioritize working with and caring for culturally sensitive materials through the *Indigenous Archival Methodologies* project. I developed critical skills in analyzing digital systems used to catalog audio and video materials from Native speakers. Through this research experience, I began recognizing patterns of violence and disregard for Native peoples, communities, and stories in academic and institutional archives. My interest in transcriptions started with the *Indigenous Archival Methodologies* project. I began

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<sup>1</sup> UCLA Arts: School of the Arts and Architecture. "Chancellor's Arts Initiative Funds Grant To Support UCLA Faculty Members' Arts-Based Research," May 5, 2021. <http://arts.ucla.edu>.

thinking about what it meant to indigenize a transcription from recorded oral histories and the ways Indigenous researchers can bypass colonial models of narrative documentation to prioritize Indigenous knowledge systems and protocols. Considering the violence that exists in archives, I wanted my research to think about how indigenizing transcriptions could make critical interventions in the ways we engage, produce and disseminate oral histories.

In my research locating oral history records from digital archives, I have observed unethical archival practices that have impacted metadata descriptions and oral history transcriptions.<sup>2</sup> Although these practices are not uncommon amongst institutions, these standards demonstrate a general lack of cultural awareness and competency in working with sensitive materials. Several challenges can arise regarding the management and organization of cultural materials, and the ethical standpoint of archives has historically best served the interests of institutions. Kristen Thorpe, a Wormi archivist from Port Stephens NSW, elaborates on the ramifications of archival ethics and practices on Indigenous peoples, “In terms of access and management of resources and records, Indigenous people are often dealing with ethical decisions that were made by colonisers on *how* our family’s lives were recorded, kept and accessed.”<sup>3</sup> Institutions are invested in documenting Indigenous cultures and histories yet operate within a narrow scope of cultural competency. This further exclusion results in Indigenous peoples being burdened with navigating the pain, grief, and violence produced and maintained by the archive.

Building upon interdisciplinary frameworks, this thesis analyzes the development of oral history scholarship and transcription production. I advocate for an alternative process of oral

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<sup>2</sup> Some brief examples of unethical archival practices include misspellings/mislabeling of Indigenous names and places, use of racist words and slurs, harmful and outdated language in titles, descriptions and metadata and public open access to culturally sensitive materials.

<sup>3</sup> Thorpe, K., Ethics, Indigenous Cultural Safety and the Archives. *Archifacts*, 2018, No 2, 33 – 47.

history transcription by identifying aspects that are pertinent to an Indigenous transcription framework.<sup>4</sup> I assert indigenizing transcription as a form of intervention in current transcription processes. In section one, I provide a brief overview of historical moments and institutions that have impacted the development of oral history scholarship concerning Native peoples and communities. In section two, I review key terms, concepts, and theories that highlight current scholarship on oral histories and transcriptions. In section three, I identify principal elements that are critical to developing an indigenizing transcription framework. I conclude the thesis by sharing my final thoughts and considerations for a future of indigenizing transcriptions.

While my objective is to position indigenizing transcriptions as a critical intervention strategy within oral history scholarship, I hope this research will encourage collective action in creating culturally competent protocols and models for transcribing oral histories from Native peoples. I am inspired by all the Indigenous scholars, archivists, librarians, researchers, and activists who move through mountains and oceans to organize and collaborate on creating community resources, educational opportunities, research initiatives, and career pathways for future generations of Indigenous peoples. I recognize this research is a part of a much more extensive “network of constellations,” and I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in this work.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> When referring to the original peoples of the United States, I use the terms Native, Native American, or American Indian. I use the term Indigenous to identify communities and scholarship from a global Indigenous context that may include geographies across the Greater Pacific, North, Central and South America. When possible, I identify people and/or communities by their respective tribe, nation, or community name.

<sup>5</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

## Research Intention and Critical Listening Positionality

My interest in researching oral histories and transcriptions emerged from my role and responsibilities of listening, caring, and carrying my family and community stories.

I recognize oral histories and storytelling as an intergenerational Indigenous feminist practice that encourages critical engagements. As noted by Wailacki and Concow historian, William Bauer, oral histories are symbolic of Indigenous women's work, skills, and responsibilities.<sup>6</sup> Oral traditions emphasize knowledge and methods of understanding and relating to time, place, and kinship. As a descendant of the southern Sierra Madre Occidental peoples of West Mexico, my family and community oral histories are presented as memories, songs, recipes, jokes, dreams, and secrets. I learned at an early age that these various forms of story composition require skills in epistemological literacy and narrative code-switching.

I draw upon Dylan Robinson's conceptual framework of critical listening positionality as a method for articulating, thinking, and positioning myself within this research. Robison utilizes critical listening positionality as a way to understand "...how we might become better attuned to the particular filters of race, class, gender, and ability that actively select and frame the moment of contact between listening body and listened-to sound."<sup>7</sup> My critical listening positionality is deeply influenced by how I navigate a hearing world as a hard-of-hearing person. As a hard-of-hearing person, I make daily negotiations on how I interact, communicate and position myself between a "hearing" and "deaf" world. In the context of "hearing" and "deafness," the nuances of navigating spatial, temporal, and cultural positions are often not considered in a Western paradigm. My critical listening positionality challenges normative forms of listening,

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<sup>6</sup> Bauer, William. "Oral History." *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

engaging, and communicating as I practice social and cultural protocols to demonstrate my presence and intention as a critical listener.<sup>8</sup> These protocols are grounded in being respectful, accepting responsibilities, honoring relationships, and being reciprocal.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I continue to utilize these protocols to engage with community, research, and oral histories.<sup>10</sup> I approach this work with an anti-colonial feminist framework that honors Indigenous expressions of knowledges. As a person who is not a member of any of the tribal communities discussed in this thesis, I recognize that these oral histories have deep intentional meanings that embody distinct cultural ontologies and therefore do not carry the same significance for me, my family, or my community. As a critical listener and visitor to these stories, I use the protocols I am familiar with to remind myself of my responsibility for engaging in this work with the utmost care and respect.

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<sup>8</sup> I provide this example to distinguish the difference between “hearing” and “listening.” The cultural protocols I reference for critical listening consist of providing eye contact with the speaker, reading facial and body expressions, sitting only when invited, not interpreting with questions or comments, reciprocating emotions and expressions and respecting privacy.

Although there are a number of other ways to engage in critical listening protocols, I share these to provide a general understanding of critical listening practices from my own cultural context.  
<sup>9</sup> Martin, Karen, and Booran Mirraaboo. “Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-Search.” *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 76 (2003): 203–14.

<sup>10</sup> While writing and theorizing on the process of indigenizing transcriptions, I worked on three oral history projects at UCLA. These oral history projects include the *Indigenous Archival Methodologies: The Venice Biennale Native Art Exhibition Archives*, *Expanding the Archive: American Indian Activism and Native Artists' Life Histories*, an Oral History Project, and *Archiving the Age of Mass Incarceration*. My participation in these oral history projects shaped the ideas and methods presented in this thesis. I received specialized training and guidance from field experts and scholars in the field of oral history. This thesis is a living document that will continue to develop with emerging theories and approaches that honor Indigenous knowledge inclusion.

## Section 1: Historical Significance of Oral Histories

Content Note: I would like to caution readers that the following section includes details on colonization, erasure, genocide, boarding schools, forced relocation, and state violence against Native peoples. Although these topics are presented through a historical lens, the impacts of these violent acts continue to be felt and experienced amongst Native families and communities today.<sup>11</sup>

The following section presents a historical account of oral history developments pertaining to Native peoples, cultures, and histories. This overview highlights critical social, political, and cultural moments that have shaped oral history scholarship of Native peoples, communities, and cultures. I focus on key points of significance from 1879 through 2021. Due to the broad time frame, I organize this timeline into four distinct periods: Civilization Regulations Era (1879 - 1930s), Reorganization, Relocation, and Termination Era (1930s - 1950s), Self-Determination Era (1960s - 1990s), and the Digitalization Era (2000 - 2020s).

As Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe declares, “Settler colonialism is a structure not an event.”<sup>12</sup> This historical timeline is meant to highlight significant moments that shaped the scholarship and fields of oral history amongst Native communities. However, the historical moments highlighted in this research should not be understood as stand-alone historical events but understood as conductive of settler colonial structures. Although this is not a comprehensive

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<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of content notes and/or content warnings is an emerging practice in the library and archive field. A recent publication from Harvard University’s Center for the History of Medicine, addresses the colonial legacy of harmful language and content in institutional collections. The “Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description” was produced as a component to the Center for the History of Medicine’s updated policies and procedures manual. Among the various strategies for identifying and correcting violent and racist description practices, the guidelines suggest incorporating content notes to provide visitors the option to engage or withdraw from viewing challenging content. While this example, highlights a university-specific manual, these suggested guidelines align with emerging practices and protocols from university and community-produced scholarship. Center for the History of Medicine. “Center for the History of Medicine: Policies & Procedures Manual.” Harvard University, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

timeline nor a tribally specific assessment, this brief analysis intends to make sense of the ways Native oral histories have come to exist in institutional archives.<sup>13</sup>

#### Civilization Regulations Era (the late 1870s - 1930s)

I refer to this specific period as the Civilization Regulations Era due to the various discriminatory laws and policies the United States government enforced on Native peoples and tribal communities. Before the late 1870s, the US government created political initiatives that justified the theft of Native lands and genocide of Native peoples.<sup>14</sup> For example, on March 3, 1819, the US government passed the Indian Civilization Act Fund allowing religious-based organizations to operate boarding schools targeting Native children.<sup>15</sup> These assimilation-based policies were made possible due to the continuous genocidal efforts conducted by the United States government. These political efforts created the perfect conditions to formulate policies that exacerbated the dispossession of cultural, spiritual, and linguistic identity.

In 1883, the Department of Interior and the Office of Indian Affairs created a legal order to abolish ceremonial and cultural practices under the Code of Indian Offenses.<sup>16</sup> The official governing form included nine rules prohibiting Native peoples from gathering, feasting, participating in ceremonies, and regulating marriage agreements.<sup>17</sup> Native peoples found guilty

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<sup>13</sup> Outside of the historical timeframe of this research focus, it's pertinent to mention the centuries long Indian wars that occurred across tribal territories in what is now the United States. In *Our History is the Future*, Lower Brule Sioux historian, Nick Estes discusses the impact of the Indian wars on tribal communities across the Dakotas and how it correlates with current political policy frameworks. Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London; New York: Verso, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> The formation of genocidal policies and laws that took effect during the late 1870s through the 1930s was directly related to the violent raids, massacres, and forced removal and confinement of Native peoples in the late 1700s through the mid-1800s. Estes, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Statutes at Large, 3:516-17. *Civilization Fund Act*, 1819.

<sup>16</sup> Teller, Henry M. "Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offenses", 1883. <https://rclinton.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/code-of-indian-offenses.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

of participating in any of these “offenses” were denied access to government rations, subjected to forced labor, substantial fines, and/or confined to an agency prison.<sup>18</sup> The U.S. government created these measures to force Native people to rely on government substantiates for survival in return for their compliance to state-imposed legal orders.<sup>19</sup> Suzan Shown Harjo, a Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee poet and policy rights activist, describes civilization regulations as a legal and political process that “...criminalized all Native traditions, ceremonies, roaming away from the reservations and interfering with ‘progressive education’ of the children...”.<sup>20</sup> The Code of Indian Offenses was designed to reinforce the operation of government-based programs such as the federal courts, the welfare system, and boarding school policies.<sup>21</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1800s, Native children were removed from their homes and communities to attend boarding schools operated by the federal government and/or religious-based organizations.<sup>22</sup> In 1879, Second Lieutenant Richard Pratt established the Carlisle Indian School in an out-of-commission military base in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The Carlisle Indian School was the first boarding school to operate outside of a reservation, forcing Native children to relocate off of their traditional territories.<sup>23</sup> In his efforts to create a unique boarding

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Breckinridge, S. P. “The Problem of Indian Administration. Lewis Meriam.” *Social Service Review* 2, no. 3 (1928): 515–518. <https://doi.org/10.1086/630423>.

<sup>20</sup> Harjo, Suzan Shown. “If You Don’t Know Treaties and Sovereignty, You Don’t Know History.” *Indian Country Today*. Accessed January 11, 2022. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/opinion/if-you-don-t-know-treaties-and-sovereignty-you-don-t-know-history>.

<sup>21</sup> While many Native children were forced to attend boarding schools far from their home territories, the Code of Indian Offenses operated in Native communities and regulated the transmission of cultural practices. These conditions made it difficult for children to return home and learn traditional practices relating to language-based ceremonies, songs, stories and dances.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Carlisle Indian School Project. “Carlisle Indian School.” Accessed January 16, 2022. <https://carlisleindianschoolproject.com/>.

school model, Pratt was famously quoted for his “Kill the Indian, save the man” philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Under Pratt’s leadership, the Carlisle Indian School demonstrated how colonial education could “civilize” Native peoples through cultural and linguistic assimilation. In this process, Native children were stripped of their identities, relationships, knowledges, and familial relations.

While the U.S. government was funding the genocide of Native peoples, the government was also invested in the documentation and research of Native culture. The Bureau of Ethnology was established in 1879 by the U.S. Congress.<sup>25</sup> The objective of the Bureau of Ethnology was to transfer documents relating to Native peoples from the Department of Interior to the Smithsonian Institute.<sup>26</sup> Franz Boas, most notably known as the “Father of Anthropology,” described the focus of the Bureau of Ethnology as being “...charged with the investigation of the life and customs of the North American Indians.”<sup>27</sup> Under the leadership of John Wesley Powell, the Bureau of Ethnology became a designated research center that emphasized ethnographic research on Native communities, languages, traditions, and territories.<sup>28</sup> To provide context on the alignment of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> In 1897, the Bureau of Ethnology was renamed the Bureau of American Ethnology. For this thesis, I use the Bureau of American Ethnology to reference the longevity of the institution as it is cited in current government sources. However, when referring to a particular time period prior to 1897, I use the Bureau of Ethnology as the main name reference. “Smithsonian Institution. Bureau of American Ethnology. 1897-1965 Organization Authority Record.” National Archives Catalog, n.d. Accessed March 16, 2022. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/10474561>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Boas, Franz. “The Bureau of American Ethnology.” *Science* 16, no. 412 (1902): 828–831. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.16.412.828-a>.

<sup>28</sup> The Bureau of American Ethnology employed field researchers who worked with different tribal communities and utilized various methods of anthropological documentation. These records may consist of audio recordings, field notes, publications, and photographs. Since each field researcher had different professional trainings, research objectives, and interests, the type of cultural materials that were collected during this era of American anthropology will differ extensively. Some of the more known field researchers for the Bureau of American Ethnology include: John Peabody Harrington, James Mooney, Alice Cunningham Fletcher, James Owen Dorsey and Francis La Flesche. More research on each individual field researcher will reveal stark contrast in project facilitations, methods and research findings. “Smithsonian Institution.

federal initiatives targeting Native communities, it is important to note that the Bureau of Ethnology and the Carlisle Indian School were both established in 1879. In her dissertation, Regna Diebold Darnell frames the origins of the Bureau of Ethnology as a political strategy driven by government-funded research, “The American Indian was the greatest foreign policy problem of the United States in 1879, and Powell used this fact to gain support for his Bureau.”<sup>29</sup> This important connection further aligns the government's interest to “kill the Indian” while also positioning Native peoples as “archival captives.”<sup>30</sup>

The study of Native peoples, languages, and cultures as a form of warfare expands on the genocidal policies authorized by federal agencies such as the Bureau of Ethnology. In a written correspondence Powell expresses his motivation and approach to ethnographic collection, “If we are to conduct our Indian affairs wisely and induct our barbaric tribes into the ways and institutions of civilization that the red man may become completely under our government and share in its benefits, the first step to be taken is to acquire a knowledge of the Indian tribal governments, religion, sociology, and industrial institutions.”<sup>31</sup> The Bureau of Ethnology operated on the basis of extracting and destroying traditional knowledges presented in the form of oral traditions, ceremonial practices, and relationships with all living and non-living relatives. This particular example of government-funded programs collecting ethnographic materials

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Bureau of American Ethnology. 1897-1965 Organization Authority Record.” National Archives Catalog, n.d. Accessed March 16, 2022. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/10474561>.

<sup>29</sup> Diebold Darnell, Regna. “The Development of American Anthropology 1879-1920: From the Bureau of American Ethnology to Franz Boas.” University of Pennsylvania, 1969. <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI7007794>.

<sup>30</sup> Hagan, William T. “Archival Captive—The American Indian.” *The American Archivist* 41, no. 2, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> Diebold Darnell, Regna. “The Development of American Anthropology 1879-1920: From the Bureau of American Ethnology to Franz Boas.” University of Pennsylvania, 1969.

further contextualizes how historical records of Native peoples were utilized as a tool for assimilation, genocide, and state violence.

#### Reorganization, Relocation, and Termination Era (late 1920s - 1950s)

From the 1920s through the 1950s, Native communities continued to experience assimilation laws and policies. In 1928, the Institute for Government Research conducted a detailed assessment of the effects of U.S. federal laws on Native peoples. The Meriam Report, formerly titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, included extensive information and narrative-based data on the health, economic, social, educational, and political conditions of tribal communities across the United States.<sup>32</sup> As noted in the summary of findings, the Meriam Report concluded that Native peoples on reservations experienced an impoverished quality of life due to the systemic violence produced by the Department of Interior, “The poverty of the Indians and their lack of adjustment to the dominant economic and social systems produce the vicious circle ordinarily found among any people under such circumstances... Several past policies adopted by the government in dealing with the Indians have been of a type which, if long continued, would tend to pauperize any race.”<sup>33</sup> The reported findings exposed the detrimental impacts sanctioned by U.S. policies and the federal administration; policies such as the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 which resulted in the loss of tribal territories, community relationships, cultural practices, and traditional knowledges.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, granted citizenship to Native peoples born in the United States. Yet, despite being granted citizenship, Native peoples were not granted the right to vote nationwide until 1957. The Meriam Report further expands on the political status of Native peoples during this particular era. Goldberg, Carole E., Rebecca Tsosie, and Robert N. Clinton, eds. *American Indian Law: Native Nations and the Federal System: Cases and Materials*. Seventh Edition. New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Breckinridge, S. P. “The Problem of Indian Administration. Lewis Meriam.” *Social Service Review* 2, no. 3 (1928): 515–518. <https://doi.org/10.1086/630423>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

The Meriam Report had a profound influence on American Indian law and policy reform development. It provided suggestions and action plans for improving the social, political, and economic development of Native communities. The U.S. government responded to the Meriam Report by implementing the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934.<sup>35</sup> The Indian Reorganization Act was created under the Roosevelt administration to encourage tribal sovereignty and self-governance. The act appealed to relinquish federal supervision of tribes in favor of tribal government models replicating U.S. legal frameworks and constitutions.<sup>36</sup> Through the Indian Reorganization Act, tribal communities developed economic opportunities, maintained surplus land trusts, and increased tribal political power.<sup>37</sup>

In 1934, the Roosevelt administration created the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. to reflect the presidential campaign for national progressive policy reform. The establishment of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) created a location for all federal and historical documentation and records of the United States. The National Archives and Records includes the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR), a collection of historical documents pertaining to American Indians and tribal communities from 1830 to present time acquisitions. These historical records include military, census, boarding school, hospital, and Bureau of Indian Affairs employee records in addition to microfilms, photographs, and historical maps.<sup>38</sup> As a federal agency, the National Archives and Records

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<sup>35</sup> Mazurek, J. P., Wrend, J., Smith, C., & Conference of Western Attorneys General. *American Indian Law Deskbook*: Vol. 2nd ed. University Press of Colorado, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> Goldberg, Carole E., Rebecca Tsosie, and Robert N. Clinton, eds. *American Indian Law: Native Nations and the Federal System: Cases and Materials*. Seventh Edition. New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> This is a brief overview of the Indian Reorganization Act, a thorough investigation into the development and legacy of this particular policy will reveal stark contrasts in political systems, governance, and leadership practices amongst tribal communities. Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> National Archives. "American Indian Records in the National Archives," August 15, 2016. Accessed March 13, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans>.

became a prominent custodian of tribal records. By 1965, NARA acquired 10,328 cubic feet of historical BIA records.<sup>39</sup> As of May 2022, AIRR expanded to approximately 350,000 cubic feet of BIA records.<sup>40</sup> This expanded growth reveals increased efforts in documenting, accessioning, organizing, and archiving records vital to strengthening tribal nationhood and self-determination.

Proceeding the Roosevelt administration, President Truman and President Eisenhower's political strategies undermined the progressive efforts made to strengthen tribal sovereignty. Under the Truman presidential administration, the U.S. Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 (HCR 108), immediately terminating one hundred and nine federally recognized tribes.<sup>41</sup> The petition for HCR 108 was framed around the elusive premise of citizenship rights and civil liberties. Following HCR 108, the U.S. Congress under the Eisenhower administration proceeded to pass an additional thirteen termination policies from 1953 through 1962.<sup>42</sup> The termination policies forced tribes to relinquish federal recognition, self-governance, and tribal land trusts.

Through the loss of federal status, tribes were prevented from accessing federally funded programs and resources. This resulted in an influx of Native peoples participating in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) relocation program.<sup>43</sup> The objective of the BIA relocation program was to remove Native peoples from their reservations and into metropolitan areas. Through this process, many Native families assimilated into urban cities.<sup>44</sup> Sanchez and Stuckey discuss the

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<sup>39</sup> Rose Buchanan, Archives Specialist in Archives 1 Reference Section at National Archives and Records, email correspondence, May 24, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Newland, Bryan. *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*. Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Mazurek, J. P., Wrend, J., Smith, C., & Conference of Western Attorneys General. *American Indian Law Deskbook*: Vol. 2nd ed. University Press of Colorado, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Deloria, Vine. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

social, cultural, and political dynamics of urban Native identities, “American Indian peoples did not cease to think of themselves in terms of their tribal communities, but many of them also began to think of themselves as ‘American Indian,’ as people who, regardless of tribal differences, had similar group interests and who faced similar challenges and obstacles.”<sup>45</sup> The relocation program had a monumental impact on the development of urban Native communities. For example, major geographical areas with significant Native populations such as Los Angeles, Denver, Cleveland, and the Bay Area created and organized American Indian community centers, churches, bars, and social clubs that posed as cultural hubs and inter-tribal spaces for gathering and kinship making.<sup>46</sup>

Following the relocation and termination acts, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Claims Commission Act in 1946. The Indian Claims Commission designated a legal process for tribes to petition their claims for land grants, treaty rights, and federal recognition.<sup>47</sup> William Bauer a Wailacki and Concow historian, discusses the emergence of oral history scholarship as it coincided with legal proceedings and academic interests, “Beginning in the 1950s, scholars began to utilize American Indian oral histories. After working on Indian Claims Commission cases, anthropologists, and later historians, developed the methodology of ethnohistory to study

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<sup>45</sup> Sanchez, John, and Mary E. Stuckey. “The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s.” *Communication Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2000): 120–136.

<sup>46</sup> Deloria, Vine. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Treaty rights include, hunting, fishing, timber, mineral and water rights. Additionally, tribes also petitioned claims for the mishandling of tribal monies, federal contracts, trust lands and land survey errors. The Native American Rights Fund (NARF) published a 43-volume, *Indian Claims Commission Decisions* (1946 - 1978) in addition to an index supplying docket cases and index subjects by tribe. Digitalized copies of the NARF reports and Indian Claims Commission case files can be viewed through the “Indian Claims Commission Decisions” collection at Oklahoma State University. “Indian Claims Commission Decisions.” Oklahoma State University. Accessed June 13, 2022.

<https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/collections/digital-collections/indian-claims-commission-decisions>.

both sides of encounters between American Indians and Europeans and cultural change in American Indian communities.”<sup>48</sup> This particular era signals a significant shift in the development of oral history as tribes began requesting and acquiring documentation from federal agencies and academic institutions relating to their tribal history, languages, territories, and tribal citizens.

In oral history discourse, experiences on the termination and relocation policies and the development of urban Indian communities have been prominent topics of interest. The BIA relocation program influenced the creation of urban Indian communities in major metropolitan cities, such as Los Angeles and Chicago. Documenting the unique experiences and memories of historical events and social-political infrastructures further contextualizes the impact of American laws and policies on Native communities. The Newberry Library in Chicago holds oral history records for the “Chicago American Indian Oral History Project” which was conducted from 1982 through 1984. The project consists of twenty-three interviews with American Indian elders and includes unpublished manuscripts, reel-to-reel tapes, cassette tapes, and oral history transcriptions. The majority of the collection materials are not available for public or research access.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the UCLA Center for Oral History Research (COHR) stewards an oral history series titled, “American Indian Relocation Project,” which includes twenty oral history audio records and transcriptions that detail the speaker’s personal experiences of childhood, community relationships, and cultural upbringing in Southern California from the

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<sup>48</sup> Bauer, William. “Oral History.” *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O’Brien, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> “Collection: Chicago American Indian Oral History Project Records | Modern Manuscripts & Archives at the Newberry.” Accessed March 15, 2022.  
<https://archives.newberry.org/repositories/2/resources/105>

1950s through the 1970s.<sup>50</sup> This oral history series also includes digital open access to project materials, such as audio recordings and transcriptions. While these projects were conducted nearly thirty years apart, the variety of mediums (reel-to-reel tapes/digital audio links), archival positionings (physical/digital), and dissemination processes (restricted/open-access) demonstrate the complexities and nuances of oral history as it relates to technology, best practices, and approaches for critical interventions. The American Indian oral history projects at UCLA and the Newberry Library make important contributions to Native oral history scholarship, however critical developments in decolonial and Indigenous feminist praxis call for re-imagining frameworks and approaches that recognize autonomy, self-determination, and sovereignty outside of western institutions.<sup>51</sup>

#### Self-Determination and Restoration Era (1960s - 1990s)

During the late 1960s and 1970s, the American public reckoned with nationwide social justice movements challenging the power and authority of the settler state. Due to the colonial legacies of genocide, state violence, land dispossession, termination, and relocation, an urgent

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<sup>50</sup> “UCLA Library | Center for Oral History Research.” Accessed March 22, 2022. [https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/?f%5Baudio\\_b%5D%5B%5D=true&f%5Bseries\\_facet%5D%5B%5D=American+Indian+Relocation+Project](https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/?f%5Baudio_b%5D%5B%5D=true&f%5Bseries_facet%5D%5B%5D=American+Indian+Relocation+Project).

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note; oral histories are not regarded as “research” and are therefore abstained from review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). According to the federal Institutional Review Board, the following practices are not considered research, “Scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected.” §46.102 This poses a series of challenges as some tribal nations have established IRBs for any research pertaining to their community and community members. Each tribal nation with an established IRB will have distinct guidelines and regulations for researchers seeking permission to conduct research with tribal citizens. The Newberry Library and the UCLA Center for Oral History Research does not mention a university or tribal IRB process for their oral history collection. Although outside of the scope of this paper, further inquiry on the subject of IRB’s, informed consent and tribal consultation would further contextualize oral history project development and legal rights/access issues.

call to action was delivered across urban, rural, and reservation communities.<sup>52</sup> The formation of organizations such as the National Indian Youth Council, Indians of All Nations, the Native American Solidarity Committee, and the American Indian Movement advocated for tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The Red Power movement was an intergenerational effort that strengthened relationships with Native peoples from different social, political, and cultural backgrounds. The community-led organizations engaged in various forms of advocacy and protest, from community convenings, and direct actions to historical occupations and standoffs with federal agents. As detailed by historian Nick Estes, “...Red Power was not just an abstract theory or an intellectual exercise. It was a practice of everyday Native people taking charge of their lives and communities. It was a movement, a revolution.”<sup>53</sup>

The Red Power movement revolutionized Native communities’ engagement with social-political issues. Community leaders used various tools and strategies to increase political participation and representation, which supported the development of crucial Native laws and policies. Through rigorous policy lobbying and community collaboration, Native organizations such as the Native American Rights Fund, the National Congress of American Indians, and Women of All Red Nations pressured the federal government and the American public to recognize the fundamental rights and civil liberties of Native peoples. The following series of legal acts were passed during the self-determination era, the Indian Civil Rights Act (1968), Indian Education Act (1972), Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975), American Religious Freedom Act (1978), Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), Native American Languages Act (1990), Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) and the

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<sup>52</sup> Sanchez, John, and Mary E. Stuckey. “The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s.” *Communication Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2000): 120–136.

<sup>53</sup> Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London; New York: Verso, 2019.

Indian Arts and Craft Act (1990).<sup>54</sup> These acts not only transformed the political engagement of Native communities but also provided a platform to address critical systemic harms within institutional settings, such as archives, museums, and academia.

Following the termination policies enacted during the Truman and Eisenhower administration, the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s served as a restoration era, in which terminated tribes attempted to locate and access historical records and documents to support their federal recognition petition.<sup>55</sup> Historian and archivist Jennifer O’Neal of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, addresses two distinct challenges tribes experienced through the restoration era. One challenge was that many tribes did not have any written documentation due to cultural practices in oral traditions. Nepia Mahuika, a Ngāti Porou oral history scholar, asserts Indigenous oral traditions as a community and land-based genealogy, “The oral histories and traditions of Maori and other indigenous peoples descend from multiple lines that carry with them diverse perspectives. In its communal and collective form, these oral history threads are bound together in genealogies that have “lived” through generations...”<sup>56</sup> In these contexts, Indigenous oral traditions provide communities a genealogical report of connections to land, place, ancestors, and more-than-human relatives.<sup>57</sup> Despite western institutions and nation-state governments not recognizing oral traditions as legitimate forms of documentation and historical records,

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<sup>54</sup> To demonstrate the historical context and the relevancy of these policies, Estes remarks on the historical connection of religious freedom as it relates to genocidal policies of the late eighteen century, “Ceremonies, dance, language, warrior and political societies, and spiritual knowledge were forced underground, each of them made illegal by the punitive Civilization Regulations and only fully ‘legalized’ in 1978 with American Indian Religious Freedom Act.” This is a critical connection as it directly correlates to the development of American ethnological practices and federal collections of cultural materials and oral histories. Estes, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> O’Neal, Jennifer. “‘The Right to Know’: Decolonizing Native American Archives.” *Journal of Western Archives* vol. 6, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Mahuika, Nēpia. *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*. Oxford Oral History Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Indigenous communities continue to practice and share collective knowledges and memories through oral traditions. An additional challenge O’Neal identified was tribal entities' lack of data and information access to federal, academic, and private institutions with historical tribal documents such as audio and video recordings, national reports, field notes, manuscripts, maps, and other forms of written and multi-media records.<sup>58</sup> Due to the magnitude of historical documentation of Native peoples and the various archival and information systems used by institutions, the challenges of locating, tracking, accessing, and retaining records pose a series of administrative, logistical, and bureaucratic challenges. Every institution has a process for requesting access and use to records. This process can be lengthy and overwhelming and may require filling out special permission applications, research proposals, consent forms, and additional institutional paperwork. Institutions may also consider inquiries based on time-sensitive requests, research interests/needs, the types of materials requested, legal copyright status, and intended use of materials. Although institutions should be responsible for prioritizing tribal community requests, the reality of information access for tribal communities continues to be challenging.

In 1978 Vine Deloria Jr. addressed the challenges of information access in Native communities in his presentation “The Right to Know,” given at the White House Pre-Conference on Indian Library and Information Services on or Near Reservations.<sup>59</sup> He declared that “ancient claims must be settled” with the federal government.<sup>60</sup> He emphasized the responsibilities the U.S. government and federal agencies have to ensure Native peoples receive educational

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<sup>58</sup> O’Neal, Jennifer. “‘The Right to Know’: Decolonizing Native American Archives.” *Journal of Western Archives* vol. 6, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Deloria, Vine. “The Right to Know: A Paper.” Washington D.C., 1978.

<sup>60</sup> The “ancient claims” Deloria refers to are the treaties, contracts, settlements and promises the U.S. government made to Native peoples and tribal communities. Deloria, 1978.

opportunities and access to all documents pertaining to Native culture, language, ceremonies, and traditional territories.<sup>61</sup> The documents in reference include historical records archived at the National Archives and Records, American Indian Records Repository, and additional local, state, and federal institutions.

Vine Deloria's principles and conviction in "The Right to Know" substantially influenced the development of tribal archives, libraries, and museums. In response to Deloria's speech, Allison Kerbs from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians reflects on Deloria's vast contributions to tribal theory and archival scholarship, "Wrapped within this bundle was his recognition that information and knowledge are critical tribal assets. Embedded within this recognition is the understanding that as Indigenous peoples, we have not only rights to but also responsibilities for our knowledge. These responsibilities are reflected in our protocols around sharing of information."<sup>62</sup> At this pivotal moment, the archive, library, and museum fields continue to expand on initiatives that prioritize the right to self-determination within data access.

#### Digitalization and Information Access Era (2000s - 2020s)

"The Right to Know" inspired a movement for Indigenous autonomy, sovereignty, and nationhood through information and record access. Indigenous scholars, archivists, librarians, researchers, tribal leaders, and community members have "answered the call" to create policies, frameworks, and protocols that prioritize Indigenous peoples. These policy and community-based efforts, have led to the development of organizations such as The First Archivists Circle, and the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Krebs, Allison Boucher. "Native America's Twenty-First-Century Right to Know." *Archival Science* vol. 12, no. 2 (2012): 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-011-9161-2>.

<sup>63</sup> The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) is a leading research, educational and professional development organization working directly with tribal communities and Native organizations.

The First Archivists Circle, a grassroots collective consisting of professional archivists, and Indigenous scholars published the “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials” in 2007. This publication established protocols and best practices for non-Native institutions stewarding American Indian archival materials.<sup>64</sup> The protocols presented foundational standards that outlined key principles and strategies to reflect Indigenous frameworks of care.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the protocols articulate keywords, frameworks, policy references, professional resources, and suggestions for archives, museums, and other non-Native institutional collections. Despite the groundbreaking push towards developing culturally responsive practices, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) endorsed the Protocols twelve years after their introduction to the field.<sup>66</sup>

The protocols continue to foster critical engagement and scholarship that promotes culturally responsive care and respectful use of Native archival materials. For example, as of 2019, Liza Posas, the head of Research Services and Archives at the Autry Museum began developing a workbook to bridge the “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials” to the Native American Graves Protection Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). In an interview with *Archives in Context*, Poza describes the state of the field as it relates to archives and the processes of

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““History of ATALM | ATALM.” Accessed May 12, 2022.  
<https://sfy.gxm.mybluehost.me/node/27>.

<sup>64</sup> First Archivists Circle. “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials,” April 9, 2007.  
<http://www.firstarchivistscircle.org/files/index.html>.

<sup>65</sup> In addition, the protocols are outlined in accordance with international Indigenous law and policies and best practices in oral history, anthropology, history, and archival studies. Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> SAA acknowledges they declined to endorse the Protocols twice since its inception. They suggest reasons for their former declined endorsements relate to the type of language used in the final report. This is an example of why Indigenous knowledge systems, protocols, and consultation is necessary for archival work. “SAA Council Endorsement of Protocols for Native American Archival Materials.” Society of American Archivists, 2018. Accessed May 27, 2022.  
<https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-council-endorsement-of-protocols-for-native-american-archival-materials>.

repatriation, “Almost every repatriation officer I have spoken to... have indicated to me that archives are key to these repatriation efforts. Yet, what I’ve witnessed in the archive profession is that this idea of repatriation is not fully understood or known about... I would even have to say that the Society of American Archivists definition of repatriation, it doesn’t refer to NAGPRA... but even that kinda gives an indication of where the archive profession is in regards to their understanding of what repatriation is.”<sup>67</sup> The slow and lackluster response from the archive field to repatriation efforts exposes a deficiency in the system of information and material collections. While Native people continue to be impacted by the lack of responsive care and access to historical records and cultural materials, interdisciplinary approaches are necessary to strengthen repatriation efforts.

During the same year the “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials” was released, the UN General Assembly passed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>68</sup> This monumental act recognizes the right to autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination for Indigenous peoples worldwide. UNDRIP consists of forty-six articles identifying major human rights reflecting the importance of practicing and connecting with land, culture, language, education, political representation, and self-determination. To further situate UNDRIP and the argument in this thesis, I’d like to highlight Article 31 as it defines Indigenous peoples’ rights to traditional knowledge expressions, cultural technologies, and intellectual rights.

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<sup>67</sup> Archives In Context. “Season 4, Episode 5: Liza Posas,” August 11, 2020.

<https://archivesincontext.archivists.org/2020/08/11/season-4-episode-5-liza-posas/>.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations. “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” September 13, 2007.

[https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf).

### *Article 31*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.

The development of UNDRIP, was an international and multi-generational effort that involved working with global Indigenous communities, political leaders, and nation-state representatives. All members of the UNDRIP committee, signed in accordance to protecting the principles outlined in the final UNDRIP report.<sup>69</sup> This declaration is a critical acknowledgment of and for Indigenous peoples across many geographies, cultures, histories, and languages. This global recognition is vital to the development of oral history scholarship as it affirms Indigenous peoples' sovereign right to maintain, control, and develop cultural heritage records.

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation announced a new project initiative to revitalize the Doris Duke Native American History Project conducted from 1966 through 1975. The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATLAM) is the national coordinator for the newly established Doris Duke Native American Oral History Revitalization Project, which aims to improve digitalization efforts.<sup>70</sup> The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation committed more than \$1.6 million to ATLAM to the original seven participating universities with Doris

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. "DCF Announces the Doris Duke Native Oral History Revitalization Project," n.d. Accessed May 23, 2022. <https://www.ddcf.org/globalassets/child-well-being/press-releases/dd-native-oral-history-revitalization-project-launch.pdf>.

Duke Native American Oral History Collections.<sup>71</sup> Currently, each university has varying levels of digitally accessible information.<sup>72</sup> The initiative aims to improve access to Native communities, digitalize records, translate materials and create supporting educational resources. The updated development for the Doris Duke Oral History Project is a historic investment in Native oral history scholarship, as the seven universities collectively steward oral history records representing 150 tribal communities. The future of this project will continue to progress and expand the various ways institutions work with Native communities on oral history projects.

Understanding these significant moments in American Indian history further contextualizes the foundational shifts and transitions in oral history scholarship. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides an international context for recognizing Indigenous peoples' rights to practice, access, maintain, and control cultural materials and historical records. In accordance with UNDRIP, institutional archives, libraries, museums, and research centers have a responsibility to recognize Native sovereignty and repatriation efforts. While these global acknowledgments and institutional ventures make important contributions to recognizing Indigenous rights, these efforts do not mitigate nor absolve institutions from their responsibilities to address and compensate Native communities for their participation in creating systems of erasure, assimilation and genocide. Moving towards a future of equity, care, reciprocity, and respect requires holistic investment in community-generated practices that promote information access, cultural sovereignty, language revitalization, repatriation, and intergenerational healing.

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<sup>71</sup> Digital information may include project descriptions, metadata, index records and transcriptions.

<sup>72</sup> The participating universities with Doris Duke Native American Oral History Collections include, University of Arizona, University of Florida, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of New Mexico, University of Oklahoma, University of South Dakota, and University of Utah.

## **Section 2: Indigenizing Oral History - Keywords, Concepts, and Theories**

In the following section, I focus on identifying critical keywords, concepts, and theories in current oral history scholarship. I use an interdisciplinary approach to draw on American Indian and Indigenous studies and archive and information studies. By bridging theoretical concepts and terminologies across multiple disciplines, I imagine a framework that will prepare us for a future of indigenizing transcriptions.<sup>73</sup> The following terms and concepts highlight essential principles that situate this research in a growing field of transcription studies<sup>74</sup>

### **Oral History as Expressions of Living Knowledge**

To fully understand the approaches, frameworks, and methods I use to conceptualize indigenizing transcriptions, I want to articulate how oral histories are designed, facilitated, and collected into institutional archives. In this thesis, I present oral history in three forms – conversations, interviews, and what cultural-bearers call “life-tellings”.<sup>75</sup> Conversations in oral history can resemble an open dialogue with two or more individuals. The direction and course of conversations are fluid and open to collective contributions. Interviews in oral histories are distinguished by the format, which often presents interviewer and interviewee dynamics. These dynamics situate the interviewer as the person responsible for leading the dialogue through a

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<sup>73</sup> In preparation for this research, I used keyword searches through the UCLA library’s database to assess the field of transcriptions and oral histories of Native peoples. Keyword searches such as “Indigenous/Native American/American Indian AND transcription” revealed insufficient research on this topic. I adjusted the keywords to include academically established terminology such as “oral histories,” “interviews,” and “storytelling” in place of “transcription.” This broader search presented an abundance of diverse publications from various fields of study, ranging within a forty-year time span. The response to this keyword adjustment highlights established academic research on Indigenous oral history scholarship, while also revealing a significant research gap on the specificities of transcriptions from Indigenous oral histories.

<sup>74</sup> I intentionally name transcription studies as a way to consider how the transcription process produces unique knowledge and skills in its own respective context.

<sup>75</sup> Due to the breadth of oral history scholarship, various strategies, styles, and principles are employed to document narratives. In this research, I prioritize discussions, interviews and life-tellings to narrow the scope on prominent forms of Native oral history.

series of questions. At the same time, the interviewee follows by responding to the questions presented by the interviewer. Life-tellings in oral history are commonly presented with one dominant speaker who shares particular details, experiences, and life memories through a biographical lens.<sup>76</sup> These definitions are not definitive, they provide a brief frame of reference to understanding how conversations, interviews, and life-tellings may differ into a broader field of oral history compositions.

Many oral history projects are designed to address specific themes, experiences or knowledges the speaker (interviewee and/or guest) may have on any given topic. For example, The Cante Sica Foundation, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, established The American Indian Boarding School Visual History Project (titled with the Autry Museum of the American West's archive as *Boarding School Stories*) in 2013. This archive consists of video interviews with boarding school survivors and alumni.<sup>77</sup> In a related example, The American Indian Relocation Project from the UCLA Center for Oral History Research Center includes audio files and transcriptions of interviews with local Los Angeles American Indian elders.<sup>78</sup> While these two LA-based American Indian oral history projects include interviews highlighting the boarding school experience and the relocation experience, these collections demonstrate the complexities of archival methods of documentation, acquisition, circulation, and interpretation of Indigenous knowledges and experiences.

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<sup>76</sup> Cariou, Warren. "Life-Telling: Indigenous Oral Autobiography and The Performance of Relation." *Biographical Research Center*, vol. 39, no. 3, Summer 2016.

<sup>77</sup> "What We Do – Cante Sica Foundation." <http://cantesica.org/what-we-do/>.

<sup>78</sup> "UCLA Library | Center for Oral History Research."

[https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/?f%5Baudio\\_b%5D%5B%5D=true&f%5Bseries\\_facet%5D%5B%5D=American+Indian+Relocation+Project](https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/?f%5Baudio_b%5D%5B%5D=true&f%5Bseries_facet%5D%5B%5D=American+Indian+Relocation+Project).

Indigenous ways of knowing are expressed and communicated through oral histories and oral traditions, such as stories, songs, poems, memories, and testimonies.<sup>79</sup> These forms of knowledge help shape expressions for documenting and sharing Indigenous knowledges that are place-based, seasonal, and intergenerational. For this research, I situate oral histories as an expression of living knowledge. Information and library science scholars Sandra Littletree, Miranda Belarde, and Marissa Durate describe Indigenous expressions of knowledge as “...the tangible and intangible objects, belongings, art, songs, words and thoughts that may become part of the collections of information institutions.”<sup>80</sup> This description provides ground for understanding how oral histories are transformed from traditional knowledge systems to institutional collections.

Expressions of Indigenous forms of knowledge change in institutional settings to accommodate different audiences, purposes, worldviews, and frames of reference. In *Indigenous Storywork*, Jo-ann Archibald, an education scholar and member of the Stó:lō Nation, reflects on the ways storytelling changes context based on location. She notes that the longhouse is the traditional place for telling stories while storytelling training is practiced on the land and/or in the home.<sup>81</sup> These different locations of sharing and telling stories create distinct experiences for understanding and receiving cultural knowledge. The context of Indigenous forms of knowledge and by extension oral histories, will change when they are expressed in institutional spaces or with members outside of the community.

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<sup>79</sup> Mahuika, Nēpia. *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*. Oxford Oral History Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Littletree, Sandra, Miranda Belarde-Lewis and, and Marisa Duarte. “Centering Relationality: A Conceptual Model to Advance Indigenous Knowledge Organization Practices.” *Knowledge Organization* 47, no. 5 (2020): 410–26. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2020-5-410>.

<sup>81</sup> Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

While oral histories exist in tangible (new media files, transcriptions, archival metadata) and intangible ways (experience, memory, feeling), many Indigenous peoples did not traditionally record oral histories with audio devices or text-based transcriptions. Present-day oral history projects create tangible records of expressions of Indigenous knowledge that can be physically and digitally accessed, distributed, and collected as institutional property. These practices impact how Indigenous ways of knowing are engaged with community members, researchers, and non-Native audiences.

### Understanding Cultural Context in Transcriptions

Oral history transcriptions are text-based interpretations and guides to audio and video-based recordings. Transcriptions represent detailed speech, emotion, and sounds that can be viewed or heard through its original recording technology. Transcriptions can be edited to include a variation of verbatim, time-based phonological details, and non-verbal information.<sup>82</sup> The transcript style and data documented will vary based on the scholarship and best practices indicated by the project goals and field of study. It's important to note that best practices will shift to support changing dynamics in the discourse of transcriptions by employing a broad range of techniques and styles of transcription. Many universities and research centers have developed oral history guides with information on interviewing techniques, recording materials, and additional project logistics.<sup>83</sup> While these oral history guides may be useful in providing

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<sup>82</sup> Agar, Michael. "Transcript Handling: An Ethnographic Strategy." *The Oral History Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, Mar. 1987, pp. 209–19. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1093/ohr/15.1.209.

<sup>83</sup> Additional project logistics may include information on ethics, style, and formatting. For this research, I limit my oral history guide references to the following sources: Trimble, Charles E., Barbara W. Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The American Indian Oral History Manual*. Routledge, 2016. "Oral History Transcription Style Guide." Columbia University Center for Oral History Research, 2022. I use these oral history guide references as they reflect current oral history best practices and practices for working with Native communities.

technical information, they are not created with the intention of informing readers of the ethics and responsibilities of working with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous oral histories.<sup>84</sup>

Verbatim-style transcripts are the most commonly used form for transcribing oral histories. The verbatim transcription process transcribes all audible materials without paraphrasing or omitting content.<sup>85</sup> There is much debate in oral history scholarship and reference guides regarding the type of content that should be omitted. In this instance, we can understand transcriptions as an interpretative process that is selective of audible information.<sup>86</sup> Through an interpretative approach, oral histories are subjected to significant alterations and revisions to accommodate research interests and demands. The “Oral History Transcription Style Guide” designed by the Columbia University Center of Oral History Research (CCOHR) identifies reflexive phrases and non-lexical sounds as utterances that do not need to be transcribed because “... they are likely to clutter a transcript and to become barriers to clarity in the text.”<sup>87</sup> For further context, CCOHR defines reflexive phrases as “...words and short phrases...uttered habitually, and do not contribute to the overall function of the sentence... [and] may even detract from the sentence’s intended meaning.”<sup>88</sup> Some examples of reflexive phrases include “you know,” “like,” and “so.”<sup>89</sup> Non-lexical sounds are utterances that are connected to a thought or habitual speech and may sound like “um,” “uh,” “uh-huh,” “hmm,” and “ah.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mahuika, Nēpia. *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*. Oxford Oral History Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Trimble, Charles E., Barbara W. Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The American Indian Oral History Manual*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Mishler, Elliot G. “Representing Discourse: The Rhetoric of Transcription.” *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, vol. 1, no. 4, Jan. 1991, pp. 255–80. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1075/jnlh.1.4.01rep.

<sup>87</sup> “Oral History Transcription Style Guide.” Columbia University Center for Oral History Research, 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Reflexive phrase may also be identified as “crutch words.” Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Non-lexical sounds may also be identified as “fillers.” Ibid.

Transcription editors ultimately decide the inclusion and omission of reflexive phrases and non-lexical sounds.<sup>91</sup> CCOHR provided a brief standardized statement regarding the preferred discipline practices of incorporating these forms of utterances.<sup>92</sup> However, it is also vital for editors to consider cultural forms of communication and the ways reflexive phrases, non-lexical sounds, and other forms of speech contribute to oral histories. Indigenous peoples have unique ways of speaking and telling stories that reflect culture, traditions, and history. Linguistic practices are also influenced by age, gender, community roles, and regional speech patterns. It is necessary for interviewers, transcribers, and editors to be culturally aware of speech variations to understand the cultural context and importance of commonly used reflexive phrases and non-lexical sounds among Indigenous peoples.

For example, a term like “Aye” can be recognized as a non-lexical sound or a filler that would be omitted from a transcription, if the transcriber was not familiar with this specific linguistic expression. However, from an Indigenous perspective, “Aye” reflects different emotions and expressions that can change the meaning and intention of a conversation. Vonnie Jo Alberts, Hunkpapa Lakota, Dakota descent, and member of the Three Affiliated Tribes, discusses the importance of “Aye” as a Native language expression, “Where exactly was the expression, ‘Aye’ derived from? I have often wondered about it and have concluded that it had to be an Indian who made it up. It is obviously a universal expression among Indian people because it never fails, whatever event is being hosted by American Indians-it will eventually be heard.”<sup>93</sup> Alberts expands on the variations in pronunciation and the cultural contexts “Aye” is used

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<sup>91</sup> It is important to know that some transcriptions are designed for linguistic analysis. I focus on some of the aspects of the linguistic form to further contextualize the diversity of oral history amongst American Indian speakers.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Alberts, Vonnie Jo. “The Infamous ‘Aye’ in Indian Country – TCJ Student.” *TCJ Student*, 1998. <https://tcjstudent.org/infamous-aye-indian-country/>.

amongst tribal and regional specific Native communities.<sup>94</sup> Alberts provides additional context to “Aye” as an expression of humor and comic relief, “The most common time it is used is after a joke or when someone is teasing. It seems to add humor to the end of the joke.”<sup>95</sup> Additionally, “Aye” can be used as a greeting or a way to get someone's attention. Alberts, also notes how “Aye” can be used as a way to call out foolishness or as a form of teasing. In this context, “Aye” can single-handedly create a vibe, emotion, and setting that is reflective of communal laughter, joy, confusion, frustration, and excitement. Without cultural awareness of the ways non-lexical sounds and reflexive phrases can have on language, the omission of expressions such as “Aye” can completely impact the content, substance, and nuance of oral histories. The transcription then remains an active site of political, cultural, and social interpretation. The process of indigenizing transcriptions requires attention to the inclusion of non-lexical and reflexive phrases that transmit cultural and linguistic significance.

In oral history scholarship, it is a common practice to eliminate repetitive non-lexical and reflexive phrases from transcriptions to create legible and comprehensive narratives. However practices of reducing and eliminating non-lexical and reflexive phrases, also advance mono-linguistic and standardized forms of oral history that is rooted in white supremacy and institutional capitalism. Linguistic scholar, Paul V. Kroskrity, situates racist stereotypes as historical references for the racism experienced and directed towards Native peoples, “For Native Americans, the indexed stereotypes that feed covert racism are different from those directed at Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian Americans. Primitive, intellectually inferior,

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<sup>94</sup> Although this topic is outside of the scope for this thesis, further research on transcribing Indigenous languages in oral histories will contribute greatly to the process of indigenizing transcription. Because transcriptions provide a technical interpretation of oral materials, there are limitations to the current transcription process that may not support Indigenous languages with culturally specific writing systems.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

conquered, incompetent, violent, and vanishing into extinction are some of the most harmful features of the negative stereotypes.”<sup>96</sup> These racist stereotypes continue to impact the ways non-Native peoples think, understand, and interact with Native communities and cultural materials. The *covert linguistic racism* as discussed by Dr. Kroskrity further expands on the convoluted linguistic practices that connect to larger structures of settler colonialism.

In the research paradigm I am championing, scholars and oral historians to include all verbal language, non-lexical sounds, and reflexive phrases in their transcriptions. Speakers may then review and edit the final version on their own accord, with scholars ethically incorporating any needed changes. My argument for indigenizing transcriptions is to acknowledge and celebrate the various ways Indigenous knowledges, languages, and narratives are expressed by prioritizing community-based strategies for the transcription process.<sup>97</sup> While standard transcription formats and styles may help create a consistent and time-efficient process, they do not always support Indigenous communities' diverse cultural and linguistic practices. The process of standardizing transcriptions can lead to unintentionally discarding, neglecting, and eliminating vital forms of Indigenous oral history expression. When we lose these unique cultural and linguistic expressions, we also lose connections to the speaker and community. It is

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<sup>96</sup> Kroskrity, Paul V. “Covert Linguistic Racisms and the (Re-)Production of White Supremacy.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (August 2021): 180–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12307>.

<sup>97</sup> I am not proposing a standard model for indigenizing transcriptions, however, I am suggesting that the process of indigenizing transcriptions should be reflective of community needs while also addressing concerns of content, material access, dissemination methods, and copyright use. Through collaborative and community-based approaches, oral history projects have the potential to transform the design and production of oral history transcription. Indigenizing historical transcription records will require a different process as many historical transcriptions were created with era-specific oral history strategies that lacked consideration for ethical practices of care. Additionally, the original audio (or video) recording may not be available for review, which will enable scholars to cross-reference or rewrite the transcriptions.

crucial to consider the distinct ways language, and sounds provide cultural context to oral history transcriptions.<sup>98</sup>

### Activating and Indigenizing Transcriptions

The colonial and historical implications of Indigenous oral history projects have greatly influenced the ways Indigenous stories, life-tellings, and histories are documented. For this particular reason, innovative methods and strategies are necessary to provide Indigenous peoples the opportunity to define and implement processes that honor the different forms of oral history expression. The following section discusses indigenizing transcriptions as an intervention in current oral history transcription practices.

I tentatively define indigenizing transcription as a collaborative and community-based process that prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as a way to interpret audio and video materials. The following chart details an indigenizing oral history transcription methodological framework, defining the Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as it relates to oral history and transcription production. I created this chart to map out a visual model of the methodological framework I utilize when thinking about indigenizing transcriptions.

I use indigenizing as a way to demonstrate the importance of having a culturally responsive process for transcribing oral histories. Linda Tuhwai Smith defines indigenizing as a “...term [that] centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action.”<sup>99</sup> In the context of oral history scholarship and transcription production, an indigenizing approach is imperative for

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<sup>98</sup> Some of the questions that I am currently thinking about to help guide future research on the development of Indigenous oral history guides include: How can Indigenous speakers and communities participate in the construction of transcription style, design, and format? How can transcriptions be designed to appropriately reflect Indigenous oral histories? How can oral history guides address the issue of linguistic and cultural erasure?

<sup>99</sup> Smith, Linda Tuhwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2. ed. London: Zed Books, 2012.

two major reasons. Firstly, indigenizing provides us with a framework that prioritizes Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and practices. This prioritization is crucial, considering the historical legacy of coercion, extraction, erasure, manipulation, and withholding of historical oral history records and documents.<sup>100</sup> Secondly, indigenizing as a practice and process is beneficial and generous for Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>101</sup> Because indigenizing gives precedence to Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous peoples can intervene, engage, practice and share oral traditions in ways that are respectful of diverse worldviews.<sup>102</sup>

I approach indigenizing transcription as a form of intervention to demonstrate a critical shift and reorientation in the process of transcribing oral histories. An intervention process is necessary due to the harmful transcription practices used to transcribe and document oral histories from Indigenous peoples. Some examples of harmful transcription practices include incorporating unconsented materials, misinterpretations, extraction of narrative, revision of language and grammar, and misspelling of names, places, and words from Indigenous languages.

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<sup>100</sup> Hagan, William T. "Archival Captive—The American Indian." *The American Archivist* 41, no. 2 (April 1978).

<sup>101</sup> Antoine, Asma-na-hi, Rachel Mason, Roberta Mason, Sophia Palahicky, and Carmen Rodriguez de France. *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers*. BCcampus, 2018. <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/>.

<sup>102</sup> Innes, Pamela. "Ethical Problems in Archival Research: Beyond Accessibility." *Language & Communication* 30 (2010): 198–203.

### Section 3: Strategies for Indigenizing Transcriptions

Transcribing is a labor of love, care, and commitment to community. When we transcribe our relatives, elders, and ancestors' oral histories, we engage in a reciprocal process of storytelling and storylistening.<sup>103</sup> While transcribing may appear to be a lengthy and tedious process, it is important to reframe these perceptions to reflect an Indigenous worldview. Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson expands on the role relationships and relationship-making has Indigenous knowledge systems, "...the relational nature of our knowledge—the journey changes with a companion, the methodology is relational."<sup>104</sup> Transcribing is relational and requires us to spend time, be present and actively participate in building meaningful relationships. During the process of transcribing oral histories, we have the opportunity to write into existence the words, thoughts, and feelings expressed by our relatives.

In this last section, I identify strategies for indigenizing transcriptions by discussing some of the variables present in the process of developing oral history projects. Some variables include respecting speaker autonomy, rights for refusal, caring for sensitive materials, and remedying ethical concerns to access. Additionally, I provide a case study example of an interview I conducted for the "Expanding the Archive: American Indian Activism and Native Artists' Life Histories, an Oral History project."<sup>105</sup> Through a personal narrative, I reflect on the experience of interviewing and transcribing an oral history record. I end this section by providing strategies for

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<sup>103</sup> Srigley, Katrina, and Lorraine Sutherland. "Decolonizing, Indigenizing, and Learning *Biskaaybiyang* in the Field: Our Oral History Journey." *The Oral History Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> UCLA Arts: School of the Arts and Architecture. "Chancellor's Arts Initiative Funds Grant To Support UCLA Faculty Members' Arts-Based Research," May 5, 2021. <http://arts.ucla.edu>.

creating interventions in the transcription process. Some of the strategies I expand on include the creation and inclusion of content notes, intentional listening, and embodiment. I consider the project of indigenizing transcriptions to be a critical and urgent intervention as oral history projects become more prominent in community and institutional settings.

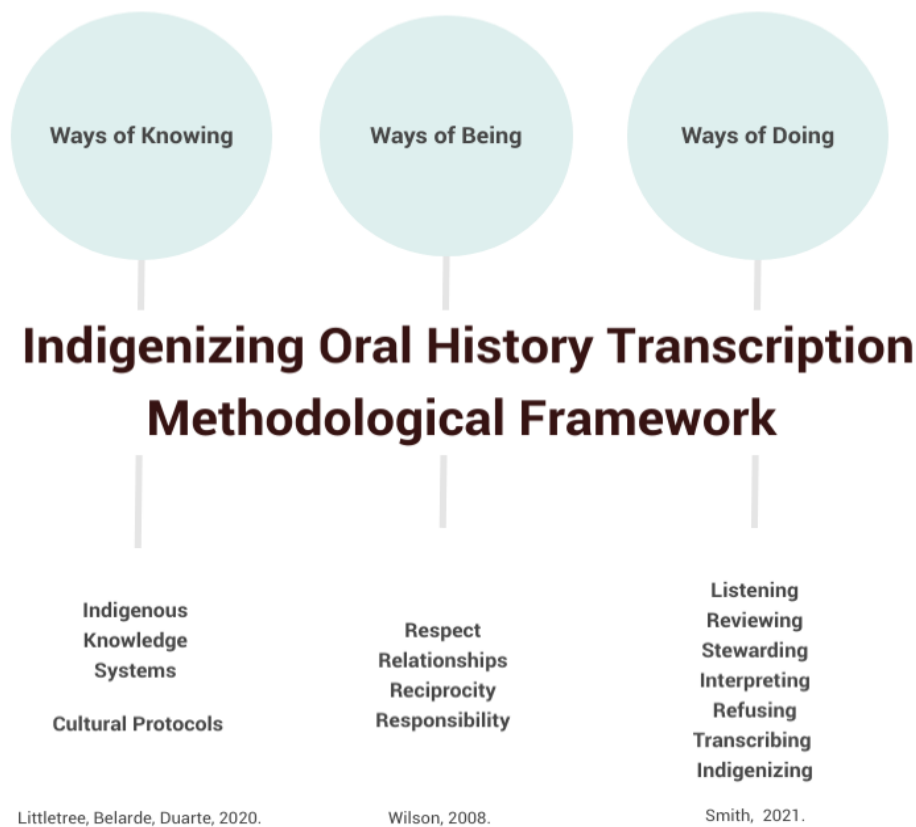


Figure 1. Indigenizing Oral History Transcription Methodological Framework

### Variables Present in the Process of Indigenizing Transcriptions

During the process of transcription, it is crucial to recognize the speaker's autonomy. I define autonomy as a standpoint for making informed and consensual decisions on behalf of one's self.<sup>106</sup> When considering the historical legacy of oral history collection, the autonomy and

<sup>106</sup> First Archivists Circle. "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials," April 9, 2007. <http://www.firstarchivistcircle.org/files/index.html>.

agency of Native peoples were generally not prioritized in the field. The lack of transparency from early anthropologists, oral historians, and researchers resulted in an influx of historical records with questionable ethics and integrity.<sup>107</sup> As an intervention strategy, the practice of refusal is an important consideration for oral history transcriptions being developed, processed, or distributed by institutional collections. These complexities regarding the provenance of Indigenous archival material and oral histories complicate the realm of documentation and dissemination practices.

Refusal offers various frameworks for working outside and through the western paradigm of transcriptions. Tuck and Yang refer to refusal as “...an approach to analyzing data within a matrix of commitments, histories, allegiances, and resonances that inform what can be known within settler colonial research frames, and what must be kept out of reach.”<sup>108</sup> This approach makes refusal generative in marking boundaries, processes, and protocols for navigating culturally specific, Native, and non-native institutional spaces.

Yet, refusal is a dynamic strategy and has the potential to transform academic scholarship and community practices. Kahnawà:ke Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson details the nuances of refusal as it aligns with Indigenous sovereignty and community autonomy. The following quote articulates Simpson’s experience working with the Kahnawà:ke community as they practiced and theorized refusal as a collective strategy, “Refusal was a stance but also a theory of the political that was being pronounced over and over again. It emerged in my own writing through

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<sup>107</sup> Jacknis, Ira. “Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology.” In *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, edited by George W. Stocking, Vol. 3. History of Anthropology. University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

<sup>108</sup> Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (July 2014): 811–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414530265>.

observation of Kahnawà:ke action, but also through their words.”<sup>109</sup> As Simpson notes, refusal is productive and has various forms of rehearsal in community and academic settings.

In accordance with speakers' autonomy is the right to refuse the inclusion of sensitive content in oral history transcriptions. Sensitive content may include experiences of systemic, racial, carceral, patriarchal, and sexual violence. Some of these topics may include racism, sexism, ableism, death, self-harm, assault, trauma, substance abuse, and “unlawful” activities. In the context of oral history projects, speakers may have directly experienced, witnessed, or have been impacted by any of these topics.

While sensitive content may arise in the process of facilitating an oral history project, oral historians are responsible for navigating the situation with care and respect for a speaker's spoken and unspoken boundaries. In *Incarcerated Stories*, Chickasaw Anthropology scholar Dr. Shannon Speed recounts her experience conducting oral history interviews with Indigenous women incarcerated in immigration detention centers, “Driving home from the detention center or other meeting place, feeling vaguely nauseous and oddly disconnected from my own embodied reality, I asked myself, why I was subjecting myself to this. Why hear these stories, why tell them? This was not a rhetorical question, and while deeply personal, it was also an intellectual, analytical question. Should we talk about and hear about terrible experiences of violence?”<sup>110</sup> Her reflections reveal the circumstances and challenges of facilitating interviews with speakers sharing their lived experiences with systemic violence in carceral spaces. Through

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<sup>109</sup> Simpson, Audra. “Consent’s Revenge.” *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (August 9, 2016): 326–33. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.02>.

<sup>110</sup> Speed, Shannon. *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*. Critical Indigeneities. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

her reflections, she demonstrates the expansive nature of facilitating oral history interviews that are subject to gender, structural and colonial violence.<sup>111</sup>

An additional variable of sensitive content in oral histories is *culturally sensitive content* that holds sacred and confidential information from a distinct culture and/or community. *The Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* explains the implications of sharing culturally sensitive material in institutional collections, “For Native American communities, the public release of or access to specialized information or knowledge—gathered with and without informed consent—can cause irreparable harm. Instances abound of misrepresentation and exploitation of sacred and secret information.”<sup>112</sup> It is important to note that the term and concept “culturally sensitive material” is defined and used differently by each community. The First Archivists Circle provides the following examples of culturally sensitive materials in recordings and transcripts: “songs, chants, music, religious practice, healing, medicine, personal or family information, oral histories, community histories, ‘myths,’ folklore.”<sup>113</sup> In addition, published documents and texts with content including “archaeological data, religious materials, ethnobotanical materials, and genealogical data” may also be recognized as culturally sensitive materials.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> In *Incarcerated Stories*, Dr. Speed shares the vulnerabilities she is exposed to as she hears, engages and works with narratives involving carceral and gender violence. The impacts of secondary trauma on researchers, scholars and archivists is an important consideration for oral history projects to acknowledge when working with sensitive materials. To fully engage in a process of indigenizing, critical interventions and professional training in trauma-informed, anti-racist, and anti-colonial practices are necessary for facilitating oral history projects with Native peoples. In the context of working with sensitive materials that may lead to implications of harm or discomfort, scholars need to be considerate in listening and setting boundaries to care for the speaker, narrative, and their own personal well-being.

<sup>112</sup> First Archivists Circle. “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials,” April 9, 2007. <http://www.firstarchivistcircle.org/files/index.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> In all instances, consent is required for transcribing, publishing, and publicizing oral histories. Research protocols will vary based on the individual and community. Some oral history projects

Pamela Innes, a Linguistic Anthropologist, discusses a Mvskoke language project that developed ethical concerns regarding public access and distribution of “dangerous texts” within the archive, “...the elders within the Mvskoke-speaking community feel strongly that some of the narratives in the archive should be withheld from the public. To make these narratives available is to endanger anyone who is not ritually prepared to have contact with them.”<sup>115</sup> This indicates an important cultural process that is required to ensure the safety and well-being of those who interact with the recorded Mvskoke narratives. The concerns highlighted in this article further illustrate the importance of working with and listening to the community’s cultural bearers and knowledge-keepers.<sup>116</sup>

Cherokee literature scholar Daniel Heath Justice, explains how Native communities have protocols for listening, visiting, and engaging with oral traditions, “...not all things are meant for all people. There are boundaries to some forms of knowledge; to insist that all things should be available without limit to everyone is to exercise a particularly corrosive kind of universalizing colonialist privilege; claiming entitlement to all peoples’ knowledges is, after all, just one of the many expropriating features of settler-colonial violence.”<sup>117</sup> These are crucial considerations when thinking about indigenizing transcription because they inform the cultural context of transcriptions and the ways the general public engages with Native oral history

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working with tribal communities may require approval from tribal institutional review boards. First Archivists Circle. “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials,” April 9, 2007. <http://www.firstarchivistscircle.org/files/index.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Innes, Pamela. “Ethical Problems in Archival Research: Beyond Accessibility.” *Language & Communication* 30 (2010): 198–203.

<sup>116</sup> It’s also important to note that knowledge keepers will be recognized in their communities for having particular skills or expertise that reflect their cultural community’s worldview and Indigenous knowledge system. Srigley, Katrina, and Lorraine Sutherland. “Decolonizing, Indigenizing, and Learning *Biskaaybiyang* in the Field: Our Oral History Journey.” *The Oral History Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2018, pp. 7

<sup>117</sup> Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Indigenous Studies Series. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

materials and collections. While some oral history projects are designed for public use, many historical oral history records have yet to be reviewed and approved by tribal representatives for public access. These concerns inform the need for tribal consultation and collaboration to ensure respectful access is practiced in non-Native institutions.

In 2012, the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) in the School for Advanced Research (SAR) began developing the “Guidelines for Collaboration” alongside a group of tribal and non-tribal museums, curators, museum directors, artists, and cultural leaders. The Guidelines were designed to foster collective methodologies and approaches for museums and Native communities creating collaborative projects. A set of guidelines was created for communities working with museums, and an additional set of guidelines was created for museums working with communities. The Guidelines address the importance of understanding cultural protocols, “The museum will need to be aware of cultural protocols, such as gender restrictions on handling, privacy for songs or prayers, or how to care for offerings made by community members. In anticipation of any cultural observances that include burning and/or plant materials, inform appropriate staff (e.g., disarm smoke alarm), and inform the community if your museum has restrictions on burning or food offerings.”<sup>118</sup> This general description of cultural protocols provides a reference point for museums and other non-Native institutions to consider when collaborating with tribal communities.

#### Reflection on *Expanding the Archive* Oral History Project

Following the analysis of the presented oral history variables, I’d like to provide an example case study of an oral history project I worked on to further elaborate on some of the

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<sup>118</sup> Indian Arts Research Center. Guidelines for Collaboration (website). Facilitated by Landis Smith, Cynthia Chavez Lamar, and Brian Vallo. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2019. <https://guidelinesforcollaboration.info/>.

lessons I learned during the interview and transcription process. In the summer of 2021, I had the opportunity to co-facilitate an oral history interview alongside Dr. Nancy Marie Mithlo for the *Expanding the Archive: American Indian Activism and Native Artists' Life Histories, an Oral History Project*. We had the privilege of talking with Richard Ray Whitman, a Yuchi-Muscogee Creek artist, actor, and activist who participated in Wounded Knee in 1972.<sup>119</sup>

Prior to conducting the interview with Richard Ray Whitman, I had the opportunity to share virtual space with him when he visited our “Indigenous Others and the Gaze” course, facilitated by Dr. Mithlo in winter 2021. During Richard Ray’s visit, we also met with film director and reporter Kevin McKiernan to screen his newly released documentary *From Wounded Knee to Standing Rock*.<sup>120</sup> During this virtual class visit, Richard Ray and McKiernan reflected on their experiences at Wounded Knee in 1972-1973. They shared stories, jokes and memories of intense, happy, joyful, and stressful situations while at the Wounded Knee camp. This experience of hearing first-hand accounts of a prominent movement of Native activism reiterated the importance of oral histories.

In preparation for the interview, I watched and reviewed various films Richard Ray starred in to familiarize myself with his work as an actor and storyteller. I also immersed myself in the history of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). Based on his classroom visit and the stories Dr. Mithlo shared of Richard Ray, I knew these were important aspects of his life. Since Richard Ray is a distinguished artist, I was

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<sup>119</sup> This interview with Richard Ray Whitman is currently being processed for future inclusion into the UCLA American Indian Studies Center Library under the collection: *Venice Biennale Native Art Exhibition Archives*. A brief description on the “Expanding the Archive: American Indian Activism and Native Artists’ Life Histories, an Oral History project” can be found via UCLA Arts: School of the Arts and Architecture. “Chancellor’s Arts Initiative Funds Grant To Support UCLA Faculty Members’ Arts-Based Research,” May 5, 2021. <http://arts.ucla.edu>.  
<sup>120</sup> McKiernan, Kevin. *From Wounded Knee to Standing Rock: A Reporters Journey*. Seventh Art Releasing, 2019. 1hr., 28 min.

able to piece together a chronological narrative of his life at IAIA through CalArts, Wounded Knee, and his current film career through a mix of digital and relational sources.

Dr. Mithlo and I had various conversations about the structure, flow, and project design of the interview. Since the interview was being facilitated on Zoom, we agreed to have a phone call with Richard Ray prior to filming the oral history interview. Through this three-way phone call, I had the opportunity to introduce myself and learn more about Richard Ray's childhood, and creative arts career. The phone call with Richard Ray and Dr. Mithlo was pivotal for understanding the direction of our interview. From the information I gathered, I created a series of questions for review and shared them with Dr. Mithlo and Richard Ray. They both provided feedback and I edited the questions accordingly. Co-designing the interview questions with Dr. Mithlo and Richard Ray was an important part of our relationship and trust-building process. Through this preparation, we were able to collectively plan and reflect on the context and direction of the interview.

On the day of the interview, we met on Zoom and chatted for a few minutes prior to recording. We discussed the structure of the interview and logistical information regarding the recording tools embedded in our technological devices. At the start of the interview, I was nervous about my role in asking Richard Ray questions in addition to other factors relating to technology and internet connectivity issues. One of the major lessons I learned during the interview process included the importance of staying visible, present, and accessible to the speaker. There was a brief moment when I had to turn off my camera after a family member walked into the background of my video. As soon as my camera was off, Richard Ray noticed and asked me if I was still on the call. Fortunately, Dr. Mithlo was able to intervene and assure

him I was present. Although I was off-camera for less than twenty seconds, the abrupt end to my visual image interrupted Richard Ray's flow and course of speaking.

Another major lesson I learned during the interview process was the importance of being able to pivot and ask follow-up questions. Prior to the interview, we had finalized five questions for Richard Ray. Through this approach, the interview proceeded to flow like a conversation rather than a rigorous and structured process. There were multiple follow-up questions and memory exchanges between Dr. Mithlo and Richard Ray. I was able to observe Dr. Mithlo's process and Richard Ray's response to going "off-script" from our outlined questions. This provided further context to how pre-written questions can serve as a guide and preparation tool for interviewing elders. Yet, interviews can also be designed with flexible features to provide opportunities to expand engagement. The process of interviewing an elder was much less rigid than I had imagined. I believe this is due to the long history and close familial relationship between Richard Ray and Dr. Mithlo. Additionally, Richard Ray is a professional actor with experience of being interviewed. These dynamics allowed Richard Ray to be comfortable while he discussed topics ranging in sensitive personal experiences.

Our conversation with Richard Ray was insightful and engaging, yet it wasn't until I started transcribing, that I realized I missed a lot of what he shared during the interview. I believe this was in part due to being nervous and reciting the questions I wanted to ask him in my head. Transcribing provided me with the opportunity to go back, rewatch and relisten to Richard Ray. Once I began transcribing, I created my own process for writing a verbatim transcription of the interview which included multiple rounds of engagement. I started by watching the full interview without interruption to situate myself in the process. I then rewatched the interview to begin transcribing the verbatim. Through this process, I repeatedly played small segments that made up

one minute of audio to ensure my text-based transcription was accurate. I relistened to the one minute segment four times before moving on to a new one-minute segment.

Each time I relistened and reviewed a one-minute segment, I focused on various aspects of the interview. For example, during the first round of listening to the audio, I would focus on writing the dialogue. In the second round, I concentrated on identification details that would require a verification check; such as names of people, places, organizations, dates, and/or tribal affiliations. On the third round, I would listen to important sounds and gestures that provided additional context to the narrative such as humming, laughing, clapping, clicking, finger tapping, and knocking. I then finished reviewing the one-minute segment with a final run-through listening to the interview and reading the transcribed segment at the same time to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Through this process, I spent approximately ten minutes transcribing one minute of audio.

#### Practices for Indigenizing Transcription Processes

Through my own process of creating technical-based transcriptions of oral history, there were key intervention strategies I wanted to highlight for a process of indigenizing transcription. Some of these intervention strategies directly relate to the structure of the archive, while other strategies are designated for reviewing and designing transcriptions. Although these are just a few intervention strategies, I imagine the process of indigenizing transcriptions to be a collective model that is inclusive of various other methods imagined by Indigenous scholars, oral historians, archivists and community members.

#### *Incorporating Content Notes*

While there are published opinion pieces on the use and effectiveness of trigger and content warnings, the topic remains controversial. I approach content notes as a method of harm

reduction for Indigenous peoples interacting with oral history records that may include sensitive content.<sup>121</sup> The University of Michigan, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Inclusive Teaching defines content warnings as a “...verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.”<sup>122</sup> Content notes provide forwarding context to the topics covered, explained, and shared in oral history records. Due to the historical nature of oral history discourse in institutional settings, oral histories can have varying topics and subjects of inquiry that may reflect the realities of settler-colonial, nation-state, systemic, carceral, and patriarchal violence. This definition has also been adopted into the proposed protocols for “The Archivist’s Task Force on Racism” by the National Archives and Records Administration.<sup>123</sup> The recognition and inclusion of content notes in this national government agency report demonstrates the necessity for intervention in archives and information collecting cultural institutions.

While content notes are not a solution to navigating violence in archives, they caution readers about the type of content, language and context they may encounter while engaging with oral history records. It’s important to note, that not everyone will be receptive to content notes however, they serve to benefit those who would like to be advised of sensitive subject matter

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<sup>121</sup> As a reminder, sensitive content may include topics discussing domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, substance abuse, death, suicide, self-injury. Content notes can also be used to caution readers of larger systemic, structural and historical violence such as war, genocide, boarding school, state violence. It is important to note that these topics will vary and discretion on content notes should be advised and consulted with the speaker, community and institutional representatives.

<sup>122</sup> “An Introduction to Content Warnings and Trigger Warnings.” University of Michigan, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Inclusive Teaching, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching-sandbox/wp-content/uploads/sites/853/2021/02/An-Introduction-to-Content-Warnings-and-Trigger-Warnings-Draft.pdf>

<sup>123</sup> “The Archivist’s Task Force on Racism.” National Archives and Records Administration, April 20, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/files/news/archivists-task-force-on-racism-report.pdf>.

before engaging with the material. For this purpose, content notes can be understood as a tool of empowerment and a way to activate self-agency when engaging with sensitive materials in archival and institutional settings.

### *Intentional Listening in Oral History Projects*

In the process of facilitating oral history projects, intentional listening is required to engage with the speaker on a multitude of levels. Intentional listening centers the speaker/community, by being attentive to their needs, leadership and direction. This also requires providing accommodations and attentive support at all stages of the project development. This task can be accomplished on an internal, relational and institutional level to ensure the motions of the project align. In *Indigenous Storywork*, Jo-ann Archibald remarks on the importance of learning to listen on an internal level, “Listening requires the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind and patience.”<sup>124</sup> These skills are essential to being an intentional and respectful listener. Additionally being empathetic, culturally responsive and understanding the requests and expectations speakers make supports the making of strong, trusting and collaborative relationships.

One example of intentional listening on a relational and institutional level can be observed by Julie Cruikshank’s experiences working with Yukon communities in the mid 1990s. Cruikshank reflects on the process of working with elders as they discuss how their oral histories should be transcribed and circulated,

One by one, elders spoke about their view that their words should be transcribed directly as they were spoken... They spoke about how such words extend connections — to younger people, to cultural outsiders, and across linguistic boundaries with the Yukon. They were less troubled about whether recording oral narrative may inappropriately disembodify, decontextualize, and crystalize it than how the printed page allows readers to “hear” the

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<sup>124</sup> Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

words of those who are no longer living — in other words, how print enhances possibilities for communication. They unanimously agreed that their words be transcribed in English as spoken, expressing a commitment to linguistic constructions that are recognizably their own.<sup>125</sup>

This is a powerful example of how intentional listening and project design can evoke a personal, emotional, and felt connection across multiple generations. The elders in this oral history project were concerned about maintaining the sensory cultural connection for future generations which is conducive of Indigenous knowledge systems and futurisms.<sup>126</sup> By transcribing the audio records through a verbatim style, the oral history transcriptions provide an opportunity for future community members to engage and listen intentionally with their ancestors narratives.

### *Transcribing Embodiment*

As a former early childhood educator, my professional and educational training included observation-based practices to document and transcribe children's verbal and non-verbal language practices. The discipline of early childhood education recognizes the significance of facial expressions, body gestures, and hand movements for language and cognitive development. From hand games to songs and storytelling, bodily practices are vital to understanding the context, performance, and interpretation of language. These gestures imply an embodied experience of dynamic perspectives that communicate the memory, emotions, and experiences shared in cultural narratives.

I propose transcribing embodiment as an additional strategy for indigenizing transcription to consider the ways transcriptions can share non-verbal information that can not be seen, felt, or directly experienced through a traditional text-based narrative. Through an embodied

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<sup>125</sup> Cruikshank, Julie. *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

<sup>126</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

transcription practice, transcribers can create multidimensional readings that engage various elements of oral history. Performance scholar, Nien Yuan Cheng, asserts that “...dynamic movements are important because they communicate to us embodied memories, be it personal habits, knowledge or skills, or lived experiences, and they provide another layer of information to the oral historian, in addition to the spoken words.”<sup>127</sup> Embodiment in transcriptions can vary from bodily performances to expressions of emotion, memory, and affection. Cheng proposes practical techniques of embodiment expressions that can be integrated into the transcription. For example, she utilizes differentiating font sizes and styles to emphasize gestures and dynamics. Additionally, she includes notes on physical gestures within the transcription.<sup>128</sup>

Embodiment in transcriptions can also be reflective of sounds in the environment, relationships, languages, and cultural expressions. These sounds, gestures, and dynamics can be incorporated in narrative-based descriptions as outlined by Christine Sun Kim in her performance in “Captioning dialogue is one thing. But captioning sound is another.”<sup>129</sup> Kim details Deaf creative strategies as a way to reinvigorate closed captions on film and video media. Kim demonstrates how narrative-based closed captioning can transform viewer experiences and engagement with sound contextualize non-verbal cues and expressions of the speaker and the setting. Oral historians could productively employ this approach in capturing the rich data that exists in bodily transcription methods.

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<sup>127</sup> Cheng, Nien Yuan. “‘Flesh and Blood Archives’: Embodying the Oral History Transcription.” *The Oral History Review* 45, no. 1 (2018): 127–42.

<sup>128</sup> The following are examples of transcribing gestures; (snaps fingers), (laughs), (yawns), (rolls eyes). Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> “Artist Christine Sun Kim Rewrites Closed Captions.” Pop-Up Magazine, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfe479qL8hg>.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I analyzed the development of oral history scholarship and transcription production and proposed an alternative process for oral history transcription models by identifying key variables present within indigenizing transcriptions process. These variables include refusal, working with culturally sensitive material, and honoring protocols. Within an indigenizing transcription framework, I presented foundational considerations for cultural awareness on tribal and community-specific forms of Indigenous knowledges, and protocols within oral history and archival practices. I suggested incorporating content notes, being an intentional listener, and transcribing embodiment as key strategies for indigenizing transcription. My research intention was to bring awareness to the importance of working with sensitive archival materials with care and consideration for speakers, descendants, and communities. This thesis advocates for an oral history transcription process that is collaborative, community-engaged, and culturally responsive.

While there are limitations to the research I proposed, I recognize this thesis as a living document that will expand as the scholarship on oral histories and archival studies advances. Most recently, I have been inspired by Tongva scholar Yve Chavez and Chiricahua Apache scholar Nancy Marie Mithlo's newly published book *Visualizing Archives: Indigenous Interventions in Art, Archives, and Museums*.<sup>130</sup> This literature contributes critical intervention strategies of institutional methods and documentation practices of Indigenous experiences with violence, genocide, and settler colonialism. I look to this scholarship as Chavez, and Mithlo lead the field toward a direction of care, healing, and accountability.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Chavez, Yve, Nancy Marie Mithlo, and Charlene Villaseñor Black, eds. *Visualizing Genocide: Indigenous Interventions in Art, Archives, and Museums*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2022.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

In closing this thesis, I would like to share an excerpt from the “Expanding the Archive” interview with Richard Ray Whitman, as he shares a personal yet pivotal moment of social, cultural, and political pride and power, “You know, I always felt too that much later after Santa Fe and CalArts, Wounded Knee in ‘72... maybe look back to Oklahoma to my own homeland, my own home. I said, maybe I can do something, maybe I can go home. There’s a certain kind of pride again, you know, you begin to reevaluate what it means to be an American Indian in American society today. The most ignored, disregarded, wholesome people of the Americas.”<sup>132</sup> Whitman reminds us of the importance of reevaluating methods, frameworks, and systems that disregard Native cultures and communities. “Returning home” is a powerful analogy that supports self-determination, sovereignty, and community care in oral history projects.

For institutions to be effectively engaged in indigenizing practices, they require alternative frameworks that emphasize transparency and accountability to the community. For this reason, I want to reiterate Vine Deloria Jr.’s call to action for a federal survey and plan for education and access to all records pertaining to Native peoples and tribal communities.<sup>133</sup> A critical assessment of federal, state, and private institutional holdings of oral histories relating to Native peoples and communities is urgently necessary to assess the field's current needs and determine appropriate steps toward institutional and scholarship change. In his 1978 speech “The Right to Know,” Deloria asserts that access to records and documents is critical for Indigenous knowledge production and sovereignty, “Today that imperative need of Indian communities... is a need to know; to know the past, to know the traditional alternatives advocated by their

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<sup>132</sup> Whitman, Richard Ray. Yuchi-Muscogee/Creek. Zoom oral history, 11 June 2021. Note: For the purpose of this thesis, I use Lorisia MacLeod’s method for citing Indigenous elders oral histories. MacLeod, Lorisia. *More Than Personal Communication: Templates for Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers*. KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies 5(1), 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Deloria, Vine. “The Right to Know: A Paper.” Washington D.C., 1978.

ancestors, to know the specific experiences of their communities, and to know about the world that surrounds them in the same intimate manner they once knew the plains, mountains, deserts, rivers, and woods.”<sup>134</sup>

Moving away from extractive and transactional processes of transcription requires a thoughtful investment in educational resources, training, research, and mentorship. Transcription scholarship and discourse are thoroughly undertheorized and often disregarded as “grunt work.” However, there is potential for Indigenous, Native and tribal organizations to support the development of this field by training and supplying community members with the appropriate tools, guides, and resources to facilitate oral history projects, indigenize transcriptions and care for historical oral history records. Oral histories are inherently an Indigenous practice, and I imagine oral history scholarship will continue to grow and expand in new and exciting ways. My hope for a future of indigenizing transcriptions is that the next generation of Indigenous oral historians and historical record stewards will continue to build upon our “networks of constellations,” improve this proposed research on indigenizing transcriptions and repatriate all oral history records held captive by federal, academic, and private institutions.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

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