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Possible Futures for Colonial Collecting Institutions. A Study of Historical Societies in the United States

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Abstract: This article explores how collecting institutions with deeply colonial roots can move into a decolonial future existence, through an in-depth study of historical societies in the United States. Examining their historic roots in colonialism of the United States and the persistence of these colonial identities in spite of a variety of evolutionary trends over the 20th century, this article asks: what decolonial possibilities exist for their future? If institutional shifts have not undone the colonial identities of some collecting institutions, what can? Turning to Sarah Ahmed's theory on queer use and Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation, I suggest practical applications of queer use and critical fabulation for decolonializing historical societies and I demonstrate how this theory is already in practice in Terese Guinsatao Monberg's writing about the work of the Filipino American National Historical Society. Through this close study of one type of collecting institution, my intention is to set a roadmap for other types of libraries, archives, and special collections to scrutinize the colonial practices imbued in their institutional identities and to explore ways these can be undone.

Keywords: Historical societies; United States; queer use; decolonization; colonialism

How can collecting institutions with deeply colonial pasts change their ways? How can they provide an example for postcolonial transformation? By exploring the roots of historical societies in the United States, this article articulates the colonial reality faced by many collecting institutions while offering theoretical and practical models for their transformation. The historical society is endemic to the landscape of small-town America, and yet the broader history of these institutions has largely been unwritten; existing scholarship focuses on individual institutions without examining broader patterns. In writing about the history of the American historical society, I take up an institutional type that serves as an example of the ties between colonialism and collections. At the same time, I understand these institutions to be close cousins to libraries and archives, and while their behavior may demonstrate specifically pronounced ties to colonialism, my hope is that the discussion that follows becomes a way to note similar patterns and possibilities for other types of collecting institutions. As such, the historical society becomes, in this article, a sandbox for digging into what collecting institutions exist for and how communities use their collections as tools for their specific ends. Taking a postcolonial standpoint as imperative for the future of both communities and the collecting institutions they support, I explore the roots of historical societies in the United States and their perpetuation of colonial power structures in the twentieth century before positing alternate theoretical frameworks which offer new possibilities for historical societies and collecting institutions more broadly.

The language of colonialism and postcolonialism is central to this discussion, and I refer to colonialism as a way to describe the "practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country and occupying it with settlers."[1] I understand "postcolonial" not to imply that colonization has been undone or even wholly left behind, but as a critical perspective on how colonialism permeates all aspects of life in colonizing and colonized

1 Colonialism, definition 1, in: OED Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/36525, <25.01.2023>.

nations. Postcolonialism wraps present and future in with the past, recognizing the extent to which colonial past impacts present and future. Postcolonialism is interested in undoing the appropriation and oppression of colonization, and it asks us to reimagine power dynamics as part of this undertaking.[2] I understand a postcolonial framework to be imperative to decisions made about present and future practice in collecting institutions, and this article builds from that assumption.

A Brief History of Historical Societies in the United States

Colonialism is the overarching narrative of white European settlement in the United States, and the origins and development of historical societies in the United States echo this. The first historical society on the continent, in Massachusetts, was founded in 1791. Its founder Jeremy Belknap (1744-1798) was interested in preserving documents produced by government bodies and the political elite in order to aid future writing of official histories of the United States; his work demonstrates an agenda of control focused on constructing national identity, memorializing settler experience and a history of exceptionalism, and justifying appropriation of the continent for the American settler project.[3] As the concept of regional historical societies spread, most copied the intentions Belknap had laid out. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania collected material that would help enshrine the memory of an idealized colonial era.[4] In western states, settlers established historical societies to show how their settlement advanced scientific and technological progress.[5] Historical societies controlled narratives of settlement, cultivating a sense of nationalism and developing historical consciousness by collecting and reinforcing specific icons of American history.[6] The narratives these organizations constructed were linear, and key players in historical societies also saw themselves as key players in the progress of civilization.[7] When Native American history was included, it was presented as a culture which had been conquered and no longer posed a threat; historical societies actively promoted a view that history only began when white settlers reached a given geographic area.[8] Historical societies were founded as tools in service of the settler communities that created them.

At the risk of oversimplifying, the work of historical societies prior to the twentieth century focused on three areas: collecting, genealogy, and publishing. Jeremy Belknap was deeply methodical about amassing collections for the Massachusetts Historical Society but focused primarily on government documents and the correspondence of a wealthy elite, which could serve as evidence for a specific political perspective on colonization.[9] The Historical Society of Pennsylvania collected artifacts but refrained from any kind of interpretation or education with its collections;[10] a focus on collecting for the sake of simply having artifacts was shared by the Historical Society of New Mexico, which collected in order to halt removal of historic artifacts from the territory. This work aimed to maintain a record of settlement and the progress that it brought.[11] Collections proved culture and refinement; Native American artifacts could be collected to understand how necessary it had been for European settlers to conquer these areas.[12] Collections also served genealogical projects: tracing ancestry helped build a heritage identity for newly settled areas and constructed new social hierarchies.[13] Using genealogy to construct superiority through economic and racial credentials helped settlers fit

2 Sara Ahmed: Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Postcoloniality, London 2000, 10-11.

3 Ryan Schumacher: The Wisconsin Magazine of History. A Case Study in Scholarly and Popular Approaches to American State Historical Society Publishing 1917-2000, in: Journal of Scholarly Publishing 44 (2013), No. 2, 114-141, here: 117-118; Agnès Delahaye: Jeremy Belknap and the Origins of American Exceptionalism, in: Transatlantica. Revue d'études Américaines / American Studies Journal 2 (2018), 1-21, here: 5, 7.

4 Barbara Clark Smith: The Authority of History. The Changing Face of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, in: The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 114 (1990), No. 1, 37-66, here: 40-42.

5 James Stensvaag: Clio on the Frontier. The Intellectual Evolution of the Historical Society of New Mexico 1859-1925, in: New Mexico Historical Review 55 (1980), No. 4, 293-308, here: 293, 298.

6 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 53; Amanda Laugesen: Making of Public Historical Culture in the American West. 1880-1910, Lewiston, NY 2006, 60.

7 Stensvaag 1980 (see FN 5), 299, 305.

8 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 10-11, 94.

9 Delahaye 2018 (see FN 3), 3.

10 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 48.

11 Stensvaag 1980 (see FN 5), 299.

12 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 139, 149.

13 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 110-111.

into a construct of "true American."[14] Publishing projects were natural outcomes of this: historical societies produced genealogies and biographies to support this research; other early publications examined the history of local governments and institutions.[15] Ultimately, while the work of early historical societies may be derided for its deeply colonial orientation, it is equally important to recognize that it was effectively deployed in service to the institution's community (albeit a specific and exclusive one).

In this brief historic overview of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is valuable to note two distinct (yet similar) types of historical societies. While Belknap founded a private institution, as did many other municipalities in the eastern United States, western expansion gave rise to publicly funded historical societies after 1850. Public historical societies were frequently written into state constitutions in the west, being willed into existence on paper before some states officially existed; they were integral to the fabric of settlement.[16] Private historical societies essentially began as gentlemen's clubs for amateur historians; publicly funded historical societies had a wider audience because appealing to the taxpayer was crucial.[17] Wisconsin established the first operational public historical society, creating a model that was replicated in many western states: in addition to the work of preserving historic documents and producing publications that private historical societies engaged with, Wisconsin also focused on public education programs as well as support for local, county-level historical societies.[18] Publicly funded historical societies continued to emphasize popular education more than their private counterparts into the twentieth century.[19] A unifying similarity across public and private institutions, however, was that their founders were not formally trained; the roles of librarian and historian had not been professionalized yet, but historical societies would experience major shifts as these professions also evolved.[20]

14 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 55-56.
15 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 71, 126.
16 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 119; Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 46.
17 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 116-119.
18 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 119-122.
19 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 59.
20 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 26.

Historical Societies Move into the 20th Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, history became an area of greater study and professionalism within higher education institutions. Professional historians emphasized a new scientific approach, specialized training, and credentials that included the possibility of a PhD. Historical societies wrestled with how the history they collected could serve an emerging professional field of work; they were criticized for having a too narrow focus and too little willingness to follow new best practices for doing historical research.[21] In the nineteenth century, the historical society had been the domain of amateurs or of settlers themselves;[22] state historical societies, reliant on their taxpayer base, now worked to serve both the emerging profession of historians as well as the amateur public they had been founded by and for.[23] Some historical societies shifted towards professionalism by bringing more credentialed historians into positions of leadership;[24] others oriented publishing efforts towards a more scholarly audience in order to shift the common perception of historical societies as "antiquated and parochial."[25] Private institutions such as the Massachusetts Historical Society, established and previously run by amateurs, brought in credentialed librarians and began to organize their collections according to professional standards.[26] As historians established authority through scholarship in a newly professional field, historical societies maintained and grew their authoritative status by taking on this aura of professionalism.[27] This shift towards professionalism matters because the ultimate impact on historical societies was maintenance of authority and power simultaneous to a shift in relationship with the communities that founded them. While historical societies in the United States prior to the twentieth century had

21 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 138; Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 60.
22 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 189.
23 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 123.
24 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 68.
25 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 132; Catherine Lewis: The Changing Face of Public History. The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum, Chicago 2005, 20.
26 Louis Leonard Tucker: The Massachusetts Historical Society. A Bicentennial History 1971-1991, Boston 1995, 249.
27 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 78.

focused more on the personal history concerns of local communities, as described above, the twentieth century marked a shift towards concern for an emerging profession.[28]

In contrast to this shift to support professionalism, social change across the United States in the twentieth century also sparked new discourse in historical societies. While this picked up speed during and after the Civil Rights era, criticism from the American Historical Association as early as the 1930s caused the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to reorganize its work, recognizing that the genealogical 'pedigree research' they had devoted energy to was not broadly relevant. They refocused on the wider public through education, outreach, and lectures, although this broader public was still constrained by a fairly narrow understanding of worthwhile areas of historical study.[29] The privately-founded Chicago Historical Society (CHS) shifted its energy in the 1930s to focus on a public-facing museum rather than its more exclusive research library. Catherine Lewis notes other important organizational trends towards diversity at CHS in the wake of the Civil Rights era, tracking Barbara Clark Smith's observation that social movements – including those for Black, women's, and indigenous rights – have generally been the real instigators of change in cultural heritage institutions.[30]

In the 1960s, CHS shifted its collection policy from objects that celebrated the history of national, elite figures to local collections often acquired in collaboration with the community.[31] Continued changes reflected the new outward-facing attitude of the museum: renovations in the 1980s made the space more welcoming to the public and a website engaged new online audiences in the 1990s.[32] Decentralized and collaborative initiatives to create exhibitions about local communities brought new voices – amateurs, students, community members – into narration of history.[33] Along the same lines, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania worked on reframing the artifacts in its collection, no longer as aesthetic art objects collected to support a single, linear history but instead as parts of a broader history that might not be entirely represented in the institution. New technology was used to present multiple perspectives on history and fill narrative gaps left by existing collections.[34] Through the late 1980s, historical societies in Minnesota, Missouri, Washington, DC and elsewhere saw shifts that included redefining mission statements, embarking on new programming, and committing their efforts to serve a broader public.[35] Even the private, elite Massachusetts Historical Society expanded its exclusive membership rosters to allow for fellows and began engaging with the community through educational lecture series and other public events.[36] Moving into the twenty-first century, Brooklyn Historical Society combined emerging technology and collaboration for a variety of web-based, community focused projects.[37]

Institutional Evolution without Transformation

What was the impact of the historical society's evolution across the twentieth century? Did a new community orientation in the wake of increased professionalism connect these institutions back to their communities and establish strong ties of service to the diverse communities they were part of? Did the organizational changes described above undo colonial power structures within these institutions? Catherine Lewis' study of institutional change at CHS helps explain the impact of post-Civil Rights changes in historical societies. She bases her analysis in Duncan Cameron's theory on the evolution of museums,[38] which posits that museums should not be sites of unquestioning authority – temples to specific, elite interpretations of history and culture – but should reorient themselves towards the public as the dialogue-oriented space of

28 Schumacher 2013 (see FN 3), 87.
29 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 62.
30 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 6; Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 62.
31 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 13-14.
32 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 85, 30.
33 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 32.
34 Clark Smith 1990 (see FN 4), 63-65.
35 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 98.
36 Tucker 1995 (see FN 26), 405, 455.
37 Thai Jones: Reviewed Works. Brooklyn Waterfront History; Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations; TeachArchives.org, in: The Journal of American History 102 (2016), No. 4, 1280-1282.
38 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 16-20.

a forum.[39] Cameron's forum expands opportunities for participation, relates historic artifacts to contemporary culture, makes space for education, and invites "chaos and conflict."[40] We see this reflected in the broader participation, educational outreach, and even "chaos" of historical societies described above, exploring gaps and nuances that have been left unnarrated by the collections on hand, inviting a wide range of individuals with diverse experience and expertise to take part in curation, and developing programming that is more relevant to a broader public. However, Lewis also points out the limited impact of this shift on power dynamics and constructions of authority at CHS. She notes that a wildly successful website launch in 1995 did not change power relationships between the institution and its visitors.[41] Similarly, changing the organizational structure to reimagine who takes part in exhibition curation did not change public perception that these exhibits represented a single, institutionally authorized version of history.[42] Ultimately, Lewis concludes that enactment of Cameron's forum – all of these new, community-oriented activities at CHS – did not shift power dynamics away from the colonial power structures at the root of historical societies; power is integral to these institutions.[43] Analyzing Cameron's forum more deeply to understand why it has failed the institutions that enact it, Rikke Haller Baggesen notes that the forum does not have the ability to undo the authority of institutions; instead, it "legitimizes … authority by the act of reaching out and inviting participation."[44] While the forum model has been popular across a wide variety of cultural heritage institutions since Duncan first wrote about it, as a theoretical model the forum is incapable of reconsidering the colonial power dynamics baked into these institutions' identities.

39 Duncan Cameron: The Museum. A Temple or the Forum, in: Curator: The Museum Journal 14 (1971), No. 1, 11-24, here: 19-20.

40 Cameron 1971 (see FN 39), 18, 21, 23, 24.

41 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 30.

42 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 120.

43 Lewis 2005 (see FN 25), 120.

44 Rikke Haller Baggesen: Augmenting the Agora. Media and Civic Engagement in Museums, in: MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research 30 (2014), No. 56,117-131, here: 127, https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v30i56.8964.

Queering the Historical Society: A Postcolonial Framework for Collecting Institutions

Where does this leave us? If historical societies began as deeply colonial institutions, and if their evolution into a supposedly more public forum has not undone the weighty power structures and authoritative presence that has defined them, what possibilities exist for these institutions in a postcolonial present and future in the United States? Postcolonialism requires us to break down oppressive systems and reimagine power dynamics, yet historical societies have only continued to consolidate power within themselves, controlling narratives of history in the United States. As an alternative, I am interested in how we can move collecting institutions towards a postcolonial theoretical framework rooted in Sarah Ahmed's theory on queer use and Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation. I will suggest practical applications of this framework and demonstrate how we see some of these already at play in Terese Guinsatao Monberg's writing about the work of the Filipino American National Historical Society, proving that this theoretical model can be implemented for the future work of other historical societies.

Sarah Ahmed's writing on queer use resonates with the work of collecting institutions. Ahmed describes how "the politics of preservation so often involves the rights of some to appropriate what is of use to others."[45] In their work to preserve history, historical societies have often used artifacts in the service of an institutional agenda regardless of their use in the community they originated in. In response to this, queer use is defined by Ahmed as using something in a different way than was originally intended, or for a different use than has been institutionally ascribed.[46] When things are used repeatedly in one way – in the service of one version of history – other possible uses are removed.[47] This is exemplified in the use of Native American artifacts by historical societies to depict the necessity of conquering these groups and to portray indigenous communities as antagonists

45 Sara Ahmed: What's the Use? On the Uses of Use, Durham, US 2019, 33.

46 Ahmed 2019 (see FN 45), 199.

47 Ahmed 2019 (see FN 45), 203.

to the colonial hero.[48] Use creates and reinforces power dynamics. Queer use, then, encourages us to undo institutional use and imagine new ways of using objects held by these institutions. We might use them to tell different stories, or to connect with individuals whose lived experience has previously not been recognized. Ahmed also describes how "museums can strip objects of life by taking them out of use."[49] Queer use thus necessitates putting things back into use, providing new mechanisms for access, which may include changing policy language and embracing multiple modes of access to collections. Queer use has the potential to move us into a postcolonial mindset. We can refuse to follow "colonial prescriptions for use" when we notice things that are less obviously significant, if we use things outside the uses that institutions have prescribed, if we find meaning in artifacts that have been discarded.[50]

This search for meaning in discarded objects and records lies at the heart of Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation.[51] This methodology involves working with the scraps of the archive: unknown people, places, and communities. From here, Hartman crafts narratives of socio-political orders that are not founded on colonialism; she points to critically fabulated narratives as a valuable method of redress for the colonial oppression of enslavement and racism.[52] These new retellings of history can be created outside the confines of written text, and they might involve crafting seemingly impossible stories.[53] Creation of fictional narratives to question and deconstruct archival records (or lack of records), through film, poetry, music, novels, and other creative work, is an active way for communities and their allies to resist oppression and erasure.[54] Hartman also explains the necessity of recognizing the temporal entanglement of historical time,[55] asking us to acknowledge the relation of past, present, and future in the historic narratives that we generate; temporal entanglement echoes the postcolonial recognition that past impacts present and future. In postcolonial engagement with the historic record, the only barriers are the limits of our imagination.

Ama Josephine B. Johnstone writes about an imaginary Ghanaian National Archives that enacts critical fabulation and queer use, introducing us to what this framework could look like in a heritage institution. Her creative writing conjures a space that holds the history of the people, not of the nation-state; it transcends nationality. It contains records of practices and traditions that have been lost; it allows us to use things for new purposes and is a site for cultural repair. This archive explores temporal entanglement by defying space and time; it holds space for future records, as well as space for records that are *for* the future. The archive takes us out of reality and is not limited by reality. The search for history in this archive is a search that, inspired by Hartman, takes the searcher home.[56]

New Futures, Postcolonial Institutions: Tactics and Strategies

While Johnstone writes of a heritage institution that enacts queer use and critical fabulation in conjectured space and time, we can reflect on Johnstone's work alongside Ahmed and Hartman's theory to draw out real tactics and strategies for historical societies that exist within the bounds of a physical universe. Seeking a postcolonial reorientation of historical societies rooted in queer use and critical fabulation, I offer a set of suggestions for engaging in this work, organized in the traditional categories of historical society activities described above: collections, publishing, and genealogy. I then describe how I see these at play in one existing historical society.

48 Laugesen 2006 (see FN 6), 126, 145.

49 Ahmed 2019 (see FN 45), 40.

50 Ahmed 2019 (see FN 45), 207, 218-219.

51 Saidiya Hartman: The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner, in: South Atlantic Quarterly 117 (2018), No. 3, 465-490, here: 470.

52 Thora Siemsen: Saidiya Hartman on Working with Archives (Interview), in: The Creative Independent, 18th April 2018, https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/saidiya-hartman-on-working-with-archives/, <25.01.2023>.

53 Saidiya Hartman: Venus in Two Acts, in: Small Axe 12 (2008), No. 2, 1-14, here: 10-11.

54 Ayla Morland: Opposing the Archive. Reimaginings of Paris 17 October 1961, in: The IJournal 7 (2022), No. 2, 28-31, here: 28-29, https://doi.org/10.33137/ijournal.v7i2.38612.

55 Siemsen 2018 (see FN 52).

56 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone: Speculative Fabulations. Enter the Archive, or 'Beneath Yaba's Garden', in: Feminist Review 125 (2020), No. 1, 38-43, here: 39-43.

Reconsidering collections: The historical society, through queer use, can refuse colonial prescriptions for use and consider new ways of using its collections by:

- Refusing 'colonial prescriptions for use' and creating access policies that encourage a broader range of collection uses
- Demonstrating use of collections and use of gaps in collections as equally valid research methods
- Creating space for individuals, artifacts, and records that are yet to be
- Creating mechanisms for collaborative, community-based appraisal and creation of current and future collections
- Pointing to gaps in collections, absence of historic evidence, and research questions that have remained unanswered or unasked as proof of the need for critical fabulation

Reframing publishing: understanding publishing more broadly as knowledge production that includes various types of programming, historical societies can:

- Allow collections to be used to present new narratives – to generate new knowledge – in new/other spaces and with new publishing mechanisms that reach a variety of audiences (walking tours, performance, audio publications, and more)
- Channel institutional resources, including but not limited to financial resources, in support of programming that engages with critical fabulation and constructs alternate narratives about individuals and communities
- Alter reproduction policies to prioritize use of collection material for the production of creative work that engages with critical fabulation, including but not limited to film, literary works, and music

Reimagining genealogy: While a heavy focus on genealogy has been less emphasized by historical societies since the early twentieth century, the reality is that many individuals engage with these institutions through this type of research. Reimagining genealogy in a framework of queer use and critical fabulation, I consider it here as the way we connect to ourselves and our heritage, and the way we build networks with others in our community – past, present, and future. In service to this, historical societies can:

- Prioritize narratives of community that understand past, present, and future as wholly interdependent
- Create access policies that understand every individual as belonging to the community and having some claim to the heritage held by the institution
- Reconsider notions of membership to reframe how individuals can be in relationship with the institution and with each other
- Prioritize use of historical society infrastructure and resources, including buildings, labor, finances, and membership to support building community relationships

The Future is Already Here: Examining the Filipino American National Historical Society

While these suggestions may sound impossible in the context of the historical societies discussed above, many of these resemble strategies already described by Guinsatao Monberg in her writing about the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS). FANHS was established in 1982 and organizes itself through a series of chapters that span the United States; in a familiar echo of the work of historical societies described above, it manages an archival collection, engages in education projects and programming, and produces publications.[57] FANHS engages in queer use by understanding that "a community's writing and publishing can … emerge from a need to engage or revise frameworks put forward by other communities."[58] Knowledge production is part of this revision work; FANHS understands historic tours as an important publication effort. They offer tours that focus on historical

57 Filipino American National Historical Society: About FANHS, http://fanhs-national.org/filam/about-fanhs/, <25.01.2023>.

58 Terese Guinsatao Monberg: Ownership, Access, and Authority. Publishing and Circulating Histories to (Re)Member Community, in: Community Literacy Journal 12 (2017), No. 1, 30-47, here: 34, https://doi.org/10.25148/CLJ.12.1.009116.

sites that are both marked and unmarked; queer use of the site understands that the site itself holds memory, whether the historic record provides evidence for these memories or not and whether the site has been used as that type of evidence previously.[59] Critical fabulation understands here that we can still cite our sources even when the sources are gone or unrecognizable. In understanding the intergenerational networks that make up the genealogy of community, these tours also explore temporal entanglement: "the past is brought into conscious conversation with the present and … through these practices of making – a future can be imagined".[60] And, like Johnstone's Ghanaian National Archives which provide space for future records and records for the future, FANHS' historic tour of Seattle culminates at the National Pinoy Archives where participants may create an archival folder with their own name on it. Participants are given agency to authorize collections about themselves, and are invited to initiate the task of making records for the future.[61] FANHS is creating heritage and building community through the process of sharing existing heritage.

The legacy of historical societies is rooted in colonial power dynamics and has continued to reify these through a variety of major institutional shifts across the twentieth century, but a framework rooted in queer use and critical fabulation opens up postcolonial possibilities to reimagine these power dynamics and undo the oppression of colonialism. And, beyond conjecture of the potential of combining queer use and critical fabulation into a new theoretical framework, we can confirm their real impact on historical societies' spaces through the actual practice of FANHS. Not only is this work possible, it may in fact create space for communities to reconnect to history and to each other, to heal, and to imagine new futures. In discarding the colonial myth-building of their roots, some might argue that we discard the very identities of collecting institutions. However, reflecting back on the fact that historical societies broadly were founded by communities and in service to communities, a theoretical perspective of queer use enacted with the tools of critical fabulation has the potential to bring historical societies more deeply into service of communities today. In a postcolonial United States, queer use and critical fabulation might make historical societies more connected to their communities than ever before. Moreover, this framework provides an opportunity for historical societies to light the way for other collecting institutions to grapple with colonial roots and embrace postcolonial identities.

59 Guinsatao Monberg 2017 (see FN 58), 35-36.
60 Guinsatao Monberg 2017 (see FN 58), 37.
61 Guinsatao Monberg 2017 (see FN 58), 39.

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