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ORIGINAL PAPER

On archival pluralism: what religious pluralism (and its critics) can teach us about archives

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Abstract Recent work has stressed the importance of pluralism in archival education, practice, and research. By examining the promises and perils of pluralism as it has been constructed in another field—religion—this article analyzes, expands, and delineates the notion of archival pluralism in a way that helps form the conceptual foundation for further work on pluralistic approaches to archival education, theory and practice. More specifically, it argues that archival pluralism can learn from four basic principles of religious pluralism—energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog—while at the same time avoiding four major perils: claims of universality, inattention to power, silencing dissent, and collapsing of difference. First, this article presents a brief discourse analysis tracing the emergence and development of archival pluralism in the literature to date. Next, turning to how pluralism has been constructed in another field, this article gives a brief overview of conceptions of religious pluralism using the work of two of its most prominent American scholars as guideposts and then addresses the strengths and weaknesses of this conceptualization of pluralism in the religious sphere. Next, this article proposes how religious pluralism's main principles and pitfalls can be adapted and applied in the realm of memory keeping in order to strengthen the conceptual framework for archival pluralism. It concludes by suggesting aspects of a research agenda for future work in archival pluralism.

Keywords Pluralism · Archival theory · Diversity · Archival education

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Introduction

Pluralism has become a topic of increasing importance in archival studies. In Summer 2011, an international group of archival doctoral students and faculty members calling themselves the Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (of which the author of this paper was a part) published a manifesto of sorts in *American Archivist*. The article, developed 2 years earlier at the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) and entitled "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," called on archival educators to radically reorient the ways they think and teach about archives in order to better engage cultural difference (PACG 2011). At its core, the group asked several key questions:

> How do we move from an archival universe dominated by one cultural paradigm to an archival multiverse; from a world constructed in terms of 'the one' and 'the other' to a world of multiple ways of knowing and practicing, of multiple narratives coexisting in one space? … How do we accept that there may be incommensurable ontologies and epistemologies between communities … and find ways to accept and work within that reality? (PACG 2011, p. 73).

Although these important questions will take archival studies decades to flesh out, the PACG article constitutes an important opening statement in a now ongoing conversation on the theoretical nature and practical implications of archival pluralism.

This article takes seriously PACG's call to engage diverse and sometimes conflicting approaches to memory keeping through a more detailed exploration of the concept of archival pluralism. By examining the promises and perils of pluralism as it has been constructed in another arena—religion—this article aims to analyze, expand, and delineate the notion of archival pluralism in a way that helps form the conceptual foundation for further work on pluralistic approaches to archival education, theory, and practice. More specifically, it argues that archival pluralism can learn from four basic principles of religious pluralism—energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog—while at the same time avoiding four major perils: claims of universality, inattention to power, silencing dissent and collapsing difference. First, this article traces the emergence and development of archival pluralism in the literature to date. Next, turning to how pluralism has been constructed in another field, this article gives a brief overview of conceptions of religious pluralism using the work of two of its most prominent American scholars as guideposts and then addresses the strengths and weaknesses of this conceptualization of religious pluralism. Next, this article proposes how religious pluralism's main principles and pitfalls can inform the conceptual framework for archival pluralism. This article concludes by suggesting aspects of a research agenda for future work in archival pluralism.

This paper employs a variety of overlapping methods with the ultimate goal of building theory in the field. The first section of this paper, which provides an historical overview of pluralism in the archival literature, constitutes a discourse analysis whereby the ongoing unfolding of archival pluralism as a concept is traced (Iacovino 2004; Gilliland and McKemmish 2004). The second section of this paper,

which focuses on religious pluralism, employs both a discourse analysis and a conceptual analysis, in that it both traces the progression of religious pluralism as a concept through recent history and explores the conditions that must be met in order for difference to be accurately classified as pluralism in the arena of religion (Furner 2004; Gilliland and McKemmish 2004). The third section of this paper, which proposes some new possibilities for archival pluralism as well as cautions against some potential pitfalls in light of the first two sections, constitutes theory building in that it systematically reflects on, refines, and recasts archival pluralism as a theoretical concept in development (Gilliland and McKemmish 2004; Brown 1991–1992). Here, I attempt to draw a theoretical roadmap through the still largely uncharted terrain of archival pluralism and provide some guideposts and directions for future travels.

The field of religious studies was chosen as a comparative sphere for several reasons. On a practical level, my first academic field was religious studies and I worked briefly for an interfaith community service organization, so I speak from a place of intellectual and practical experience with the concept. Yet beyond my specific personal history and area of academic expertise, religious studies provides a particularly rich field of comparison. Religion, perhaps more so than other aspects of culture or ethnicity, is a site of intense difference that, if not properly negotiated, can erupt into violent disagreement. Globalization, mass migration, and war heighten the quantity and intensity of encounters between people of different faiths and foreground the importance of interreligious understanding and dialog. In the context of the ongoing conflicts of the twenty first century, theories and practical strategies for dealing with religious pluralism provide highly developed models from which archival studies can learn. Furthermore, the location of the academic field of religious studies—precariously balanced between history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and theology, and straddling the humanities and social sciences—mimics the hybrid nature of archival studies, which has been situated between library and information studies and history, and is greatly influenced now by science and technology studies, anthropology, philosophy, and other disciplines. Liminal fields like religious studies and archival studies are not bound by a singular methodology or approach, providing fertile ground for new strategies to be forged unconstrained by previous conventions.

Pluralism is an aspirational concept that is not easily achieved and, perhaps, is not even achievable. Like social justice, it always out of grasp, a "phantom" that "must always be coming" (Harris 2007, p. 249). It is contingent, contextual, and culturally informed; there is no universal path to or plan for pluralism, but rather it must be derived in situ from much effort, reflection, self-evaluation, and iteration. Pluralism is a process rather than a product; this article constitutes a small step in furthering that process conceptually in archival studies.

Locating archival pluralism: birth of a concept

This section traces a very brief history of the term "pluralism" in English language scholarship, its recent adoption by archival studies, and its application in the areas

of archival practice and archival education. This overview reflects the current state of archival pluralism, the future of which will be addressed in more detail after a discussion of lessons that can be learned from the conceptualization of religious pluralism.

The English word "pluralism" has religious roots, but its original meaning is significantly different from current usage. Religious studies scholars Klassen and Bender (2010) trace the word's genealogy back to eighteenth century England, where it was used to describe clergy who simultaneously held multiple positions in the Church of England. Yet, as Klassen and Bender report, by the late nineteenth century, pluralism took on a wholly different meaning through the work of philosopher William James. Influenced by conceptualizations of multiple universes in Eastern religions, James's treatise, *A Pluralistic Universe,* denounced absolutist and monist approaches to the divine (what James calls "the all-form") in favor of direct individual mystical experience (the "each-form") (1909, p. 20). He writes: "the pluralistic form which I prefer to adopt is willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest collection of it ever made, and that a distributive form of reality, the *each*-form, is logically as acceptable and empirically as probable as the all-form…" (1909, p. 20). Later, James asks "Can a plurality of reals be possible?" (1909, p. 39). He then answers affirmatively. James's concept of the multiverse was later appropriated by fields as diverse as physics, astronomy, and archival studies, while his notion of pluralism was invoked throughout the twentieth century's discussions of cultural pluralism, ethnic pluralism, and religious pluralism (the last of which will be explored in detail).

In archival studies, the concept of archival pluralism has largely (but not exclusively) developed within the context of the records continuum model. Created within an Australian archival milieu deeply influenced by both indigenous memory traditions and postcustodial models of electronic recordkeeping, the continuum approach or "metaview" accommodates a plurality of perspectives on the use and meaning of evidentiary texts. Upward et al. have recently summarized the continuum approach as "the integration of recordkeeping and archiving processes …, together with a multi-dimensional and pluralist view of archival functionality" (2011, p. 198). This "pluralist view of archival functionality" takes into account a multiplicity of past, current, and future uses of records and allows for divergent definitions of records to coexist.

The recent adoption of William James's term "multiverse" to describe "the hypothetical set of multiple possible universes" by continuum theorists represents a key moment in the genealogy of archival pluralism (Upward et al. 2011, p. 198; PACG 2011; Gilliland and McKemmish 2011). The archival multiverse is constructed not only as a backdrop against which fundamentally different worldviews coexist, but a mode through which difference and conflict are discussed and only sometimes resolved. Upward, McKemmish and Reed write, "Multiple views, often in competition with each other, must be allowed in the archival multiverse" (Upward et al. 2011, p. 235). The multiverse is a messy space, marked by contrast and divergence, and their ensuing discomforts.

It must be noted here that although archival pluralism is an important component of recent continuum scholarship and owes much of its intellectual lineage to continuum scholars, it should be distinguished from the continuum function of pluralisation. Frank Upward introduced pluralisation as the fourth dimension of the records continuum model whereby records are brought into an ever-widening circle or "system for building, recalling and disseminating collective memory," where they are disembedded from their original locations in space and time and made available to an ever-growing audience for a multiplicity of purposes and meanings (Upward 1996). For Upward, memory gets "pluralised" in the movement outward from documents to records, records to an archive, an archive to archives, and in this movement, grows to accommodate a diversity of functions, uses, and worldviews (Upward 1996). Yet while the continuum notion of pluralisation is complementary to archival pluralism, the two concepts should be differentiated. Pluralisation is the movement of records into larger systems through which they will be accessible across space and time by the greater society. As records move outward into the biggest ring on the continuum model, they become accessible to an increasingly larger audience who then make meaning from them in ever-increasing ways. By contrast, archival pluralism is the acknowledgement of and engagement with, multiple coexisting archival realities—that is, fundamentally differing but equally valid ways of being and knowing—most commonly made manifest in the archival realm by (sometimes) irreconcilably divergent—but still credible—ways of defining, transmitting, and interpreting evidence and memory. It is this later concept that concerns this paper.

For decades, archivists have noted the potential impact of pluralist approaches to cultural and social history on archival practice. In 1978, Nicholas Montalto of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota called on archivists to rethink preservation practices in the face of an increasingly ethnically pluralist society (Montalto 1978). In 1985, Dale Mayer summarized pluralist approaches in what were then the "new" social history and its implications for appraisal, arrangement, description, and reference (Mayer 1985). Similarly, the discussion over macro-appraisal, particularly the work of Terry Cook (1992), may be read as an attempt to build more representative collections in the face of cultural pluralism, though multiculturalism—rather than pluralism—was the preferred term among archivists at the time (Cox 2000). Since the turn of the twenty first century, postmodern archival thinkers have questioned the Jenkinsonian neutrality of archivists, eroding the traditional Western conception of records as neutral by-products of activity and paving the way for a more thorough investigation of the social and cultural factors shaping records, archival functions, and archival institutions (Nesmith 2002; Cook 2001; Ketelaar 2001). Scholars influenced by deconstructionist ways of thinking, particularly by the Derridean insistence on hospitality toward the "other," have also suggested expanding prevalent notions of record, archives, and value to include nonWestern ways of knowing (Harris 2007; Peterson 2002). In 2002, Terry Eastwood explicitly called for a pluralist approach to appraisal; "a pluralist society needs pluralism in its archival system," he writes (Eastwood 2002, p. 71). More recently, scholarship on community archives has positioned independent grassroots organizations as alternative venues for marginalized groups to question

dominant narratives of the past and collect a more inclusive range of materials that have been neglected or misrepresented by mainstream repositories (Flinn et al. 2009; Flinn and Stevens 2009). Yet while some of this scholarship addresses how other types of pluralism—cultural, ethnic, historical—might impact archival practice, it does little to detail the notion of pluralism as a distinctly archival concept.

Recent work on pluralist approaches to archival description (particularly on descriptive practices that reflect indigenous philosophies) and archival education has changed this by positing pluralism as an archival concept in its own right. Again, the continuum theorists have made important strides developing archival pluralism theory and then translating it into innovative descriptive practice. At the forefront, Upward et al., call on practitioners to "pluraliz[e] archival functionality and professional recordkeeping practice, continuum-style, to support the co-existence and interaction of multiple, diverse evidence paradigms and knowledge systems" and "embrace and better support multiple ways of knowing, recordkeeping, and archiving, and multiple forms of records" (2011, p. 210; p. 218). Examples of putting the multiverse concept into archival practice include the building of descriptive systems in participation with indigenous groups that acknowledge co-creatorship, multiple provenance, or parallel provenance (Upward et al. 2011; Hurley 2005; Christen 2011; McKemmish et al. 2011). The Australian project *Trust and Technology: Building Archival Systems for Indigenous Oral Memory* has transformed archival practice to better incorporate indigenous ways of knowing, building descriptive systems that reconcile the perceived divide between oral and written records and meet the needs of indigenous communities (McKemmish et al. 2011). Similarly, the Mukurtu Project and the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal have conceptualized and enacted systems for archival description that are structured around indigenous epistemologies, reflect indigenous knowledge, and are sensitive to indigenous access protocols (Christen 2011). The goal of these formulations of archival pluralism (in as much as there is a goal in a continually evolving process) is a transformation of practice. As McKemmish et al. write, "The challenge is to develop systems that can allow the co-existence of multiple knowledge systems and forms of record" (2011, p. 227). Given that many of these projects are ongoing, description will be a particularly important area to watch for the future development of archival pluralism.

Another area in which much of the work on archival pluralism has been done is archival education. As early as 2000, Anne Gilliland called for "increased pluralism in archival education," through which graduate education programs could meet the diverse needs of local communities and strengthen divergent research agendas and areas of specialization (Gilliland 2000, p. 267). Responding to Gilliland's call, Kelvin White proposed a framework for pluralizing archival education to more accurately reflect indigenous and African contributions to Mexican culture; his six-point plan includes: conceptual expansion; embeddedness of fieldwork within communities; collaboration with community-based groups; leadership, activism, and ethics; reflexivity of archival theory and practice; and sustainability (White 2009, p. 51). White writes that postmodern archival thinkers have redefined the archival role by, in part, "acknowledging and supporting pluralism" (White 2009, p. 49). Furthering this ongoing conversation, the convening of the PACG at AERI in 2009 represents a milestone in the development of archival pluralism.

Led by Anne Gilliland, PACG included many scholars whose work had addressed archival pluralism to date, including Sue McKemmish, Kelvin White, and Shannon Faulkhead, as well as several doctoral students whose as-of-yet unpublished work explores or assumes pluralist perspectives. PACG provided the first detailed and explicit definition of archival pluralism that distinguishes it from the mere fact of difference. Pluralism, PACG posited, acknowledges "incommensurable ontologies and epistemologies between communities", "strives to give equal footing to the range of perspectives explored" and promotes ways of "work[ing] within" complexly intersecting difference (PACG 2011, pp. 72–73).

PACG critiqued a diversity model by positing that efforts to racially and ethnically diversify the archival profession, though important, are incomplete in that they fail to acknowledge ontological and epistemological difference and address incommensurable worldviews. Diversity initiatives, the PACG argues, "overlook the systematic nature of the problems [they] seek to address, that diversifying the student population without expanding pedagogy and practice perpetuates a lack of awareness and consideration of the perspectives, behaviors, and needs of many different communities" (PACG 2011, p. 70). PACG juxtaposed diversity initiatives with pluralism approaches, arguing that pluralism "acknowledges that considerable 'messiness' and nuance need to be exposed, addressed, and engaged" (PACG 2011, p. 72). The article further acknowledged that "different ways of looking at the same phenomena cannot always be fully reconciled because they are simply different in some fundamental ways" and challenged a pluralist archival education framework to "explore how to facilitate negotiation of common ground on which to build without assimilation into, or complete agreement with, the dominant perspective" (PACG 2011, p. 80). In this way, the PACG article provides the most comprehensive conceptualization of archival pluralism thus far, as well as proposing some important ways pluralism could transform archival education. Putting PACG's model into practice in the classroom, Caswell et al. (2012) further explored what PACG's pluralist framework might look like in an introductory course, as well as archival pluralism's relationship to a social justice approach to education, while ongoing pluralism workshops at AERI aim to further delineate cross-cultural concepts as the basis for archival education (Gilliland and McKemmish 2011; AERI 2012, AERI Archival Concepts undated). Again, as the pluralist approach to archival education has only recently been proposed, this is an area to watch for further conceptualizations of pluralism, particularly as the doctoral student members of PACG graduate to faculty positions and begin constructing their own curricula reflecting their proposed approach.

Now that this article has addressed the nascent conceptualization of archival pluralism, it will turn to the evolution of pluralism in another field—religious studies—for clues on how best to proceed. By examining the promises and perils of pluralism in religious studies, this article hopes to refine and develop archival pluralism.

Locating religious pluralism: promises and pitfalls

This section summarizes the current prevailing strands in the rhetoric of religious pluralism in the U.S. and addresses several important critiques of pluralism that will

later be crucial to this article's discussion of archival pluralism. Although there are multiplicities of both religious pluralism scholars and conceptualizations of religious pluralism (which will be explored in future work), this article focuses on the concept's two most prominent mainstream American academic proponents, Martin E. Marty and Diana Eck. More specifically, this section will describe Marty's definition of pluralism and outline Eck's four proposed principles of pluralism: energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog. This section then describes how pluralism is situated as one of three possible responses to religious diversity in the prevailing literature, with exclusivist and inclusivist positions as the alternatives to pluralism. This section will then conclude by summarizing four major problems with this construction of religious pluralism: purported universality, inattention to power, silencing dissent, and collapsing of difference.

The current conceptualization of American religious pluralism can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, when debates among Protestants about how best to respond to their Catholic or Jewish neighbors loomed large. The evolution of religious pluralism was largely subsumed by the growing conceptualization of other types of pluralism—cultural, racial, ethnic—but by the 1990s, American scholars of religion—most notably Martin Marty and Diana Eck—began to take up pluralism's mantle.

Marty, a distinguished professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School and an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, co-directed the Fundamentalism Project for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences from 1988 to 1994, where he oversaw research from hundreds of scholars on religious fundamentalism around the world. The project was explicitly global in scope and included investigations of any religious tradition deemed "fundamentalist," from Protestants in Northern Ireland to Sikhs in India, to name but two examples. However, despite this global and nondenominational scope, the project was criticized for focusing too narrowly on Islam, as Marty acknowledges (Marty 1995). Building on his decades of studying religious conflict, Marty wrote his most explicit book on religious pluralism, *When Faiths Collide*, in 2005.

Another (and arguably more important) figure in the recent history of the concept of religious pluralism in the American context is Diana Eck. In 1991, Eck, a Harvard professor, self-described Methodist, and Hinduism scholar, founded the Pluralism Project. The project was created (in part as a response to the Fundamentalism Project's focus on religious conflict) in order to "help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources" (Eck 1997a, http://pluralism.org/about/mission). The project sent students back to their hometowns each summer to conduct research on religious diversity in the United States. Taking advantage of new technologies, in 1997, the Pluralism Project released *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, an introductory-level educational CD-ROM that profiled 300 religious communities, provided basic information on fifteen religious traditions practiced in the US and outlined the history of dealing with religious difference in the US (Pluralism Project 1997). By 1996, the Pluralism Project launched its website, www.pluralism.org, which remains a popular and well-respected source for

information on religious diversity and dialog. While the Pluralism Project began an International Initiative in 2005, the majority of its work remains decidedly domestic.

Both Marty and Eck have gone to great lengths to define religious pluralism and distinguish it from related terms such as diversity and plurality. Marty writes, "From the first it is important to emphasize that pluralism… is not the same thing as diversity…. Mere diversity is not a synonym for pluralism, since it [diversity] simply results from an obvious observation: 'There are a lot of different things—races, ethnic groups, classes, peoples, interests, and religious communities hereabouts'" (Marty 2005, pp. 68–69). By contrast, Marty posits, "The various pluralist proposals and practices on display today manifest what people opt to *do* with the fact of diversity" (Marty 2005, p. 70). Similarly, Eck writes, "'Pluralism' and 'diversity' are sometimes used as if they were synonyms, but diversity is just plurality, plain, and simple—splendid, colorful, perhaps, threatening. Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality" (Eck 2006a). As Eck describes, religious diversity is a fact of life in the US, but "pluralism is only one of the possible responses to this diversity," a response for which ongoing relationships with and substantive engagement between diverse groups is a prerequisite (2006a).

Having defined pluralism, Eck (1997a) specifies four distinguishing features of religious pluralism:

- First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. …. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.
- Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*…. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.
- Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind…. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.
- Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialog*. The language of pluralism is that of dialog and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialog means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialog does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one's commitments." (Eck 1997–2012, http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/what_is_pluralism)

These four principles—energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog—have been taken up by interfaith organizations across the country like the Interfaith Youth Core (where the author of this paper was briefly employed in 2004), who put them into practice through educational dialogs and

service learning projects. These principles will later guide this paper's discussion of what religious pluralism can offer archival pluralism. In another context, Eck also proposed a fifth element—that pluralism is based on the US Constitution's First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion and no state establishment of religion—but later omitted this point when talking about religious pluralism in a global context (Eck 2006b). As archival pluralism is emerging in a distinctly international academic community, such specificities of American government will so too be omitted from this discussion.

Marty and Eck agree that pluralism is just one of several possible options for encounters between different religious groups. Summarizing the past 50 years of American Christian thought on the topic, they both note that one of the most common (and to use Eck's phrase, "the most loudly expressed") responses to religious difference is exclusivism (Eck 1993, p. 178). In an exclusivist Christian position, Christianity has a monopoly on divine truth; exclusivists acknowledge there are people of other religious traditions in the world, but think those people are, quite simply, wrong. This position sees diversity as a threat and differences as irreconcilable. For exclusivists, pluralism is a "problem." The second response to religious difference noted by Marty and Eck among others, is the inclusivist response, which posits that the other religious traditions are "partially true" but incomplete (Eck 1993, p. 179). In the Christian version of inclusivism, Christianity is still seen as the ultimate truth, but one that "embraces, explains, and supersedes" all other religions, which reflect partial or incomplete versions of truth (Eck 1993, p. 179). Eck thinks this inclusivist view reflects the beliefs of most Christians, but also "feels like a form of theological imperialism" to those non-Christians whose beliefs are "swept into the interpretive schema of another tradition" (Eck 1993, p. 184).

It is also important to note that within this discussion, Eck sees the categories of exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist as universals, in that they can describe members of any religious tradition, while Marty situates them within Western Christian thought. This distinction, perhaps, results from Eck's orientation as a scholar of Hinduism, in contrast to Marty's focus on Christian Evangelicals. Tellingly, Marty posits, "Most of the energy put into the pluralist conversation has come from Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Enlightenment sources," revealing his markedly mainstream American perspective that ignores the long history of ample contribution to conceptions of religious pluralism by Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist thinkers in other contexts (Marty 2005, p. 175). For Marty, religious pluralism arises out of Christian responses to religious difference, while for Eck, pluralist views have multiple or universal lineages. This distinction between Christian pluralism and universal pluralism is especially salient when engaging pluralism's critics, as will soon be addressed.

This article will now turn to four major criticisms of the American construction of religious pluralism in the hopes that archival pluralism can avoid these pitfalls. First, one of the major criticisms of mainstream religious pluralism in the US is the purported universality of concepts that have developed, at least in the American context, in the crucible of Christian theology. Marty's emphasis on the Christian roots of pluralism omits the highly developed philosophies of pluralism in other

cultures around the world. For example, a South Asian religious pluralism based on the Jain doctrine of *anekantavada* (nonexclusivity) (Gopalan 1973; Mookerjee 1978), or an indigenous religious pluralism based on Native American philosophies of the multiplicity of paths to truth (Rice 2005; Cordova 2007) would look very different than Marty's conceptualization. On the other hand, a convincing argument can be made that Eck's claims to universality gloss over the differences in these culturally situated approaches to pluralism and fail to acknowledge that Christian approaches to pluralism have dominated the discussion in the US. As religion scholars Klassen and Bender note, "Suffice it to say that pluralism, like the related concepts of secularism and religion, emerged in response to particular challenges in the development of Western liberal democracies. In turn, pluralism has gone global, creating the paradox that with its expanding reach, invocations to celebrate difference may themselves breed a hegemonic unity" (Klassen and Bender 2010, p. 8). Synthesizing these critiques of religious pluralism, we can simultaneously acknowledge a plurality of pluralisms *and* carefully situate the current dominant rhetoric of religious pluralism in the US in its specific Christian-dominated, Enlightenment-influenced context.

Yet, this synthesis also hints at a second important critique of pluralism, namely pluralism's inattention to power relations. While affirming the validity of all religious traditions, pluralism ignores the long histories of unequal power relations that have previously dictated the terms of inter-religious dialog. Scholars of indigenous religions in particular have lamented this inattention to power. For example, commenting on pluralism's demand for dialog, Tracy Neal Leavelle writes, "Even in the supposedly more pluralistic era of our own time, the heavy weight of these institutional structures and histories of oppression has not disappeared. … Religious pluralism, with its demands for explanation and engagement, looks to many native peoples like a peculiarly modern form of colonialism" (Leavelle 2010, p. 156). Indeed, as Leavelle notes, dialog has previously opened up indigenous religious practice to appropriation, misinterpretation, and destruction and has rarely occurred on equal terms. But, rather than disregarding pluralism in totality, Leavelle cautions us to both acknowledge the historical context and political motivations for such pluralism and to leave space for dissent and disruption. He writes, "Pluralism … enacts definitions of acceptable difference. Pluralism in its current form is not ahistorical, nor is it apolitical. As a descriptive act and a prescriptive practice, it is clearly implicated in the long history of colonization" (Leavelle 2010, p. 175). As Leavelle acknowledges, there is a marked failure of religious pluralism as it has been conceived and practiced in the US to engage the importance of power in general and the impact of colonialism, militarism, racism, and capitalism in particular in dictating the terms on which members of different faith traditions encounter each other. The playing field on which interfaith encounters occur is not level despite pluralism's rhetoric.

A third important criticism of the religious pluralism movement in the US is its tendency to silence dissent in favor of perceived cohesion. Again, Leavelle summarizes this critique:

> In a diverse post-pluralistic world of contact, combination, and conflict, there must be room for divergence—for incommensurability, nonparticipation,

> dissonance, and misunderstanding—of a whole range of religious and political practices that may or may not include engagement and dialog" (Leavelle 2010, p. 175).

This attention to dissent and disruption suggested by Leavelle is in marked contrast to the dominant language of pluralism in the US, which stresses "social cohesion" and "social capital" as the ultimate goal of interfaith dialog and action (Patel and Meyer 2011, p. 2). Although the promotion of greater social cohesion may be seen as laudable in societies plagued by violent religious conflict, pluralism must also allow for varying degrees of disagreement, discord, and nonparticipation. Leavelle's critique—and its emphasis on spaces of incommensurability, nonparticipation, dissonance—is crucial as we move forward with the construction of archival pluralism, particularly in light of archival tendencies to favor unifying standards over a messy cacophony of practices.

A related and incisive critique of the rhetoric of religious pluralism in the US is that, in its emphasis on commonality, it fails to acknowledge contestation, change, and difference within and between religious communities. Too often, pluralist engagement calls on individuals to speak on behalf of and stand in for the larger faith community of which they are a part. This approach collapses important differences within religious communities and sees them as static entities, conveying a false sense of unity, silencing disruptive or dissenting voices and ignoring dynamic changes within groups. Furthermore, important differences between religious traditions are also collapsed in pluralism's demands for commonalities. An example of this can be seen in the nonprofit organization Interfaith Youth Core's definition of "interfaith literacy," which highlights, "Knowledge of the values—such as mercy, compassion, and hospitality—shared between different religious traditions" (Interfaith Youth Core, Undated, http://www.ifyc.org/communicating-movement). (The organization also posits that "religious pluralism" and "interfaith cooperation" are interchangeable terms.) By stressing mutually held values like hospitality, religious pluralism can fail to engage those values that are not mutually held, those instances marked by incommensurable difference rather than cohesion. For pluralism to live up to its ideals, it must acknowledge and deal with the difficulty of incommensurable difference rather than simply stress commonalities.

Having delineated both four crucial conditions of religious pluralism (energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog) and four important pitfalls (claims of universality, inattention to power, silencing dissent, and collapsing difference), this paper will now address how we can construct a stronger notion of archival pluralism in light of these conditions and critiques of religious pluralism.

Constructing archival pluralism

Moving ahead to the work of building archival pluralism, what lessons can we learn from religious studies? This paper proposes the adaptation of Eck's four tenets of religious pluralism into the archival world. First, archival pluralism must be marked

by energetic engagement with diversity and not just the mere observation of the existence of diverse memory practices. Next, archival pluralism hinges on active learning about memory practices different from those in which we were raised, educated, and trained as archivists, requiring that we put ourselves and our students outside of our cultural comfort zones. Third, pluralism must strengthen our commitment to the archival enterprise, rather than paralyze us into inaction. And finally, archival pluralism must thrive on dialog, reflection, and criticism. But while each of these tenets of religious pluralism can be adapted into the archival realm, we must engage seriously with religious pluralism's critics and be careful not to reproduce its mistakes. More specifically, our evolving notion of archival pluralism must avoid claims of universality, inattention to power structures, the silencing of dissent, and the collapsing of difference. Each of these principles and pitfalls will now be explored in some detail.

First, archival pluralism is not simply a description of the existence of archival difference, but a committed interaction with that difference. Noticing that different people bring different notions of records, evidence, and memory to the archival endeavor is a good start, but it is not the end goal. Archival pluralism must go further than the encouragement and acknowledgement of difference; diversity is a prerequisite for pluralism, but pluralism goes further by actively engaging with the difference that diversity implies. Here, Verne Harris's notion of hospitality is crucial (2007). We must, as Harris expresses, welcome "the other" into the archives, "to reach for what is not known (for what is, possibly, unknowable), and to reach out to those excluded or marginalized" (p. 5). For archivists operating in a dominant Western paradigm, this may mean embracing orality over the written, fluidity over fixity, uncertainty over authority, ongoing relationships of stewardship over custody. For archivists whose ontologies and epistemologies are built on storytelling, performance, or other types of embodied knowledge, it may mean, in the words of South African archivist Sello Hatang, "the time has come … for us to empower our own ways of knowing in order to engage the dominant ideas from the West" (2007, p. 231). In our encounters with difference, nothing is sacred; our dearly held notions of memory, records, archives, representation, value, evidence, and knowledge are all open to discussion. In short, archival pluralism welcomes difference and, in so doing, may challenge the archival concepts and procedures we take for granted. We must be open to this challenge.

Second, pluralism requires serious intellectual effort. We must strive to understand each other across differences in epistemologies and ontologies that stem from our particular locations in bodies, cultures, races, religions, genders, classes, and sexualities. This takes hard work. Our education is never finished. We must continually learn new languages, read outside of our areas of expertise, and challenge ourselves to confront ideas that push our boundaries and reach beyond our comfort zones. The impact of diving into difference through education is immeasurable. I will share a small example from my experiences as a Hindi language learner. As any first semester Hindi student learns, there is no way in casual conversation to demarcate ownership of a material object in Hindi; one can only have ownership over relationships, not things. My sister is mine, for example, but the computer I am using to write this article is merely "near" me. This is not just

a fun thought experiment, nor is it the fringe worldview of an insignificant percentage of the world's population; this is the linguistic reality for speakers of the fourth most common language in the world. Think of the implications of this grammatical construction on our archival concepts of ownership, custody, creatorship, and provenance. What does it mean for archivists when it is linguistically impossible for an individual or an institution to own records? What does it mean for international archival partnerships when records can at most be "near" a repository? The archival impact of this linguistic difference is staggering, but I would be entirely ignorant of this profound construction had I not tried to learn Hindi. And yet my own past experience of difference, disruption, and dislocation as someone attempting to live and speak in another culture is not enough to meet the challenges of archival pluralism. I must continue the significant work of filling in the gaps in my own education, learning, for example, about indigenous philosophies and transgender politics and postcolonial theory. Increased understanding is the basis on which pluralism rests. Education about those different from us is a process we must be enduringly committed to throughout our careers and not an end goal that is achieved with graduation.

Third, pluralism must strengthen our responsibility to the archival enterprise rather than paralyze us into inaction. We must not abandon memory work entirely in the face of epistemic and ontologic chaos. For example, archivists trained in mainstream Western notions of the record will likely have very different ideas about the importance of fixity in records than archivists grounded in indigenous oral traditions. We must not allow this incommensurable difference in a fundamental definition to prevent us from moving forward with archival work. Indeed, some of the most innovative projects in the field have been hatched in this uncomfortable space of encounter. For example, McKemmish et al. (2011) have shown through their project *Trust and Technology: Building Archival Systems for Indigenous Archival Memory* that multiple ways of knowing can not only coexist but be more fully realized through collaborative archival practice. Their work promotes what they term "reconciling research" and posits "a continuum of orality and written text, with both oral tradition and written records being accessed and understood in the context of their own knowledge systems and related transmission processes" (McKemmish et al. 2011, pp. 220, 212). In the face of a plurality of approaches to some of our most basic concepts and practices, pluralism must renew rather than dampen our commitment to stewarding records across time and space.

And finally, archival pluralism must cultivate a culture of critical self-reflection, debate, and dialog in order to foster constant improvement. We must be unafraid to make mistakes as we venture out into the uncharted territory of archival pluralism. Difference is messy; working with and through difference is even messier. We must muddle through the clumsiness of our initial attempts to build archival pluralism together in spite of the inevitable blunders. Reflection on and refinement of our ideas and actions over time must be integral. As McKemmish et al. note (2011), self-reflection is time-consuming and difficult, but is necessary for sustainable, mutually beneficial, and enduring partnerships. In this spirit of dialog, the four principles of archival pluralism just proposed are meant to be initial steps open to

criticism, debate, and refinement. It is up to the field to build on these proposed principles.

Now that this article has suggested four principles of archival pluralism informed by the construction of American religious pluralism, it will turn to four important critiques of religious pluralism that archivists should be mindful of as we build our concept of archival pluralism.

First, archival pluralism must proceed cautiously regarding claims of universality. Our notions of archival pluralism are developed and situated within particular contexts. We bring our philosophical lineages and standpoints with us to the endeavor of archival pluralism. We must acknowledge these particularities. What counts as archival pluralism in an American library school classroom, for example, may be entirely different than what counts as archival pluralism in a library school classroom in the Philippines (Punzalan 2005). Both of these may look entirely different than archival pluralism in a nongovernmental human rights organization in Cambodia (Caswell 2010). Those of us who are influenced by William James's multiverse concept, for example, will have a different take on archival pluralism than those who are primarily influenced by the Jain doctrine of *anekantavada* (nonexclusivity) (Gopalan 1973; Mookerjee 1978), or by the Buddhist conception of impermanence (Strong 1995), or by the Ghanian concept of *sankofa* (Bastian 2003), or by the indigenous North American concept of interrelatedness (Rice 2005; Cordova 2007). We must be careful to locate the genealogy of our own archival pluralism rather than pass off our particular pluralist worldview as universal. We must strive to create, in the words of postcolonial theorist Paul Gilroy, "a worldly vision that is not simply one more imperialistic particularism dressed up in seductive universal garb" (2005, p. 4). We must move toward a plurality of archival pluralisms.

Second, we must learn from religious pluralism's mistakes by paying careful attention to inequalities of power. While we may recognize the validity of ontologies and epistemologies different from our own, we must also acknowledge how histories (and current realities) of colonialism, militarism, racism, and capitalism have dictated who is brought to the table for this discussion, when and on what terms. Disempowered groups bring significant legacies of distrust to the conversation; power is always central. As Leavelle (2010) noted in the religious arena, sharing worldviews has often left indigenous people vulnerable, open to degradation, appropriation, and cultural obliteration. We must honor these difficult histories and know that it will take significant time commitments to build trust across the gulfs of these legacies of inequality, imperialism, and genocide. The social justice approach to archives can help inform this conversation and ensure that issues of silence and marginalization remain at the forefront (Caswell et al 2012). At the same time, we must respect active silence as a form of resistance to participation in the face of the historical legacies of inequality (Carter 2006).

Third, we must construct archival pluralism in a way that welcomes dissent, embraces disagreement, and thrives on discord. We will not all want to participate in cross-cultural dialog. We will not all agree on fundamental archival principles. We will not all even agree that archival pluralism is desirable or worthwhile. We must welcome this real chaos over a false cohesion.

Our conceptualizations must be big and fluid enough to allow for conflict and even for nonparticipation. We must question the metanarrative of archival pluralism, even as we conduct the messy business of constructing it, being acutely aware, as Harris is (in the context of post-apartheid memory) that "too many sub-narratives have been squeezed out, too many counter narratives have been ignored" (2012, p. 3). Archival pluralism, like archives themselves, must be big enough for metanarratives, sub-narratives, counter narratives and even the silence of nonnarratives at all (Carter 2006).

And finally, while we share a commitment to the archival enterprise, real and sometimes incommensurable differences divide us. We must not collapse these differences or dilute them by overemphasizing our commonalities. Furthermore, there is always significant difference between members located within the same community. We must be cautious about simplistically treating individuals as representative of larger groups without accepting complex relationships within and toward those groups. We must strive to be on the just side of the fine and constantly moving line between respecting difference and essentializing the other. This balancing act requires ongoing critical self-reflection, an emphasis on process over product, and keen attention to context and change.

Conclusion

This article has explored the conceptualization of pluralism in both the religious and archival arenas and posited some principles and areas of caution for the future of archival pluralism. More specifically, it has proposed the adaptation of four of religious pluralism's main principles—energetic engagement, understanding, strengthened commitment, and dialog—to the archival realm. At the same time, it has cautioned archivists to learn from the mistakes of religious pluralism by avoiding the pitfalls of claims of universality, inattention to power, silencing dissent, and collapsing of difference. By turning an archival lens on the progression of a similar concept in a parallel field, this article has aimed to build our budding conception of archival pluralism and open up this conceptualization for further development, debate, and disagreement.

Archival pluralism is a grand challenge in the field, and there is much future work to be done in its development. The concept calls for a multi-faceted research agenda that will take the work of many people over many years to complete. Three major subareas of this research emerge: conceptual development, archival education, and archival practice.

First, in the work of theory building, we must explore nondominant philosophical conceptualizations of pluralism and theorize how those conceptualizations may apply in the archival realm. Indigenous North American philosophies of interrelatedness (Cordova 2007), the Jain doctrine of *anekantavada* or nonexclusivity (Gopalan 1973; Mookerjee 1978), and the Buddhist concept of dependent origination (Strong 1995) provide just a few areas ripe for exploration. This intense conceptual work deepens our understanding of different ontologies and epistemologies, as outlined in the first proposed principle of archival pluralism, and helps

shape the future of archival pluralism in a way that is not simply dictated by dominant ways of knowing and being in the world. The participation of archival scholars from across the globe is crucial in this endeavor. No single one of us can be an expert on everything, but we can teach each other small slices from our own areas of expertise. Furthermore, the principles and perils of pluralism outlined in this article are just one scholar's take based on her own academic, personal, and experiential background and must be discussed, debated, and refined. This article is but one tiny "sliver of a sliver of a sliver" of archival pluralism, to use Verne Harris's apt phrase (2002, p. 65). A truly pluralist conceptualization of archives can only be achieved through a multiplicity of voices.

A second area for future work is the implementation of pluralism in archival education. How should we change our curricula to reflect archival pluralism? How can we better prepare our students for thinking and working in increasingly diverse societies? What concrete classroom exercises can we engage our students in that convey the deeply abstract theoretical concepts central to archival pluralism? Although the answers to these questions may be as plural as the number of archival educators, we must share best practices with each other as well as admit to and learn from each other's mistakes.

And finally, much work needs to be done in putting archival pluralism into practice. What impact does archival pluralism have on individual appraisal decisions and larger documentation strategies? How can we create descriptive systems that reflect divergent epistemologies and ontologies? How does culture influence notions of permanence and what does this mean for our preservation projects? How can archivists employ pluralism to build ongoing relationships of trust with donors, source communities, and users? How are differing notions of credible evidence, accountability, and justice made manifest through archival practice in different settings? These important questions will take years of collective hard work on the part of scholars, practitioners, and community members to answer.

In light of the seemingly insurmountable challenges addressed in this article, we might ask: what is the alternative? We could construct our archival conceptualizations as exclusivist, denying the validity of those whose memory keeping practices differ from our own. We could also construct them as inclusivist, positing that those whose memory keeping practices differ from our own are partially valid, yet woefully incomplete. Neither of these options is compelling. If we are to ignore archival pluralism and continue working in "an archival universe dominated by one cultural paradigm" (as PACG succinctly put it), we are to lose the insights of the majority of humanity and reproduce a lopsided version of knowledge that continues to privilege the powerful (2011, p. 73). This is not an ethically acceptable nor even practical alternative if the archival enterprise is going to remain meaningful in the future. Archival pluralism is difficult, demanding, and messy, but the challenge is too important to ignore.

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