# Indigenous Representation and Preservation Challenges in Audiovisual Archives

**Bárbara Carrera**
Simmons University 300 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115
barbara.carrera@simmons.edu

## ABSTRACT
Tribal communities possess a wealth of knowledge that represents each community's unique worldview, and these ideas and beliefs are represented in both tangible and intangible media: manuscripts, songs, film, audio recordings, and religious ceremonies, among other manifestations. Representation of indigenous films and photographs in audiovisual repositories is a contentious subject in the archival community, and it closely relates to the tensions surrounding intellectual property and traditional knowledge. With a rich and diverse history, this study focuses on some of the challenges faced by Indigenous communities across the Americas and how communities have banded together to address issues of representation, intellectual property, and artistic expression.

This poster will broach these questions by analyzing intellectual property, preservation challenges and approaches, and cultural representation through the analysis of three distinct scenarios in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. I explored scholarly articles, primary audiovisual sources, and archival descriptions of indigenous collections to probe these topics.

## KEYWORDS
culturally sensitive preservation, traditional knowledge, tribal archives, audiovisual materials, preservation, collaborative model

## INTRODUCTION
The main goal of this research is to investigate how distinct indigenous communities, each with their own varying goals and interests, can create collections that accurately reflect the life, goals, and values of their own communities. Using a community lens this poster explores how photographic, audio, and film materials of Indigenous communities are appraised and preserved by film archivists and community archive professionals to display to the public. This paper focuses on three examples: the Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project (focusing on the use of the Mukurtu software platform), the Chiapas Photographic Project (to demonstrate a successful self-representation and appraisal model), and the partnership between Canada's Assembly of First Peoples and the Canadian Museums Association.

## PURPOSE
In researching Indigenous audiovisual content and the challenges of preserving these materials, I approached the topic by exploring several questions. First, how are indigenous groups represented in mainstream archives, if represented at all? What can audiovisual archivists today change in archival practice to ensure that these communities are represented accurately and respectfully? Second, what appraisal criteria is important to the community and how do community ideals impact if and how materials are selected for preservation? Finally, how can indigenous and mainstream communities negotiate and compromise during the appraisal and acquisition processes to ensure that all communities are heard, but that the emphasis remains on respecting and empowering underrepresented groups?

## METHODS
To explore these questions, I researched several projects and repositories throughout Central and South America, Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States to assess the challenges facing these repositories and the creative ways in which archivists engage with the local communities throughout the life of the records. I also investigated best practices and guidelines for the representation and conservation of audiovisual materials. I narrowed my selection of institutions to present in this paper by selecting the programs or repositories that encompass the challenges and emerging solutions in the field.

## FINDINGS
This research project reviewed concepts of traditional knowledge and intellectual property to understand the acquisition and appraisal negotiation process between indigenous communities and audiovisual repositories. To address the needs of all parties, professionals on all sides need an understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in appraising and acquiring materials of importance to both Indigenous and mainstream (non-Indigenous) communities. Investigating film archives with the Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project presented a unique opportunity to explore how native people are represented in the mainstream archives and some creative ways in which the communities depicted in these materials can reclaim the narrative to their histories. Finally, creating opportunities for self-representation helps Indigenous artists express their identities, their perspectives, and their lives in as fully and accurately a manner as possible.

### Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property
Indigenous scholar Michael Marker dissects the concerns of community elders when deciding how to preserve indigenous ways of knowing and cultural knowledge. Historically,

archival repositories have had a contentious relationship with indigenous artifacts and materials, often leading to discussions about the ethics of accessioning cultural heritage artifacts into mainstream collections. The implementation of access restrictions on materials can prevent tribal members from accessing the materials that can help them connect with their communities, learn about their pasts, and establish a sense of identity. This presents the first, and possibly, one of the greatest challenges: severing the link between knowledge and access. The practice of restricting access from the communities that produced the materials has also fueled a deep sense of distrust between tribal communities and larger repositories housed in private, university, or government institutions. Some tribal archives may place different values on some materials, such as religious artifacts or audio recording of spiritual songs, which are deemed too personal to share with researchers outside their community. After investigating an array of tribal university archives, it became apparent that these institutions reserve the right to limit access of these materials to tribal members only. We will explore this topic further in the analysis of the collaboration between the First Peoples and the Canadian Museums Association.

Dr. Jane Anderson explores how an indigenous framework of preservation and information transmission may or may not fit into the mainstream approach to archiving, appraising, and holding materials. She explains how intellectual property laws "seek to 'promote investment in, and access to, the results of creative effort, and extend to protecting the marketing of goods and services.' One reason for this is that intellectual property is increasingly an important mechanism of world trade" (p. 5). Understanding the economic role of intellectual property laws provides clarity around issues of intellectual and cultural discord where holding indigenous materials comes to play. Here, we can question how one set of beliefs in holding sacred knowledge does not fit into the setting outlined by private versus communal ownership, donor agreements, and public access. Larger cultural heritage institutions may disagree by arguing that they are protecting valuable information that benefits society on a wider scale. However, barring members of a community from their own intellectual materials still plays into an unbalanced system of access.

Apart from access, LAM institutions have historically promulgated stereotypes of indigenous peoples, playing into erroneous and offensive ideas of tribal communities and placing emphasis on these roles rather than offering a portrayal that is true to the values held dear to these communities. Continuing to promote false stereotypes has deepened the divide between groups, but many institutions and groups on either side of the divide have made concerted efforts in recent years to improve relationships between communities, repositories, researchers, and government agencies maintaining indigenous collections.

One step towards reconciling the different parties involved in housing indigenous materials is to help promote tribal communities' self-representation. This is a unique opportunity to address issues in the appraisal of indigenous collections, as artists and other creators are part of the appraisal process, indicating which materials they deem as important for a collection and how they wish to represent themselves and their communities. Archival self-representation has led to a

greater array of repositories housing indigenous materials that are moderated by the community. Furthermore, the creation of Mukurtu, which is a platform on which repositories can represent materials in a culturally relevant and respectful way, has opened a pathway for tribal archives to take back their collections and control how their communities are represented and accessed.

**Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project and Mukurtu**
The Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project, which aims to utilize films from the University of Arizona's American Indian Film Gallery, works to retell an accurate history of native communities. Reappropriating films created in the mid-20th century is an essential part of this project, as the website states that "most of the films…reflect mainstream cultural attitudes of the day. Often the narration pronounces meaning that is inaccurate or disrespectful, but the visual narratives are for the most part quite remarkable. This project seeks to rebalance the historical record, intentionally shifting emphasis from external perceptions of Native peoples to the voices, knowledge, and languages of the peoples represented in the films by participatory recording of new narrations for the films" (http://tribesourcingfilm.com/about)

The Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project accomplishes its unique mission by using Mukurtu's platform to display its content, share the history and stories of native people, and by taking back the narrative of their own histories. Repurposing the films to tell their stories is a unique approach to reclaiming the historical narrative of native people. To supplement the historical narrative, the film project has over five hundred films under its domain. The content on the Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project's website is controlled and presented by the tribes involved in the project, ensuring the individuals running the project remain in control of the narrative.

**Self-Representation**
Another successful model of self-representation in audiovisual projects is the Proyecto Fotográfico de Chiapas, or the Chiapas Photographic Project (CPP), founded by Carlota Duarte, director of the Archivo Fotográfico Indígena. This project focuses on the photography training and presentation of indigenous photographs from the Chiapas region of Mexico. The project teaches any interested member of the Mayan tribes in Chiapas how to use a variety of cameras and the basics of photographic techniques. The project developed an in-house studio where participants can edit their photographs and apply a number of techniques to their own works. Additionally, more advanced participants can learn the basics of metadata and are trained in entering metadata for the works produced on-site.
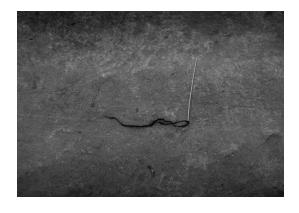
**Image 1. Maruch Sántiz Gómez
Aguja, 1996
Col. Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C.**

In the short film, "Camaristas: Autoretratos Indígenas," Carlota Duarte and several of her students explain their relationship with the project and how its mission drives them to continue capturing everyday moments in Chiapas. One student from the project, Maruch Sántiz Gómez, spent a weekend interviewing elders in the Mayan communities of Chiapas, collecting oral histories and photographing moments that capture snapshots of everyday indigenous life. One example is the photograph (see Image 1) entitled "aguja" (meaning "needle" in English), which is part of a sixteen-photograph exhibit portraying everyday indigenous life and housework,

In both the short film and the eventual exhibition of Sántiz Gómez's photographs, the photograph tell the stories of the tribes, allowing those who can not read or write to understand and relay information through photography. This type of photographic project can help bridge the gaps between community members who are not able to read or write with those who are able to do so. Photography takes on a new meaning not only by relaying information on everyday life in Chiapas, but by also taking on a new form of communication between community members. Reflections on the past and representations of present-day life are communicated through the use of photographs, which also help community members and outside researchers view the world through the photographer's eyes.

In the film, Duarte states, "to me it is important that the collection become part of the National System of Photographic Archives (SINAFO, Sistema Nacional de Fototecas), and through these types of contacts we can improve the quality, in general, of the maintenance of the collection, spreading awareness of the collection, and to demonstrate the importance of this talent in the indigenous photographs and to be part of creating part of the cultural patrimony of the nation (Duarte, AFI 1992). The work of the CPP is an integral part of tracking and recording present indigenous culture and history, with the unique aspect of allowing the creators to partake in the appraisal process. This model allows the community members and those participating in the project to have a direct hand in curating, appraising, and maintaining a collection representative of their heritage. Curating such a unique collection and working collaboratively with the SINAFO gives Mayan communities in Chiapas and throughout southern Mexico the opportunity to permanently record history as representative of their heritage, talents, and world views.

**Relationship Building and Collaboration**
After reviewing the audiovisual representation of indigenous people in Canadian LAM institutions, a partnership between the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association was formed. The purpose of this partnership was to strike a balance between empowering indigenous communities and using established best practices from mainstream archives as a means to best represent the needs of all parties. Empowerment takes shape by providing these communities with a platform on which to voice their concerns and to work directly with their individual community's collections. By doing this, individuals and communities can identify respect-

ful ways of representing materials, displaying material in a culturally appropriate way, and making the repositories aware of cultural limitations in displaying material. The Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples outlines the discussions that took place when all parties and the steps needed to address the many concerns in historical representation of indigenous. The consultations address issues of access, involvement, cultural significance, training, repatriation, and institutional support. These topical areas then span into the recommendations for building partnerships between the two institutional types, allowing archivists and activists on both sides to understand the significance of working through each stage of a collection's life and understanding the roles each actor plays in the process.

This report, along with several other resources specific to the preservation and maintenance of unique materials (ivory, baskets, graves, etc.), created a foundation for the Canadian government to assemble best practices for the maintenance of indigenous museum collections. The guidelines are broken down into manuals for each type of material and contains a section entitled, "Caring for Sacred and Culturally Sensitive Objects," which outlines the physical steps of traditional care of materials. The other large-scale section of the guidelines addresses the intangible nature of caring for these materials, defining what is sacred and culturally significant and who the stakeholders are in the preservation process. Establishing these guidelines required in-depth analysis of how these partnerships would work and the perspective of each actor in the collaboration.Ultimately, what makes this unique is that is sets the foundation for LAM institutions in Canada and abroad to work with other marginalized communities.

**DISCUSSION**
Examining indigenous people's representation in audiovisual archives and the place these collections have in the overall institution is significant to understand where progress can be made when working indigenous tribal artifacts and materials. Reviewing the scholarly articles and the projects in which self-representation was a core value was significant in that many of these communities, while holding different traits and unique viewpoints, share many similar concerns regarding their archival material. Audiovisual records and objects present a unique facet to this discussion because the public tends to gravitate towards these materials first in a collection, attempting to capture and understand a community, a theme, or an individual based on what they see and hear. However, these features are what make audiovisual material also more potent in transferring ideas and beliefs from one group to the next. In some ways, audiovisual materials may be more powerful in the representation of people and can ultimately benefit or hurt a community if not carefully handled and presented.

Empowering communities, especially those whose voices and stories have been delegitimized, is significant because it helps to break the bonds between these groups and a society fraught with social inequities. Empowerment can lead to helping communities to demonstrate their abilities, talents, and contributions, as was seen in the Chiapas Photographic Project. The role of partnerships and collaborations between a variety of institutions can also help activists and archivists to bridge their interests for a common goal. Archivists have long held a quiet role in the archives and those who are eager to become ac-

tivists for underrepresented groups can use partnerships to give silent communities a platform on which to express themselves.

**CONCLUSION**
From the resources analyzed for this paper, I saw a common thread among the various types of repositories and therefore used the three projects to exemplify some of the challenges tribal archives face while shedding light on initial steps taken to address these issues. The development of this paper took shape over a series of steps, as the original outline of the paper was meant to represent the voices of filmmakers, artists, and tribal leaders through the use of interviews. Beginning this assignment with an analysis of scholarly articles, documentaries, and interviews helped set the foundation to what could potentially become a larger project. Unfortunately, I was not able to include first-person narratives on these topics, which could have easily lent to a more well-rounded view on how to work in the present and how to develop potential solutions in the future. Expanding the research to look at tribal archival description can also help to address how these materials can be presented in a culturally relevant manner.

Finally, this project would benefit from future study by adding a second wave of research, namely a phase in which I could conduct more in-depth interviews than those original planned. Hearing first-person accounts of creating audiovisual material and maintaining collections in culturally appropriate ways would help give this research a well-rounded perspective and may even help larger organizations to take action to develop these partnerships. Working together, archivists and activists can learn to work in tandem to address these many obstacles in the preservation of historical and culturally sensitive materials.

**References**

*Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki*. *(n.d.) Conservation*. Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. https://www.ahtahthiki.com/conservation/.

American Indian Library Association. (2020). *Current AILA Committees and Assignments*. *American Indian Library Association*. https://ailanet.org/about/committees/.

Anderson, Dr. J. (2005). *Access and Control of Indigenous Knowledge in Libraries and Archives: Ownership and Future Use*. American Library Association and The MacArthur Foundation Columbia University, New York. http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/alaconf2005/paper_anderson.pdf.

The Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association. (1994). *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*. http://museums.in1touch.org/uploaded/web/docs/Task_Force_Report_1994.pdf.

Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums. (n.d.) *Advancing Indigenous Cultural Organizations*. ATALM. https://www.atalm.org.

Baldridge, S. (2013). *Preserving the Past: A Basic Handbook for Archiving in Rural Alaska*. Alaska Native Language Archive. https://sustainableheritagenetwork.org/system/files/atoms/file/PreservingThePast-20130521.pdf.

Bermudéz, P. A. & Uzendoski, M. A. (2018). Kukama Runa: Polyphonic Aesthetics in Cine Comunitario Among the Napo Runa of Amazonian Ecuador.

Bishop, N., Pringle, J., & Tsosie, C. (2017). Connecting Cline Library with Tribal Communities: A Case Study. *Collection Management*, *42*,(3-4), 240-255. doi:10.1080/01462679.2017.1359717.

Brown, M (1998). Can Culture Be Copyrighted? *Current Anthropology, 39*(2). 193-222.

CIESAS. (2019, May 27). *Camaristas*. *Autoretratos Indígenas* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oIk-wkQRN0o.

Chiapas Photography Project. (2011, September). *Sobre el Proyecto Fotográfico de Chiapas*. https://chiapasphoto.org/about/about-sp.html.

Clad, J. (1984, December). *Conservation and Indigenous People*. Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine. https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/conservation-and-indigenous-peoples.

Clavir, M. & Moses, J. (2019, September 24). *Caring for Sacred and Culturally Sensitive Objects*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/caring-sacred-culturally-sensitive-objects.html#b9.

Gonzalez Möller, N. (2018, October 10). Cine y Video Indígena en América Latina 1-6: Un Asunto de Vida o Muerte. *Revista Icónica: Pensamiento Fílmico*. http://revistaiconica.com/cine-y-video-indigena-en-america-latina-1-un-asunto-de-vida-o-muerte/.

Institute of American Indian Arts. (2020). *Archives*. IAIA. https://iaia.edu/academics/library/archives/.

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. *Sistema Nacional de Fototecas*. *Quienes Somos: Presentación*. https://sinafo.inah.gob.mx/pagina-ejemplo/.

Joffrion, E. & Fernández, N. (2015). Collaborations between Tribal and Nontribal Organizations: Suggested Best Practices for Sharing Expertise, Cultural Resources, and Knowledge. *The American Archivist, 78*(1), 192-237.

Labriola Center. (2018, June 15). *Labriola Center Collection Development Policy. Labriola Center*. https://libguides.asu.edu/ld.php?content_id=10615825.

The Library of Congress. (2020, March 31). *Collections and Research Services*. The American Folklife Center. https://www.loc.gov/folklife/.

Marker, M.. (2010). *A Long Time Ago in the Future: Indigenous Media in the Digital Age*. NCLA Report on the Americ-

as. https://nacla.org/article/long-time-ago-future-indigenous-media-digital-age.

Matheison, K.. (2012). A Defense of Native Americans' Rights over Their Traditional Cultural Expressions. *The American Archivist, 75*, 456-481.

McRobbie, J. (2014). *Applicable Models for Audiovisual Archives and Collections: Engagement With Indigenous Communities and Archival Materials*. American Folklore Society. http://hdl.handle.net/2022/21492.

Mukurtu. (n.d.) *Our Mission*. https://mukurtu.org/about/.

Mukurtu (n.d.) *The Mukurtu Community*. https://mukurtu.org/showcase/.

Nickerson, M. (2016). *Supporting & Developing The Indigenous Screen-based Media Industry in Canada: A Strategy*. Canada Media Fund. https://www.cmf-fmc.ca/fr-ca/global-assets/news/2017/cmf-indigenous-strategy-dec2016.

Reyes-Escudero, V. & Wendel Cox, J. (2017). Survey, Understanding, and Ethical Stewardship of Indigenous Collections: A Case Study. *Collection Management, 42*(3-4), 130-138. https://doi.org/10.1080/01462679.2017.1336503.

Sántiz Gómez, M. (1996). Aguja [Photograph]. http://fomentoculturalbanamex.org/exposicion/creencias-de-maruch-santiz-gomez-3/.

Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project. (2020). *About*. Tribesourcing Southwest Film Project. http://tribesourcing-film.com/about.

TV Unam. (2017, October 8). *Archivo Fotográfico México Indígena* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shEyxxiDTzs.

UNESCO. (2019). *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. https://en.unesco.org/links.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. (n.d.) *Repositorio Universitario Digital Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales*. Repositorio del IIS-Unam. http://ru.iis.sociales.unam.mx/jspui/handle/IIS/43.

Woksape Tipi Library. (2020, April 7). *Finding Aids/Collection Summaries*. https://library.olc.edu/c.php?g=953079&p=6876382.