



Unconference Critique Digitale Report- Oct. 21-22, 2021

## **Transparency and democratizing archives by digitization**

*Panel A3- Basel*

*21.10.21, 15h45 - 16h30*

*Panel suggested by Melanie Boehi*

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### **Discussion leader and core topic presentation:**

Nowadays, the role of an archive and its collection is not always easy to determine. Working with objects out of post-colonial art raises new questions about how transparency of the archive can be achieved as well as handling its history.

### **Main arguments of the discussion:**

Many archives seem to be building online collections, which, despite their claim to be more accessible, are often only accessible to a limited group of people. This can be due to the limited choice of language options on the web-platforms, as well as due to copyright policies that do not allow access to everyone. It is especially problematic when access is denied to people who may have a cultural connection to the objects. How biased are Western museums and archives that digitize the objects, conduct research, and organize exhibitions?

Isn't an archive an accidental structure? Can we decolonialize an archive or is it an oxymoron? We must ask who built the archive, what was the initial purpose of it, what not, who has access to it and who not. For a form of decolonization, we must learn, acknowledging its history and be open and transparent about it.

### **Proposed solutions:**

Digital institutions must become more flexible and welcome knowledge outside of the western academic bias (including citizen scientists and people with different cultural backgrounds).

We must be truthful to the initial orders of an archive but also make more transparent how the collection came about. An archivist should work with the existing material in the collection, while recognizing its history. Critical thinking on archives should also be integrated into future education and training to make the staff working in archives aware of their role to build the more democratic and transparent archives of tomorrow.