Archive as Prefigurative Space

Our Lives and Black Feminism in Canada

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ABSTRACT This article introduces readers to the publication archive of *Our Lives: Canada's First Black Women's Newspaper*, founded by the Black Women's Collective in 1986 and housed within the digital collection of the Rise Up! Feminist Archive. By situating the publication *Our Lives* as a potential site for recuperating histories of Black feminist resistance, this article demonstrates the role that community or activist archives play in the preservation of collective history: combating institutional modes of erasure and challenging dominant historical narratives. It argues that there is a need for further examination of the pedagogical and ideological elements of activist archives and their contribution to social movements and archival practice. Rather than considering activist archives as relatives of traditional archival institutions, it suggests that these projects need to be examined as sites of active learning in the tradition of community-embedded experiments. Building on recent scholarship, it investigates the discursive continuity between archives and historical narratives, and it reconceptualizes the term archives to include alternative sites and materials for the reconstructing the stories of historically marginalized groups. Finally, the article argues that archival projects need to adapt to new forms of archival representation and contexts, allowing for shifts in traditional methods and definitions.

RÉSUMÉ Cet article amène les lecteurs à la rencontre des archives liées à la publication Our Lives: Canada's First Black Women's Newspaper, fondé par le Black Women's Collective en 1986 et qui est hébergé dans la collection numérique de Rise Up! Feminist Archive. En positionnant la publication *Our Lives* comme lieu potentiel de réappropriation des histoires de la résistance féministe noire, cet article démontre le rôle que les archives communautaires ou militantes jouent dans la préservation de l'histoire collective: elles luttent contre les modalités institutionnelles d'effacement et défient les discours historiques dominants. Il soutient qu'un examen plus poussé des éléments pédagogiques et idéologiques des archives militantes et leur contribution aux mouvements sociaux et aux pratiques en archivistique est nécessaire. Plutôt que de considérer les archives militantes comme apparentées aux institutions d'archives traditionnelles, il suggère que ces projets doivent être étudiés comme des lieux d'apprentissage actif dans la lignée des expériences ancrées dans la communauté. S'appuyant sur les études récentes, il scrute les continuités narratives entre les archives et les discours historiques et reconceptualise le terme « archives » afin d'y intégrer des lieux et des matériaux alternatifs pour rebâtir les histoires de groupes historiquement marginalisé. Enfin, l'article soutient que les projets archivistiques doivent s'adapter à de nouvelles formes de représentations et de contextes archivistiques, permettant ainsi de modifier les méthodes et les définitions traditionnelles.

We do not have guns. We do not have well paid bureaucrats . . . We do not have police or government power. What we have are a few placards, the occasional use of a photocopier and a whole lot of people who believe that if we speak out, if we call for justice, if we struggle for an end to racism and police violence it will alleviate the oppressive conditions under which Black people, women, working people, gay and lesbians, live in this society.[1]

In September 2017, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent issued a report raising deep concerns about Canada's history of anti-Black racism – from 16th-century slavery to contemporary institutional practices.[2] Among several recommendations, the report advised the Canadian government to "take concrete steps to preserve the history of enslavement and the political, social and economic contributions of African Canadians" and to "ensure that . . . educational materials accurately reflect historical facts."[3] Efforts to address the generalized erasure of Black history in Canada have been taken up by scholars whose research situates African Canadian stories – as well as the histories of slavery, colonialism, and segregation – within the Canadian landscape.[4] Inspired by this work, this article introduces readers to the publication archive of *Our Lives: Canada's First Black Women's Newspaper*, founded by the Black Women's Collective (BWC) in 1986 and housed within the online collection of the Rise Up! Feminist Archive (Rise Up!). Specifically, it positions social movement ephemera as valuable cultural and historical tools for situating anti-Black racism and its resistance within Canada's history. It argues that conceptualizing activist archives as related to anti-authoritarian, community-embedded projects facilitates a richer understanding of the long-term transformative goals of these projects. As the above quote illustrates, the BWC challenged systemic racism and epistemic violence despite its limited resources; here I examine how

1 Rise Up! Feminist Archive, Black Women's Collective, "Statement of the Women's Coalition against Racism and Police Violence," 16 December 1989.

2 United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on Its Mission to Canada,* A/HRC/36/60/Add. 1, 16 August 2017.

3 Ibid.

4 See Afua P. Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2006); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016); and Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 1997).

these struggles and ideologies are transmitted to new archival contexts.

Our Lives was published between 1986 and 1989 by the Toronto-based Black Women's Collective, a tightly organized group that initiated local and national feminist and anti-racist activism and called for broader representation within contemporaneous progressive organizations. Intervening in white Canadian feminist discourse of the time, BWC's main organizing collective included prominent African Canadian scholars, activists, and artists such as Carol Allain, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, and Faith Nolan. *Our Lives'* editorial focus was the lived experiences of Black women in Canada in the late 1980s, and the publication was the main vehicle for disseminating the ideas of the BWC and allied community organizations. Employing intersectional analysis, the newspaper documented struggles with education, labour, health care, poverty, and racism, and celebrated the past and present achievements of Black women and long-standing Black communities.

The Rise Up! Feminist Archive includes seven issues of *Our Lives* within its collection of feminist periodicals, accessible through its "Publications" page. Though volumes of *Our Lives* can be found in the collections of Library and Archives Canada, the University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections, and the Wisconsin Historical Society, Rise Up! holds the most complete set and is the only collection that includes free, online, and accessible digitized copies. All 64 newspaper, newsletter, and magazine titles housed within the Rise Up! collection can be downloaded as high-resolution PDF files. While this breaks down most technological, geographical, and physical barriers to access and encourages more widespread use, it comes at the expense of archival description; the only metadata listed for each publication is the title, publisher, date, region, and city/town. As with many archives that rely on volunteer labour, grant funding, and donations, Rise Up! has prioritized access over the time-consuming and resource-intensive task of adding rich archival description to each record. This means the onus is on users to fill in provenancial information for each periodical. Nevertheless, Rise Up!'s collection of periodicals is unrivalled not only in terms of the diversity and scope of its selection but also in terms of its accessibility.

Despite offering critical insight into the histories and development of feminist organizing and print culture in Canada, the archive of feminist periodicals has been largely unexplored. As Tessa Jordan argues, "ranging from local women's centres' mimeographed newsletters to nationally distributed feminist magazines

with high production values, these periodicals were organizing tools, centres for debate, and publishing opportunities for Canadian women writers."[5] As one of only a few periodicals produced by women of colour during this period, *Our Lives* is not only culturally significant but also an important historiographical tool, offering insight into a branch of Canadian feminism that has been understudied. What follows is an examination of the cultural context and ideological location of *Our Lives* within the terrain of feminist discourse and print culture.

Our Lives was produced during a crucial moment in racial formation and anti-racist resistance within Canada. One of the main forces that shaped the historically specific pattern of racialization in Canada during this time was the "liberalization" of immigration policy, specifically the introduction of the points system in 1967. Prior to this, Canada, like most western European societies, had an explicitly racist and sexist immigration policy.[6] Particularly, the West Indian Domestic Scheme of 1955 allowed Canadians to sponsor single, childless women from Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados to labour in Canada as domestic workers. These domestic permits were the only legal pathway to immigration for racialized women fleeing poverty, and because these workers' immigration status was tied directly to their employers, workplace abuse and exploitation was common.[7] With the introduction of the points system, potential immigrants were given a score based on a set of universal criteria related to their education, linguistic aptitude, and skills relevant to the economy. A new *Immigration Act* of 1976 encouraged immigrants of colour to come to Canada as the "traditional" source countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, and European countries) were drying up – dramatically changing the demographic composition of Canada. Alongside these changes to immigrant selection, multiculturalism was adopted as an official policy in 1971 by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* declared that Canada could not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, and other factors, and encouraged racial and ethnic minorities to maintain their cultural identities upon arriving in Canada.[8] Yet

5 Tessa Jordan, "Branching Out: Second-Wave Feminist Periodicals and the Archive of Canadian Women's Writing," *English Studies in Canada* 36, no. 2–3 (2010): 63–90.

6 Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson, *Scratching the Surface: Canadian, Anti-racist, Feminist Thought* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1999), 191.

7 Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017), 65.

8 Ibid., 55.

while the philosophy of multiculturalism guaranteed formal equalities before the law, this did not translate to material realities. Critics allege that multiculturalism depoliticized social inequality, fostered social division, created ethnic ghettoes, commodified ethnic culture, and reinforced cultural stereotypes.[9] Further, scholars have argued compellingly that encouraging the preservation of a distinct cultural heritage took the place of more meaningful policies to materially combat racism and discrimination, allowing for the ongoing economic subjugation of non-white migrant groups.[10] A startling example of this was the re-emergence during the 1970s and 1980s of white nationalist groups – including the Heritage Front, the Western Guard and the Ku Klux Klan – who aimed to put an end to non-white immigration.

Our Lives documented such realities, advocating for Black migrants in the face of economic precarity and vulnerability to exploitation. Organizations like the BWC challenged the racism of discriminatory immigration policies and of policing practices, mobilizing those sectors in which women of colour were concentrated, challenging racism within the women's movement, and creating a shelter movement to provide women of colour with a space safe from both male violence and racism.[11] Labour issues were often the focus of editorials in *Our Lives*; specifically, the collective outlined the discrimination faced by continental Africans and Caribbean and Canadian-born Black populations and linked forms of economic violence to global free trade agreements and neo-colonialism. The November/December 1986 issue of *Our Lives* includes an editorial written by the collective titled "Amnesty for Black Women Workers." Here, the hardships and abuse faced by undocumented Black women workers are outlined, and plans to form support networks and build movements around citizenship rights are strategized. Interviews with two undocumented single mothers inform readers of the daunting experience of applying for immigration status while performing menial labour and supporting a household. Of particular importance is the voice this article gives to marginalized women – subjects who would otherwise disappear from the historical record. By documenting the organizing efforts of such groups, *Our Lives* acts as an integral source for Canadian labour history

9 Joseph Mensah, *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions*, 2nd ed. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 209.

10 Ibid., 56.

11 Dua and Robertson, *Scratching the Surface*, 19.

and women's organizing, official histories of which are largely dominated by the voices of white activists and scholars.

In their academic careers, several members of BWC – including Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, and Angela Robertson – have published important volumes on Black history in Canada. Accordingly, beyond addressing ongoing struggles, *Our Lives* made important interventions in Canadian historiography, publishing articles that documented the largely unwritten and unacknowledged histories of Black women in Canada. For instance, the March/April 1987 issue, titled "*Our Lives* and The Black Women's Collective Salutes Women in Our History," features a timeline of Black women's history within Canada, tracing the genealogy of anti-racist resistance and community-building initiatives. The timeline begins with the story of an enslaved woman in Montreal named Marie-Joseph Angélique, who in 1733, fled from her owner and left 50 burned buildings in her wake, only to be recaptured and burned at the stake. These histories of resistance are integral to challenging the social amnesia behind Canada's veneer of multiculturalism and tolerance. Typical of the content in *Our Lives*, this article firmly situates state-sanctioned violence and the concerted neglect of Black people within Canada's history. Moreover, these articles provide an overview of the social context of Black presence in Canada – linked to histories of the trans-atlantic slave trade and colonialism – demonstrating to readers the rationale and cultural mechanisms of endemic anti-Black racism. The BWC used *Our Lives* as a platform to counter the common misconception that Black people either had not existed in the development of Canada or had only arrived in Canada through more recent immigrations from the Caribbean and Africa.

A typical issue of *Our Lives* featured profiles of local activists and community organizations; longer, issue-specific editorials with infographics; event listings; features on art, music, and poetry; and book and music reviews; photographs and sketches were interlaced throughout its layout. By offering content that spoke directly to the collective experiences of racialized women in Canada, *Our Lives* challenged the notion that women's issues were predicated on the experience of white women alone. Specifically, it problematized the reproduction of whiteness in Canadian academic feminist discourse by moving beyond the dichotomy of Euro-American and Third-World feminisms – positioning struggles against racism at the forefront of feminist discourse.[12] Founded after

12 Linda E. Carty, *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press,

the social insurgency of the underground press movement of the 1960s, *Our Lives* was part of a re-emergence of feminist publishing in the 1980s, which occupied a central space in second-wave feminist organizing. Publications like *Our Lives* were important tactical tools for feminist organizations, enabling the spread of feminist discourse and artwork as well as information about actions, organizations, and issues. Control over content allowed these organizations a level of autonomy not available through typical media and scholarly channels. These publications were crucial in challenging the epistemic violence experienced by the Black feminist intellectual tradition, legitimizing subjugated forms of knowledge and cultural production and countering hegemonic narratives.

The digitization of *Our Lives* by Rise Up! provides documentation of Black feminist movement knowledge and offers a corrective to the absences and misrepresentations of Black history. Within Canada, the historical suppression of Black women's ideas has had a profound effect not only on the material conditions of racialized peoples but also on feminist scholarship and Canadian historiography. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that "historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power."[13] The historical narratives that contribute to Canada's social amnesia are therefore fuelled by the current balance of archival power. For instance, in the Fall 2017 issue of *Canadian Art*, a group of Black women scholars, artists, and curators described a recurring challenge of doing archival research on Black life in Canada. Curator Julie Crooks, poet and scholar Afua Cooper, and artists Deanna Bowen and Seika Boye shared similar experiences "of being turned away by librarians, archivists and other gatekeepers of historical artifacts, who patiently explained that the materials they sought did not exist."[14] Eventually, "after some persistence," these women discovered that this was not true, that traces of Black Canadian history "were hidden in plain sight in dusty boxes in public records offices and library storerooms."[15] So while historiographical and administrative practices have denied women agency in preservation and

1993), 37.

13 Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Hazel V. Carby, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 55.

14 Yaniya Lee, "The Women Running the Show," *Canadian Art*, Fall 2017, accessed 3 January 2019, https://canadianart.ca/features/women-running-show/

15 Ibid.

editorial processes, they have also invisibilized the voices of racialized women. This invisibilization has been problematized by anti-racist feminist activists and scholars for decades. Patricia Hill Collins writes that maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure.[16] For Collins, the task of reclaiming this subjugated knowledge "involves examining the everyday ideas of Black women not previously considered intellectuals."[17] With its focus on the lives of working-class, racialized women, *Our Lives* offers a critical inroad for both recuperating the intellectual tradition of Black women within Canada and facilitating the exchange of intergenerational knowledge.

Typical of grassroots publications of the time, *Our Lives* was characterized by a non-hierarchical, collectivist structure that emphasized political engagement over profit generation and was marked by a heightened self-consciousness of its position vis-a-vis the corporate mainstream. Anthropologist David Graeber defines collectives as organizations that recognize the oppressive nature of hierarchical structures and thereby help to build alternative venues for engaging in particular pedagogical practices that represent those alternatives – horizontal and mutual spaces.[18] Mirroring this organizational structure, the Rise Up! Feminist Archive is a collective of local feminist scholars and activists who were active in feminist organizing during the period of the 1970s to 1990s. The Toronto-based digital collection is composed of cultural products from Canada's feminist movements and includes publications, films, sheet music for and recordings of protest songs, photographs, textual documents, posters, and buttons. Founded in 2014, the Archive is mandated "to help preserve the diversity, vibrancy and radical legacy of this era and to make it accessible online to new generations of activists, students, and researchers."[19] The initial intention of the organizing collective was to digitize only three Toronto-based feminist publications from members' personal collections: *Cayenne*, *Rebel Girls' Rag*, and the *International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) Newsletter*. The project eventually expanded after collective members revisited their personal archives and

16 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5.

17 Ibid., 15.

18 David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

19 Rise Up! Feminist Archive Collective, 2016, "Home," accessed 6 October 2018, http://riseupfeministarchive.ca/.

realized the educational and affective potential of social movement artifacts – objects that had initially been conceived as temporary in nature but had been preserved by participants.

Growing interest in the history of Canadian women, inaugurated by the disciplinary formation of academic feminism in the 1970s, has led to greater attention to women's private records, as demonstrated in the surge of published guides to women's papers in archival institutions, which swelled most noticeably from 1974 to 1981.[20] Kate Eichhorn argues that this "archival turn" was premised on the understanding of women as potential subjects rather than as central agents in the archive: the emphasis appeared to be on archiving women's records, rather than on women archiving.[21] In this formulation, the burden of redressing the marginalizing capacity of the archive rests solely with the archival professional, not with those represented in the archive. Primarily, as Livia Iacovino argues, "archival systems have been based on the conventional understanding of the relationship between record subjects as third parties and record creators as the principal parties to the record transaction, thus limiting the rights of those captured in and by the record."[22] Though the outgrowth of poststructuralist archival theory, which also developed during the 1970s, has interrogated and discovered new meaning in the power possessed by archives and archivists, further democratization of the archival processes is necessary.[23] What is needed is a re-examination of the role of activism in the creation and maintenance of community or grassroots archives and a consideration of methods of incorporating communities into the heart of archival professional work.[24] In order to enact more inclusive policies, we need to widen the scope of these discussions beyond traditional archives and look to both community-based archival projects and liberatory forms of social organization.

20 Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 10.

21 Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014), 12.

22 Livia Iacovina, "Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities: A Participant Relationship Model of Rights and Responsibilities," *Archival Science* 10, no. 4 (2010): 353–72.

23 Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 63–86.

24 Diana K. Wakimoto, Christina Bruce, and Helen Partridge, "Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California," *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 293–316.

Alycia Sellie, Jessie Goldstein, Molly Fair, and Jennifer Hoyer define activist archives as "community-based archival projects on the left that are conducted by and for activists themselves . . . located in the historical and cultural space where community archives and archiving activism overlap."[25] While archiving activism is understood as the broad phenomenon of collecting, organizing, and preserving material culture originating from social movements, community archives are much more complex to define.[26] Definitions of community archives are by no means clear or fixed; nonetheless, acceptance of the term *community archives* has grown in recent years as an effective means of categorizing these often very disparate and variously named projects and initiatives.[27] Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd offer a working definition of community archives as "the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential."[28] In this way, community archives challenge the mainstream sector by documenting those hidden or marginal to the formal archive.[29]Activist archives then share many of the same characteristics of community archives in that they provide local, autonomous spaces for alternative historical narratives and cultural identities to be created and preserved.[30] However for Sellie et al., an activist archive demands *both* community involvement *and* a collection of activist materials. This is similar to the practices of queer and postcolonial feminist theorists, who not only redefine archives and archival material but situate themselves as archivists, thus demonstrating how archiving can be re-deployed to combat the oppressive conditions created by traditional knowledge production methods, including the institutional archives.[31] Likewise, activist archives further deconstruct the traditional power dynamics of the

25 Alycia Sellie, Jessie Goldstein, Molly Fair, and Jennifer Hoyer, "Interference Archive: A Free Space for Social Movement Culture," *Archival Science* 15, no. 4 (2015): 454.

26 Ibid., 456.

27 Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (2009): 73.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Sellie et al., "Interference Archive," 454.

31 Danielle Cooper, "Imagining Something Else Entirely: Metaphorical Archives in Feminist Theory," *Women's Studies* 45, no. 5 (2016): 454.

archive by creating holistic relationships with users and establishing marginalized people as historical actors.

While ethnographic work has been conducted on community and grassroots archives, further examination of the pedagogical and ideological elements of activist archives and their contribution to social movements and archival practice is necessary.[32] As Shaunna Moore and Susan Pell argue, the functions of archives in social justice organizing and social movements are broader than their evidentiary capacities; they bridge constructions of the past and imaginations of the future.[33] This idea is echoed in the conception of "archival imaginaries" by Michelle Caswell, Alda A. Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor; they note that community archives create liberatory archival imaginaries that re-envision future trajectories of the past for social justice aims, changing our idea of what archives and archival work make possible.[34] This focus on the future is critical to understanding activist archives. In his study of movement organizing, activist and historian Chris Dixon states that the key to understanding origins and trajectories of activist tactics is historicizing them, effectively creating a genealogy of the ways of acting and thinking that can inform contemporary movements.[35] A more nuanced conceptualization of activist archives will become more relevant as activists involved in historicizing movements strive to enact the policies of their communities. This is especially true as anti-authoritarian movements engage in prefigurativism – the embodiment of forms of social relations, decision-making, and culture that reflect the future society being sought by the group. The pedagogical perspectives and practices of activist archives have been understood to be oriented toward the public through open-access policies and public outreach. However, these techniques overlook the way activist archives are theoretically informed by prefigurative politics and by learning as a dialogical process.

Activist archives therefore need to be examined as sites of active learning in the tradition of anti-authoritarian organizing and community-embedded

32 Ibid.

33 Shaunna Moore and Susan Pell, "Autonomous Archives," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 4–5 (2010): 255.

34 Michelle Caswell, Alda A. Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor, "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise': Community Archives and the Importance of Representation," *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2017): 5–26.

35 Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Movements* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014).

projects such as *free skools*. Like community and activist archives, these projects position themselves in opposition to traditional hierarchical institutions, in favour of principles of horizontality, autonomy, self-reliance, equality, and collective organizing.[36] In particular, free skools – which have their roots in the anarchist *Escuela Moderna* of Spain, established in the early 20th century – abandon or reject the normative educational system and organize new spaces for the exchange of ideas and skills. Typically held in autonomous social centres, church basements, or other public spaces, free skools lack entrance requirements and are ardently student-centred, questioning the dichotomy between student and teacher.[37] The ideological tenets of free skools dovetail with those of activist archives, specifically in their focus on community engagement, removing barriers to access, and challenging the relationship between records subjects and records creators. More broadly, Dixon describes the four core principles of anti-authoritarian organizing:

> 1. Struggling against all forms of domination. . . .
> 2. Developing new social relations and forms of social organization in the process of struggle. . . .
> 4. Linking strategies for improvements in the lives of ordinary people. . . .
> 5. Organizing that is grassroots and bottom-up.[38]

Looking to the principles of community-based archival projects, as outlined in ethnographic studies of their operations, we can see a pattern of overlap with Dixon's principles of anti-authoritarian organizing. At their core, community archives also interrogate existing assumptions of mainstream Western archival practice; develop new sites and practices for collecting and preserving records and materials; build more equitable or democratic futures by recuperating marginalized histories; and prioritize grassroots organization and foster relationships with community members. Mapping the ideological location of projects like *Our Lives* and Rise Up! provides crucial insight into the history of feminist activism because these projects do not conform to typical categories

36 Robert H. Haworth, *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 182.

37 Ibid.

38 Dixon, *Another Politics*, 7.

used to frame discussions of feminist periodicals and archives. Both projects occupy positions of marginality relative to mainstream discourse, whether feminist or archival; *Our Lives* is informed by the intellectual tradition of Black women within Canada, and Rise Up! exists beyond institutional and professional definitions and collects materials representing a range of marginalized political groups. Perhaps more relevant to this discussion, both projects are informed by movement-based feminism and grounded in the struggles of ordinary people collectively resisting oppression and dispossession while building liberatory spaces of resistance.

By archiving the cultural products of social movements, activist archives like Rise Up! create genealogies that have the potential to inform the tactical evolution of contemporary movements and foster solidarity across geographies and temporalities. Though often informal collections, confined by budgetary and labour shortages, activist archives have the capacity to transmit experience-based knowledge to archivists, scholars, and activists. In the case of Rise Up! and *Our Lives*, control of the digital archive is held by proponents of the same feminist organizations or their allies, which allows for discursive continuity between the ideological aims of those organizations and subsequent archival practices. As Moore and Pell argue, "although the archive will never speak for itself, the interpretative effects may be more nuanced and reflective of their original contexts if the archive's many subjects and originators provide the first reading."[39] Because community-based archives are inherently tied to the grassroots and community-building processes that create them, it is crucial to understand the ideological and historical contours that inform their operation and structure.[40]

Central to the politics of anti-authoritarian organizations is the prioritization of access and shared ownership as a means of fostering more egalitarian and democratic social relations. This is also true of community archives, where the aims are to provide space for communities to represent and redefine their own lived history and to support a continual process of archival engagement. Across several archival contexts, online interfaces are increasingly becoming the common mode of user engagement. This is an especially attractive option for community and activist archives, where autonomy is often favoured over

39 Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives," 264.

40 Rebecka Sheffield, "Community Archives," in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, 2nd ed., ed. Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017), 351–476.

sustainability. Accessing public funding may come at the cost of independence, creating a tension between the funder's demands and the community's vision for the archive.[41] In light of this, the implementation of digital archives provides a cost-effective platform for marginalized histories to be circulated far beyond their physical locations. Correspondingly, Rise Up! runs on Omeka, a content management system whose mission is to provide a free, standards-based, online publishing platform for non-professionals.[42] Omeka primarily functions to publish "archives, collections, exhibits, and teaching materials" and caters to "scholars, librarians, archivists, museum professionals, and cultural enthusiasts."[43] Users can display items, collections, and exhibits either locally or on an Omeka server and have access to documentation, technical support, and a user community. Its relative accessibility and user-friendly interface make the system an attractive platform for the digital collections of both larger institutions and grassroots initiatives.

However, Deborah Maron and Melanie Feinberg argue that there is a "rhetorical mismatch"[44] between Omeka's claim to being standards-based and the platform's actual implementation of Dublin Core usage guidelines. Specifically, though the Omeka developers claim that the adoption of Dublin Core is integral to their mission, the platform's lack of support for this metadata standard is at odds with not only the company's mission but also the Dublin Core community. Overall, the authors argue that the platform does not facilitate or encourage proper implementation of Dublin Core and that this undermines some of the core principles of the standard, namely interoperability and aggregation. Employing four case studies that represent a diverse sample of Omeka-powered projects, Maron and Feinberg conclude that Omeka provides "scant, confusing, contradictory documentation for Dublin Core."[45] As Julie Weagley, Ellen Gelches, and Jung-Ran Park claim, inadequate quality control on the part of metadata creators can undermine future interoperability and aggregation and hinder resource discovery.[46]

41 Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?," 80.

42 Deborah Maron and Melanie Feinberg, "What Does it Mean to Adopt a Metadata Standard? A Case Study of Omeka and the Dublin Core," *Journal of Documentation* 74, no. 4 (2018): 674–91.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 689.

45 Ibid., 687.

46 Julie Weagley, Ellen Gelches, and Jung-Ran Park, "Interoperability and Metadata Quality in Digital Video Reposi-

This is of particular concern to activist archives where operational challenges have in some cases led to support and collaboration with larger institutions, necessitating migration of metadata across platforms. Issues with proper metadata implementation have the potential then to further marginalize or undermine the potential of archival materials like *Our Lives*, a relatively unknown resource not held within many repositories. Similarly, when we lose information on source creation, we lose information on the organizational history of the BWC. On the other hand, Cait McKinney argues that, in the interest of getting materials online, cataloguers must accept the provisionality of metadata standards: "this good-enough approach to description and metadata is not a disadvantage of the community archives; rather . . . even in large institutional archives, when it comes to metadata, 'sometimes "good enough" is good enough.'"[47] Echoing this, Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris argue that "a liberatory approach" to descriptive standards would seek ways of troubling its own status and its de facto functioning as a medium of metanarrative.[48] In the context of archiving social movements, where struggles are ongoing, more liberatory descriptive standards push the capacity of description to accommodate partial or multiple rather than complete closures.

This conceptual clearing brought on by postmodern archival discourse and grassroots projects has led scholars to challenge not only collecting practices but also the very definition of the term *archive*. The advent of online repositories, and website archives in particular, has caused this "semantic drift,"[49] creating new archival contexts and complicating traditional principles of provenance. In her study of online archives, Emily Monks-Leeson argues that while a collection gathers disparate material on the basis of interest or subject, archival documents gain their meaning from the preservation of original contexts of creation and use, as represented by the records' provenance.[50] Removing these

tories: A Study of Dublin Core," *Journal of Library Metadata* 10, no. 1 (2010): 37–57.

47 Cait McKinney, "Body, Sex, Interface: Reckoning with Images at the Lesbian Herstory Archives," *Radical History Review* 122 (2015): 121.

48 Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3–4 (2002): 263–85.

49 Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, 12.

50 Emily Monks-Leeson, "Archives on the Internet: Representing Contexts and Provenance from Repository to Website," *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 38–57.

links and associations in favour of thematic groupings and representative examples comes at the cost of losing the provenancial bonds that archivists take as crucial to a record's meaning and evidential value. The "Publications" section of the Rise Up! Archive demonstrates this point; it brings together a disparate collection of newsletters, newspapers, and magazines produced by feminist groups between the 1970s and the 1990s and gathers them under a thematic umbrella of Canadian women's publishing history in order to widen access. While these publications have different mandates, readerships, and contexts of creation, within the Rise Up! Feminist Archive, new contextual bonds and sites of storytelling are established; in this way, they are informed by a more open-ended "liberatory approach."

In terms of issues of temporality and longevity, activist archives, like many community-embedded projects, are often associated with the idea of impermanence. Sellie et al. argue that, instead of judging the success of an activist archive by the longevity of its holdings, we should consider the significance of these projects in relation to "free spaces."[51] Like community-embedded projects, free spaces are environments in which people are able to learn deeper and more assertive group identities, public skills, and values of co-operation and civic virtue.[52] The temporal nature of activist spaces and the operational challenges involved in housing collections permanently unsettle prior notions of archival permanence.[53] In their commitment to prefigurativism, these projects are invested in creating a more equitable future through movement building, but there is an understanding among proponents of activist archives that they should not be considered failures if their collections are not preserved forever. As Sellie et al. explain, though physical spaces are important to establish or reaffirm social relationships, it is the relationships themselves, rather than the physical sites, that are important in explaining their role in mobilization.[54] Conceptualizing activist archives as related to expressions of temporary spatial control or free spaces (whether physical or virtual) like marches, protests, occupations, and encampments provides us with a more nuanced understanding of these projects in terms of their ideological commitments and operational choices.

51 Sellie et al., "Interference Archive," 464.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

In *Freedom Dreams*, Robin D.G. Kelley maintains, "In the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born."[55] Kelly's words anticipate Sharon Sliwinski's idea of the potency of dreaming in engaging in transformative forms of political thought,[56] and specifically, her notion of dreaming as a practice of freedom – the idea that attending to this alternative form of thinking may help us live through, resist, and ultimately transfigure our shared social and political landscapes. By providing wider access to the cultural products of social movements, activist archives like Rise Up! offer researchers, activists, and academics the historiographical tools to uncover the freedom dreams of these social movements. Unhindered by limited access mandates and traditional ideas of provenance, digital repositories like Rise Up! provide a wider level of access than most traditional archival institutions. In this way the activist archive – like the organizations that its holdings represent – identifies intersectional feminist histories as marginalized from dominant history narratives and institutions and demonstrates how archival methodologies can facilitate the collaborative production of knowledge and the exchange of intergenerational knowledge. Eichhorn argues that "what makes an archive a potential site of resistance is arguably not simply its mandate or its location, but how it is deployed in the present."[57] Therefore, publications like *Our Lives* have the potential to transmit experiential knowledge of Black resistance and resilience within Canada, providing a crucial resource that can inform present and future actions. In her study of anti-Black racism in Canada, Robyn Maynard argues that "Black subjection in Canada cannot be fully understood, and therefore cannot be fully redressed or countered, without placing it in its historical context."[58] *Our Lives* contains rich movement histories, debates, and knowledge that can help contemporary movements document, theorize, and generate action.

55 Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 9–10.

56 Sharon Sliwinski, *Dreaming in Dark Times: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 26.

57 Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, 160.

58 Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 7.

BIOGRAPHY Rachel Lobo is a PhD student in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Her research examines how archival practice can establish new signifying spaces that create historical agency. Specifically, she is interested in how photographic archives construct racial knowledge and cultural identity. Rachel received a master's degree in Photographic Preservation and Collections Management from Ryerson University and has held curatorial and archival internships at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Ryerson Image Centre respectively.