



The EURODOC Producers' Roadmap of Decolonial and Ethical Uses of Archive in Documentary

« *Our film history is a diaspora* » Aboubacar Sanongo, 2019

Designed through and thanks to :

- Collective work and reflexions held at EURODOC CARIBBEAN Training Labs for Producers in 2022-2025 (Martinique, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, French Guiana), which invited professionals (Karim Miské, Annabelle Aventurin, Amalia Cordova, Olivier Marboeuf, Leonard Cortana) and archival funds (BFI, INA, ONF/NFB);
- BIPOC EURODOC Producers Taskforce conversations and demands;
- Consultations with : Elizabeth Klinck, Nikolaus Perneczky, Anita Afonu, Alba Lombardía, Monika Preischl, Paul Seesequasis, Ania Szczepanska, Mila Turajlic, Laura Tusi.

This version of the roadmap (presented at Berlinale / EFM in February 2026) has been written and edited by Nora Philippe.

This roadmap is meant for the general interest of the documentary ecosystem. It aims at filmmakers, producers, archival producers, film funds, archives, commissioning editors. It is *per se* a work in progress, intended to evolve on a regular basis in dialogue with professionals.



Pre-existing manifestos, pledges and codes of ethics

The documentary global ecosystem appears often unaware of certain recent initiatives of institutions, collectives and organizations which have either expressed demands to foster a more ethical and reparative relationship to archive, or published progressive pledges and codes of ethics in their own realm, region or country. Certain manifestos, especially coming from marginalized communities or professions, have been buried. **To our knowledge, no set of recommendations on the use of archive are used in the film industry - by makers and players - as can be codes of ethics regarding parity, diversity, environmental sustainability, or responsibility in AI use.** Our first task in addressing the current needs for recommendations is then to quote the existing initiatives and the intellectual work which has been produced and should be referred to. Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- Association of Canadian Archivists, Equity Commitments : <https://archivists.ca/Equity> (2020)
- Final Report to the Association of Canadian Archivists from the Indigenous Matters Working Group: Assessment & Recommendations : <https://archivists.ca/ACA-Indigenous-Matters-Working-Group-Assessment-and-Recommendations-Final-Report-&-Resource-Guide-2024> (July 2024)
- The « Liberate the image » Manifesto (edited by the Dox Box collective, 2018-2019)
- The Call for action & reflection on decolonising film archives, part of the project « Everything passes, except the past » project, workshop held at the Goethe Institute in Portugal in September 2019: www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf200/en_call-for-action--reflectionworkingprogress.pdf
- The International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA)'s Ethical Principles: www.iasa-web.org/ethical-principles (2020, revised in 20211)
- Unesco's Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA), November 10, 2011
- The FIAF Declaration on Fair Use and Access: <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Fair-Access.html> (2007, ratified 2008)
- The FIAF guide to « Decolonizing Film Catalogues: Recommendations and best practices by the FIAF CDC on the representation of Ukrainian film titles and cast/credits produced during the Soviet Union » : <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/E-Resources/best-practices-fiaf-cdc-on-cataloguing-ukrainian-films.html> (December 14, 2023)
- The International Council on Archives (ICA) Code of Ethics: <https://www.ica.org/resource/ica-code-of-ethics/> (September 4, 1996)
- The International Council on Archives (ICA) Principles of Access to Archives: a Success for Transparency and Right to Information: <https://www.iasa-web.org/ethical-principles> (2012)
- The CCAAA Policy Statement « Sharing of Heritage » : www.ccaaa.org/pages/policies-and-standards/CCAAA-policy-on-sharing-of-heritage.html
- The Archival Producers Alliance's GenAI Initiative toolkits: <https://www.archivalproducersalliance.com/apa-genai-initiative> (2025)
- Durban FilmMart's « Global South Activities and Initiatives Towards Archival Justice » (2024, 2025)

Colonial Archive & Mental Health



- The labor of archival research, particularly on colonial collections, entails sustained exposure to traumatic imagery, violent histories, and epistemic asymmetries. Archivists should incorporate **content advisories** (or « Trigger warnings ») within cataloguing systems where appropriate and explicitly acknowledge when cultural materials were not intended for unrestricted circulation.
- Producers and institutions should budget for **therapeutic supervision** or psychological support for filmmakers and editors engaged in long-term work with distressing archival content.
- Even in the absence of graphic violence, sustained engagement with material produced within a colonial gaze can generate cumulative psychological strain. **Ethical archival practice must therefore recognize mental health as an integral dimension of archival labor.**



The Future of Our Footage

- **Use archival material in the manner in which you would like your own films and your footage to be treated in the future, when they become archive themselves.** The materials we produce today will, in time, constitute the archival record through which future generations interpret our present, and reinterpret the past.
- Once your film is completed, resist the possibility to sell your rushes to the highest commercial bidder. Instead, consider depositing the material with institutions or community-based organizations capable of preserving them in the public interest and contributing to the redress of asymmetrical ownership structures.
- Likewise, once research and production conclude, regard the collected materials (archive screeners, logs, notes, transcripts, inventories) not as residual by-products, but as part of a shared intellectual and cultural resource. These materials themselves constitute an archive. **They should be preserved and, where appropriate, shared with the communities and institutions concerned, without waiting for formal requests.**
- From the earliest stages of production, integrate into **consent and release processes explicit provisions regarding the future stewardship of footage**, not only of the finished film, but of the materials that will eventually become archival documents. This commitment may be defined as **Archival Care**.

Archival Meaning & Accountability Demands



Filmmakers:

- Archival material should not be reduced to **illustration**, in conformity with mainstream market conventions. The increasing pressures toward colorization, aesthetic enhancement, and decontextualized “beautification” must be approached very critically.
- Archives require **contextualization**. Without reflexivity, provenance research, and critical inquiry, **archival images become interchangeable with algorithmically generated content or generic stock-image descriptors**.
- Filmmakers are encouraged to render visible their own relationship to the archive within the filmic form itself. The process of archival engagement is not external to the work; it constitutes part of its meaning. **A film that employs archival material should, in some measure, reflect on the conditions of its use.**

Decision-makers:

- Projects with the largest budgets - and therefore the greatest **purchasing power** for archival materials - are not inherently the most legitimate to undertake them. In live-action documentary, criteria such as **legitimacy, access, and cultural authenticity** increasingly inform evaluation. These principles must apply equally to archive-based works.
- As a decision-maker, a fund or a television/streamer, value the impact and justice work which can be accomplished with and through the archival research needed for the film you are coproducing / purchasing.
- **Filmmakers and producers should privilege doing business with archival funds that articulate strong equity frameworks and transparent restitution policies when it comes to colonial film heritage.** Where such policies are insufficient, production relationships should be used to **advocate for reform**.

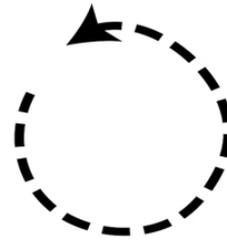
Why not ask about:

- Do you facilitate archive **education** opportunities on archive research, copyright and repatriation for Indigenous / ex-colonized / equity-seeking audiences?
- Do you digitize and publicize **transparently** and actively the colonial funds you steward so that concerned communities can know exactly what stand in the fund’s collections? Do you organize cooperation trips to the countries

concerned in order to actively communicate on your collections and your openness to restitution or cooperation?

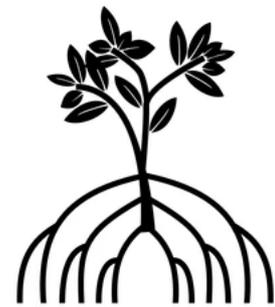
- Have you provided the concerned national / communities a **digital copy and the full inventories** of the archive you steward which represents parts of their story? Are your **digital tools** (payment, streaming, download options) adapted to certain constraints met by Global South professionals?
- Do you work actively on the **elimination of financial barriers** to access colonial / Indigenous archive by the communities? **Do you offer discounts and special rates?** Do you explore and put in place restitution actions?
- Do you invite scholars, curators, filmmakers from the Global South / marginalized communities to study your collection, and use your archive in their works so that they can have their own voice heard and their own POV represented? Funds should **sponsor** researchers from ex-colonized countries for their **visa** request: traveling is often simply impossible for Global South producers. We acknowledge archive is material, needs a site, technical care, and a costly institution - that digitization does not answer all challenges. But the global visa system is designed in such a way that traveling to archival funds is extremely difficult and costly.
- Do you train your teams in anti-bias and **anti-racist approaches** to archival work, practice and research?

Countering The Market



- **Whom you pay, what you pay for and how you pay is political.** Careful consideration should be given before directing substantial resources toward commercial funds that offer standardized licensing agreements without sufficient commitment to provenance research, contextual integrity, or equitable access. **Smaller, independently curated collections may provide more ethically grounded alternatives and...the same material.** Funds and TVs should also value this approach.
- **Archival funds should understand their role as facilitators of access rather than exclusive owners of material.**
- We cannot continue paying very large amounts of money to **private funds** which have no interest in research, in preserving world heritage and above all, in respecting the source and the context of the archive it sells. The decontextualization and commercial fragmentation of historical material exemplify the risks of purely market-driven logics.
- Every day, legitimate researchers, archival producers, filmmakers, not to say indigenous / ex-colonized communities and descendants testify being left with no answer when liaising with certain national or transnational funds to view material. which literally end up **locking away** some parts of humankind's history. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that many public archival institutions operate under severe financial constraints. **Nonetheless, access to materials constituting shared human heritage should not depend upon proximity, informal negotiations, or personal goodwill.**
- Obtaining screeners, rights, or discounts to view and clear crucial archive which belong to humankind should not depend on personal arrangements with transient teams in institutions. We salute the political courage of single individuals in certain institutions, who fight for inclusion, and the groundbreaking work of activist archival producers to access certain funds, but archive access cannot rely on **interpersonal arrangements**, which are usually based on proximity in the Global North, and exclude colleagues in the Global South and equity-seeking communities.
- **Fair use provisions** cannot function as structural solutions to budgetary constraints. They apply only within specific legal frameworks and are not recognized globally. **Structural inequities in archival access demand structural remedies.**

Archive & Cultural Sovereignty + Ownership



- **Coproduction can and should enforce ethical and equitable relationships.** From the Global North: Always ask yourself if the live protagonists of your story, or their descendants, could afford licensing the archive you're paying for, and if not, how your own film will transform this situation and make it fairer?
- In the case of a **coproduction** between a player in the Global North and a player in the Global South on a project implying whatever archive, an important dimension of the cooperation should be about **inventing a process to utilize the coproduction to repair the archive access asymmetry**. Understand the needs of Indigenous/ Global South archivists and communities, without making rapid assumptions, especially on the nature of the adequate « reparation ».
- When projects in the Global North engage archival materials relating to histories or communities in the Global South, coproduction with partners in the concerned country should be regarded as **an ethical requirement**. Such cooperation helps ensure that **master files and archival copies remain accessible locally** and are part of the national or regional heritage, and that cultural sovereignty is respected.
- Where archival infrastructures are lacking, **production processes may serve as platforms for advocacy and capacity-building**. Hiring archival producers from the concerned regions, investing in professional training, and compensating community-based collaborators should be standard practice. Also, make sure to **hire** cultural / scientific / community experts / facilitators in a team. Community work must be compensated.
- Explore new ways to label copyright when you design coproductions involving archive: **community copyright** should be prioritized in certain cases.
- The absence of documented consent in historical archives does not absolve contemporary practitioners of responsibility. Due diligence remains possible and necessary, even where records reflect prior erasure. E&O insurance should not be regarded as the end of the process.
- Upon completion of a film, **impact and educational initiatives** shall include the presentation of selected archival materials alongside the finished work. This expanded practice, **Archival Impact**, fosters dialogue not only about representation and film heritage, but about archival conditions themselves.
- Once the film is finished, deposit and share the hard drives with the screeners and logs with the suitable film professional collectives, local/national archive associations, universities, education nonprofit organizations, so that the archive returns and circulates. This is considered piracy, but this is currently what is being done by many filmmakers on an individual level, in the absence of effective charters.

End Credits & Acknowledgements



When archival material produced in colonial contexts is incorporated into a film, **end credits should function as spaces of accountability.**

- Standard acknowledgements should recognize that **consent of the individuals depicted was not properly sought** or documented at the time of filming and that efforts have been undertaken to identify those represented and to liaise with descendants or concerned communities.
- Credits should also acknowledge that the original material was produced within political and legal frameworks that restricted or censored Indigenous and colonized subjects' self-representation. **Making visible the conditions of erasure and violence embedded in the material constitutes an ethical responsibility.**
- Finally, credits should indicate that the production - and potentially the supporting institutions of the film - are open to receiving additional information concerning the archival materials used, not solely for legal risk mitigation, but as part of **an ongoing commitment to research, transparency, and equity.** Credits may direct audiences toward dedicated platforms or partner institutions capable of continuing the work.

Credits play a relational role.