Activating Personal Counter-Archives: The Case of the Amir Hassanpour Fonds

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ABSTRACT

In this article, through a historical and theoretical reflection on the Amir Hassanpour Fonds, held at the University of Toronto, the author investigates the role of personal and community archives in counter-archiving in the Middle East, especially in Iran. He expands on his experience working on appraising, describing, and arranging the Amir Hassanpour Fonds at the University of Toronto Archives and Records Management Services (UTARMS) to argue that archiving a diasporic and revolutionary counter-archive calls for more than a procedural and habitual institutional practice. To activate such a counter-archive, there should be, first, close attention paid to the memory institutions against which the counter-archive has been developed. Such close attention calls for an investigation into the larger political structures in which the memory institutions are embedded. Second, the counter-archive should be understood in the broader modes and methods of cultural and memory resistance in that specific political structure, engaging analytically and theoretically with the creator's counter-archiving praxis, in this case Amir Hassanpour's Marxist internationalist revolutionary approach. The article ends with a brief discussion of the various ways UTARMS attempted to enliven this specific fonds.

KEY WORDS

Amir Hassanpour, Counter-archives, Diasporic archives, Iran, Kurdish archives, Marxist feminism, Memory resistance, Middle East

For decades, practitioners and scholars have debated the role and responsibilities of archivists and institutional archives to contribute to the understanding and development of the profession beyond the traditional agendas of preservation and custodianship of documentary records.[1] There have been calls to deeply reflect on the role and functioning of mainstream institutions,[2] as well as on the ways archivists can actively build inclusive documentary heritage and move beyond the colonial legacies of archival institutions.[3]

Gilliland examines the displacement and migrant crises in the Balkans region and shows that "official" archives are inadequately equipped, both in terms of their epistemological orientation and their structural setup, to address the immediate needs of forcibly displaced individuals and other marginalized "non-citizens" who frequently resort to "irregular" methods and uses of records as a means of survival. Consequently, a comprehensive theoretical, organizational, and practical reorientation is imperative. According to Gilliland, this proposed reorientation must be grounded in a deep understanding of the affected individuals and their daily lives, while also acknowledging and accounting for the existence of "irregular" records generated or employed under conditions of urgency or through other forms of radical agency by those who have been forcibly displaced. By adopting this holistic approach, encompassing the perspectives of those affected and embracing nontraditional recordkeeping practices, the reorientation can effectively meet the pressing needs of forcibly displaced individuals and foster their overall well-being.[4]

In accordance with Gilliland's viewpoint, this article builds on the assertion that it is essential for archival institutions in today's society to transcend the mere facilitation of the interests and narratives promoted by the funding institution and the obligatory acquisition of its records. In this article, this is demonstrated through a discussion of the Amir Hassanpour Fonds housed at the University of Toronto.

This article further explores the role of personal archives as a form of counter-archive in relation to official public archives, particularly in Iran where the official public archives actively support specific power dynamics and structures. The significance of personal archives has been the subject of some recent studies. Exploring the context of Colombia, South America, Qvortrup and Giraldo argue that the creation and preservation of personal archives of enforced disappearance serve as acts of liberatory memory work and as means for families to resist repression and collective forgetting. Qvortrup and Giraldo demonstrate that liberatory memory work is an active reality in Colombia, operating on an individual level, surpassing transitional justice frameworks, and transforming victims into custodians of records, providing future generations with the opportunity for historical accountability.[5]

The importance of personal archives has further been demonstrated by Aton. Discussing the context of Sri Lanka, Aton argues that the archives of the disappeared, which encompass various forms of documentation such as files, objects, and photographs related to missing loved ones, hold significant cultural,

political, and personal value. Despite being overlooked by the Sri Lankan state, these personal archives play a central role in the ongoing protests by Tamil relatives of those forcibly disappeared during the Sri Lankan Civil War. These archives transcend mere records; they symbolize the resilience of a marginalized community and serve as potent tools for advocacy, shedding light on the enduring human rights concerns and the need for accountability in a postconflict era. By preserving the stories and experiences of those who vanished, these archives powerfully amplify the voices of the affected families, demanding recognition, closure, and reconciliation in a nation striving to heal from the scars of its turbulent past.[6]

In line with the two studies mentioned in this article I will explore Amir Hassanpour's personal archives and why it serves as a counter-archive. *Counter-archive* is a concept that refers to alternative or subversive forms of archival practice. Counter-archives seek to disrupt dominant power structures[7] and offer alternative ways of remembering, preserving, and accessing information. While archives activism encompasses a broader range of actions and initiatives that seek to promote social change and transformation within archival institutions and practices, counter-archiving is a specific form of archives activism that involves the collection, preservation, and dissemination of materials that are often marginalized or excluded from official archives.

Personal counter-archives are personal archives that make previously silenced voices audible.[8] To understand and analyze personal counter-archives, we should start with the creator's life and explore the relationship between the ruling relations of power and the creator's counter-archiving practices.

Amir Hassanpour

Amir Hassanpour (1943–2017) was a Kurdish Iranian revolutionary activist, Marxist linguist, and social historian. He was born in Mahabad, a city in Iranian Kurdistan-Rojhelat. When he was only three years old, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad was established. This short-lived government, in power between January and December 1946, had socialist agendas and influences, making it the only experiment in an autonomous Kurdish government for Kurds living in Iran. In late 1946, the Iranian Army crushed the Kurdish Republic, executing and imprisoning its leaders, who were members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran.[9]

Hassanpour's early years were shaped by the aftermath of the defeat of the Kurdish Republic. The Iranian state constantly propagated its monarchist and centralist narrative about this short-lived provincial government, while Kurdish nationalism and revolutionary socialism continued to resist despite political suppression.

Hassanpour attended the University of Tehran for his BA in English language and literature (1960–1964). He completed his MA in linguistics in 1968 at the

University of Tehran and then moved to the United States to study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he obtained his PhD in 1972.[10] In the United States, Hassanpour was closely affiliated with the Confederation of Iranian Students, a network of Iranian student activists that developed into a radical political force calling for the overthrow of the shah's regime and the revolutionization of social relations.[11] Amir Hassanpour returned to Iran with the revolution of 1979 and joined the Kurdish movement. However, as the revolutionary Shi'a political parties consolidated power, they started to suppress the Kurdish movement as well as Marxist and communist revolutionary opposition. In the early 1980s, due to increasing suppression by the Islamic regime, Hassanpour was forced into exile. He fled the country and continued his scholarly and activist life in North America.[12]

As a professor, Amir Hassanpour taught at several universities in Canada, including the University of Toronto (from 1999 to 2009). His intellectual and historical contributions have had a significant impact on Kurdish language studies, theories of nationalism, Kurdish media studies, and Kurdish sociopolitical history, as well as the class analysis of the peasant movement and other social movements in the Middle East. Amir Hassanpour passed away in 2017.[13]

Hassanpour's personal collection of materials related to Kurdish history and grassroots organizations, as well as his own papers, were donated to the University of Toronto Archives and Records Management Services (UTARMS), where I had the chance to work on appraising, describing, transliterating, and arranging them. During this work, I had the opportunity to explore and engage with Hassanpour's revolutionary counter-archiving practice. I also had the chance to reflect and work closely with Daniela Ansovini, the UTARMS archivist, on how we could activate Hassanpour's counter-archiving praxis in the process. In this article, I build on this work experience to demonstrate how understanding Hassanpour's personal archive relies on a historical understanding of the condition of memory institutions and archiving as it relates to Kurds and Kurdish and Iranian communist revolutionaries.

However, before discussing this fonds and expanding further on the archival process, I first need to narrate my own life journey to show how my life experience in Iran assisted me in understanding Amir Hassanpour's archiving vision, as well as in developing my skills and ethics of care. This will also underscore the significant importance of political analysis in the construction of archives.

My Personal Narrative

I was born and raised in postrevolution Iran, where I experienced firsthand the effects of a systematic censorship regime that effectively erased historical traces contradicting the official Shi'a revolutionary ideology and state-sponsored historiography.[14] I was born in Kerman, a province in southeast Iran, historically known for its relative religious tolerance and its diverse communities of different

faiths.[15] However, despite this historical identity, during my youth, it was a challenge to find any traces of those communities I had read or heard about. The rise of an Islamic State in 1979, along with decades of terror, coerced migration, and economic subjugation, rapidly changed the province's historical identity.

On the streets of Kerman in the 1990s, there were hardly any signs of Zoroastrians, Sufis, Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Shaykhis, Azelis, or Isma'ilis. Instead, what I and other wanderers in the city could see was a state-sponsored homogeneous revolutionary Shi'a culture. This culture went to extreme lengths, such as forcefully converting the only church in town into a taxi service station, transforming the city's Jewish neighborhood into an intimidating space with half-destroyed buildings and difficult-to-navigate alleys, erasing any sign of a Baha'i community ever existing in the city, and constructing a highway that cut through and destroyed a historic Isma'ili and Sufi house in a nearby town.[16]

To understand this, a brief historical sketch is helpful. With the consolidation of power by the radical Islamic parties after the revolution of 1979, the early revolution's brief period of political freedom and freedom of expression was suppressed. A few months after the revolution, a state-sponsored cultural purging began. This period, known as the Cultural Revolution (1980–1983), aimed to purge the academia of Iran from "Western and non-Islamic" influences and align it with the revolutionary and political Islam.[17] The effects of this cultural engineering have been long-lasting, impacting publishers, printers, historians, writers, and cultural heritage institutions.

Furthermore, since the early 1980s, book publication inside Iran has been subjected to constant governmental control and a systematic process of preprint licensing and censorship.[18] According to the law, all manuscripts must be submitted to Iran's Ministry of Culture for preauthorization and licensing before they can be printed. In a lengthy process, anonymous agents within the Ministry of Culture review each manuscript to ensure it adheres to the ideological and conservative ethical guidelines of the Islamic regime. This process has resulted in systematic censorship, effectively suppressing the formal publication and distribution of numerous historical narratives, as well as voices from minoritized ethnic,[19] religious, and LGBTQ communities over the past forty years.

Despite these conditions, a clandestine and grassroots culture of resistance developed in Iran, where activists, intellectuals, ordinary people, poets, artists, and sympathizers with the Pahlavi regime would pass on stories, histories, images of documents, and suppressed memories to the generation born after the revolution.

However, to enter such an underground counterculture and gain access to the memory of resistance and the memory that resisted state-sponsored homogenization, one had to develop specific personal skills and ethical sensibilities. The construction of state-sponsored ideology in Iran, to which I will return later in this article, relies on a constant battle to appropriate, undermine, and reshape language, customs, values, desires, and beliefs. The state appropriates several key terms, reevaluates historical

moments, dehumanizes certain social and religious groups, and systematically excludes secular and unorthodox religious voices. Therefore, to build politicized trust[20] with suppressed and marginalized communities, it was crucial to study their history from their point of view, being highly attentive and respectful of the sensitivity of different religious and social communities. One had to understand not only marginalized communities' desires, languages, and histories, but also their fears, concerns, and social and political traumas. Building trust with these communities further called for constant reflection on the rules and ethics of engagement, as well as understanding why certain members of such communities may become upset, disheartened, discouraged, or uncertain about something one has said, implied, or done. Moreover, it was necessary to develop an ethics and understanding of secrecy and responsibly share these suppressed histories and publications with others, always being mindful of not putting those involved in the collecting process in danger.

Satellite TV and the Internet assisted in providing wider exposure to unofficial accounts and access to excluded voices. Years later, external hard drives became an asset. Sharing the documents, movies, historical images, and e-books collected on hard drives with other graduate students and young friends could easily make your day, if not your week. This was a social and cultural practice unique to the sociohistorical moment and context of Iran. Reflecting on those days, I believe that under these conditions, many young Iranians learned to become counterculture archivists and collectors—cautious about what they would collect, actively pursuing it, constantly rethinking how to organize the files, and always carefully considering the ways and methods of responsibly and securely sharing their resources with others.

In 2014, a few years after moving to Canada, I became Dr. Hassanpour's research assistant to help with his seminal work on the Mukriyan peasant movement in Kurdistan (1952–1953). For almost four years, I worked closely with him on extracting data from historical archives and translating declassified documents. I learned, among other things, from his archival analysis and his meticulous scholarly editing and formatting guidelines.[21]

About two years after Professor Hassanpour's death, in 2019, I sat behind the tables in the UTARMS reading room to appraise, translate, and describe his fonds. The Amir Hassanpour Fonds is multilingual, predominantly consisting of English, Sorani Kurdish, Persian, and Arabic materials. This fonds documents Professor Hassanpour's professional and personal life, including his various research projects; correspondence with scholars, intellectuals, writers, and political leaders; and his efforts to preserve the Kurdish oral, visual, and textual heritage. Over the span of four decades, Amir Hassanpour actively collected books, pamphlets, journals, musical cassettes and CDs, videos, and ephemera, driven by his commitment to preserving the history of international revolutionary movements and his vision to establish the discipline of Kurdish studies at the University of Toronto. His

dedication to preserving the Kurdish documentary heritage, in various forms, was a response to the historical suppression of the cultural and political struggles of the Kurdish people.[22]

The Kurds, an indigenous people of the Mesopotamian plains totaling approximately forty million, have their own distinct culture and language, and a long history of struggle for national liberation. However, they are dispersed across four different countries in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey). These Middle Eastern nation-states have attempted to rewrite their national histories by erasing the histories, culture, and struggles of the Kurdish people. The Kurdish independence movement received international support through the Treaty of Sèvres (signed between the Allies of World War I and the Ottoman Empire), which included a provision for an autonomous Kurdish state. However, this commitment was promptly neglected by the Treaty of Lausanne (signed between the same parties). Despite the Kurds' continued fight for self-determination, the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s witnessed brutal betrayals by the West and violent persecution by repressive regimes in the Middle East. These actions have resulted in ongoing warfare, genocide,[23] multiple waves of forced migration, and the formation of Kurdish diasporic communities in Europe and North America.[24]

Archiving the Kurds: The Case of Iran

As mentioned earlier, the case of the Kurds represents a unique example of a stateless and suppressed nation, offering a specific lens to examine the role of the national state and social hierarchy in modern archiving. It serves as a case study to understand how the condition of statelessness and national subjugation affects the processes of archiving and documentation. Furthermore, the Kurdish case and archives related to the Kurds provide insights into the significance of archiving in relation to practices such as orality,[25] systematic suppressions like linguicide, human and cultural rights, social and cultural struggles (cultural resistance and survival), dispersal and diaspora, and identity.[26]

Modern systematic and centralized archiving is a relatively recent phenomenon in many countries in the Middle East. There have been a few studies on the archiving processes in premodern Islamic societies. Jürgen Paul's survey of the remaining archival records reveals a variety of archival practices in Islamic societies. Paul suggests that the archives of shrines come closest to institutional archiving in the Islamic world,[27] as they were used to preserve endowment documents related to the space. However, the extant records, especially those predating 1500, are fewer than one might hope. Some scholars propose that institutions did not maintain legal records due to the emphasis on oral testimony in many schools of Sharia law.[28] Others, like Paul, discuss how documents would be sold for their paper value or reused once the administrative archives and documents were deemed no longer

useful or after wars and lootings. Hirschler also reflects on the case of the Cairo *geniza* and similar storerooms, arguing that many of the remaining archives were not originally intended for preservation but were left in those storerooms to be respectfully discarded as they bore the name of God.[29]

Historically, the establishment of modern archival institutions in the Middle East took place within the context of imperialism, colonialism, and nation-state building. The formation and purpose of archival institutions cannot be separated from this context. In the case of Iran, the National Archives of Iran was established in 1960. During this year, the law for establishing the National Archives was ratified, which created a central organization responsible for collecting and preserving Iran's national documents and providing public access to them. This organization also had the authority to determine which documents were deemed valuable for preservation. However, the Ministry of Defense was exempted from passing its documents to the national archives, and a separate committee was established within the Ministry of Defense to decide on the collection and disposal of its documents based on its own regulations (Article 8).

The case of Iranian Kurds illustrates why the aforementioned "national" institution could not possibly be inclusive of Kurdish culture, history, and aspirations. In 1941, Iran was occupied by Allied Forces, and, after World War II, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (in power from January to December 1946) was established in the northwest of Iran. However, when Soviet forces began to withdraw from Iran in March 1946, the Iranian state deployed its army to regain full control over the Kurdish provinces. Iran's army defeated the Kurdish government and reestablished centralized control over the region. In simple terms, one of the most prominent Kurdish struggles in the twentieth century was crushed by the Pahlavi army. This raises the question: what are the chances of having an inclusive "national" archives when the process of nation-state building involved the suppression of certain communities, peoples, and political aspirations? Moreover, when the army responsible for such suppression has the authority to determine the fate of documents related to its own affairs, the integrity and inclusiveness of the archives are called into question.

Similar questions can be raised regarding the Iranian state's relationship with its Kurdish population in the immediate years following the 1979 revolution. Just a few months after the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's political leader at the time, issued a *fatwa* against Kurdish rebels, leading to numerous casualties among the Kurds and subsequent political and cultural suppression in the Kurdish region.[30]

As discussed by Robinson-Sweet, documents that recall past wrongdoings by the government pose a threat in the eyes of the state.[31] Mbembe aptly states that "the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state." Consequently, states employ various methods, ranging from destruction and commemoration to the commodification of memory, to manage this threat.[32] By controlling the archives,

states control social memory and history. Harris explores this phenomenon in the case of South Africa.[33] In a comparable vein, the Islamic Republic, functioning as a religious capitalist regime characterized by meticulously structured, gender-based segregation and actively pursuing an authoritarian neoliberal agenda,[34] assumes authority over the collective remembrance of society as a strategic component of its mission to fortify its ideological foundations. Much like apartheid-era South Africa, the Islamic regime distorts memory institutions to support its official propaganda.[35]

After the revolution, Iran's National Library took on the responsibility of mobilizing knowledge about the "Islamic" revolution. In 2002, the National Archives of Iran merged with the National Library of Iran, resulting in the formation of a central institution known as the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLI). It is evident that the institutional agenda to mobilize knowledge about the revolution as an "Islamic" one influences the way this institution documents Iran's pre- and postrevolutionary history.

It is worth questioning whether the NLI, an institution mandated to mobilize knowledge about the "Islamic" revolution, would feel compelled to collect and preserve the struggles of national and religious minoritized communities for their rights. The question not only pertains to responsibility but also raises concerns of trust. Would dissidents and minoritized communities trust such a national (Islamic) archives, even if it made efforts to collect their documents? How might they become subsumed within the state's discourse?

The NLI can also face criticism regarding its language policies, outreach efforts, and accessibility. Despite millions of Iranians speaking Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, and Baluchi as their mother tongues, the NLI only indexes and catalogs materials in Persian. Additionally, the center imposes its ideological agenda by implementing strict access policies. An example illustrating the practices of the NLI concerning access to books that do not align with its ideology is the last book that Hassanpour published during his lifetime, which focuses on the future of communism.[36] The topic is evidently censored and not openly discussed in Iran. Although the book is published by an oppositional communist political party in Italy, the NLI possesses a copy of it classified as "not to be loaned" on its official website. Denying access is not limited to Hassanpour's book; there are numerous instances of the NLI withholding lending books or providing access to its collections for ideological and political reasons. Furthermore, in terms of outreach, the NLI does not actively engage with historically excluded, marginalized, and minoritized communities and nations within the geographical borders of Iran to seek their opinions on records pertaining to their social and cultural lives.

The nation-states in which Kurds reside, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, have a long history of systematically and actively erasing the history and culture of Kurdish nationals. Memory institutions have played a significant role in this process as well. For example, there is currently no institution dedicated to preserving the

history and archiving documents related to the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (January–December 1946) in northwest Iran. Both the Pahlavi State (1925–1979) and the Islamic State (1979–present) depicted this republic as a secessionist and pro-Soviet state. State suppression goes beyond the direct repression of movements and the brutalization of activists; it also involves erasing the historical and documentary evidence of these movements as a means of silencing, allowing only state-sanctioned narratives of history. Clearly, this deliberate obliteration affects how the state archives movements and portrays struggles.[37]

Under the aforementioned conditions, community archiving and personal archives have become important forms of counter-archiving activism, particularly on the Internet. For instance, Azərbaycan Mədəniyyət Ocağı (Ocaq) is an initiative by Turkish Azeris in northwestern Iran. Since 1991, this community-led project has collected materials regarding the sociocultural life of Turkish Azeris in Iran. It is a case of a community effort to build an archives in the face of Persianization of culture and linguistic and cultural discrimination against Turkish ethnic groups in contemporary Iran. Another example of community counter-archiving is the establishment of Baha'i Persecution in Iran by the Baha'i International Community to document its systematic persecution.[38] However, this archives is limited to documenting the persecution of Baha'is in Iran. There is currently no archives that preserves and documents the social and cultural life of Baha'is in Iran, as such documentation would put people in their community at risk.

The Archives of Iranian Opposition Documents is an attempt led by an individual to collect and provide digital access to the historical documents of political dissidents and oppositional political organizations. Many of the documents archived on this website are either not actively collected by the National Library of Iran or, if collected, are not accessible to researchers.

The Iranian American Digital Archive Project (IADAP) is an initiative aimed at preserving and sharing the history and experiences of Iranian Americans through a digital archival platform. It focuses on documenting the Iranian diaspora's contributions, struggles, and cultural heritage in the United States. Through its efforts, the project aims to preserve Iranian American history, counter stereotypes and misconceptions, and promote a deeper understanding of the Iranian American community's cultural heritage and its contributions in the United States.

The examples provided here highlight how communities, activists, historians, and scholars have developed methods to challenge the state's hegemony over social memory through counter-archiving practices. These counter-archives play a crucial role in shaping social memory, giving voice to the voiceless, and actively documenting society.

The case of the Amir Hassanpour Fonds and his archiving praxis should be understood within this context as an example of how personal archives contribute to such counter-archiving initiatives. This fonds specifically emphasizes the importance

of the role of the creator in counter-archiving practices and prompts the question of how a creator's politics and theories can be considered in the archiving process of personal documents.

Amir Hassanpour's Vision and Legacy in Archiving

Traditional archival theory often overlooks the role of the creator. However, private archives clearly demonstrate "the creator's active role in fashioning their archive."[39] The case of the Amir Hassanpour Fonds exemplifies how a personal archive, focused on Kurdish history, political parties, left groups, and grassroots organizations, can document public life and politics in a manner that public records cannot. Hassanpour's vision for preserving endangered Kurdish materials was genuinely revolutionary. His archiving practice was fundamentally an act of activism, actively documenting and representing those who are marginalized through mechanisms of suppression and censorship.

Hassanpour collected materials that document the activities of short-lived social and political groups, as well as the bulletins, fliers, and ephemera published by Kurdish groups and societies in exile. Without his initiative, many of these documents would have been lost to researchers, given the lack of any state-sponsored efforts. The fact that some of the materials he gathered were banned in the countries where Kurds reside further underscores the significance of his transnational intellectual and political network, as well as his ability to build trust with various communities to acquire out-of-print and underground written materials, exile publications, and clandestine political pamphlets.

In addition to written records, Hassanpour also collected oral tradition and expression. For instance, he conducted oral history interviews for the Kurdish Women's Project and recorded linguistic variations of the Kurdish language, including endangered Kurdish-language varieties.[40] For Hassanpour, the suppression of Kurds was connected to the suppression of other nations in the Middle East (such as Palestine) and globally. Consequently, addressing the Kurdish question required a broader inquiry and revolutionary praxis to combat the national and transnational forces of patriarchal capitalism in the region and beyond.[41]

As Campbell discusses in the case of the Hip-Hop Archives, archiving the voices of an excluded group should not lead to erasing the essence of their culture.[42] Similarly, when archiving a personal counter-archive, it is essential for the archivist to engage closely with the context in which the counter-archive was developed. This requires a creative and in-depth understanding of the creator's archival practices and the vision behind the counter-archive.

While Amir Hassanpour was not a professional archivist or a theorist of archival practice, his personal archival practice, as well as his occasional analysis of archives in his works, clearly demonstrates a specific understanding of the relationship

between personal and political identity and archives. As a Marxist intellectual with a visionary approach to archiving Kurdish history and the history of class struggle and social movements in the Middle East, Hassanpour's archiving practice was guided not only by radical empathy toward the subjects and communities he was archiving but also by the importance of theory and politics in the pursuit of social justice. His Marxist theory led to the development of a theoretical and political understanding of the value of certain records, shaping his active archiving of oppression, exploitation, subjugation, subordination, solidarity, and internationalism.

In a proposal entitled "The Protection of the Kurdish Cultural Heritage," which is now part of his fonds at the University of Toronto, Hassanpour expresses his concern about the vulnerability of Kurdish archives and suggests an institutional solution. He highlights the absence of a central institution that could "collect, preserve, restore, study, and make accessible the national heritage of all Kurds in the domain of the traditional arts, particularly oral literature, music, and dance." Stressing the urgency of establishing such an institution, the proposal acknowledges the linguistic and ethnic policies, violence, and threats that Kurds face in some countries where they reside, endangering the living practice of the national Kurdish cultural heritage. Although the proposal was never implemented due to budgetary and political constraints, it aimed to establish a central institution for the comprehensive collection and maintenance of the Kurdish national cultural heritage.[43] This proposal demonstrates that, for Hassanpour, the objective of archiving went beyond preservation and encompassed a broader understanding that aligns with what Sheffield describes as stewardship. The proposal advocates active archiving, archiving for social justice, archiving social movements, creating accessibility, and generating knowledge.

In his article titled "The Absence of Peasant Revolts in the Middle East: A Historiographic Myth," Hassanpour examines the inadequate archival representation of the peasant uprising of 1952–1953 in the Mukriyan region of Iran's Kurdistan. He delves into the reasons behind the insufficient documentation of this uprising and discusses the impact of ideology on archiving. Hassanpour highlights that, while this uprising is documented in various foreign official records, it remains absent from the literature on Iranian politics and history, revealing the constraints on studying history as a process of class struggle.

By exploring this specific historical case, Hassanpour illustrates how various social and ideological forces have suppressed the documentation and study of such history, particularly through the lens of class struggle. These forces include 1) the Iranian state, which promoted a narrative focused on kings and hindered investigations into class struggles throughout history; 2) political parties and their ideologies, such as the underrepresentation of class struggles within Kurdish society due to the emphasis on Kurdish nationalism; 3) the ideological and theoretical commitments of researchers and archivists; 4) the social structure of rural areas

(feudalism), which makes fieldwork challenging and even perilous; 5) the reign of state terror and censorship, which discourages individuals from allowing the recording of anything of a political nature; and 6) state policies that deny researchers access to state archives.[44]

Having placed the Amir Hassanpour Fonds in the wider context of counter-archiving practices in the Middle East and discussed his archival vision and theory, I will now delve into how personal counter-archives can be described, preserved, and archived to effectively reflect the creator's vision and goals.

Activating Ethics of Care

In their article "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," Caswell and Cifor advocate an ethics of care, which they describe as feminist ethics, to position archivists as caregivers who are responsible for records creators, subjects, users, and communities.[45] They call for an ethical relationship with records throughout the entire process of archiving, from appraisal to outreach. They argue that this empathetic approach, grounded in hospitality, can foster inclusivity in archival interventions. Their call for a social justice agenda in archives emphasizes the need for critical analyses of power, efforts to promote equity in resource allocation and opportunities, advocacy for the inclusion and agency of marginalized individuals and communities in archives, and a reinterpretation of archival concepts to challenge dominant power structures in support of social justice principles and goals.[46]

I argue that this feminist ethics of care would benefit theoretically and in its application by engaging in a social and historical inquiry into archival institutions and practices. Reflecting on Amir Hassanpour's counter-archiving practice and theory, I believe that to activate and implement the social justice agenda proposed by Caswell and Cifor, archivists need theoretical and analytical frameworks to scrutinize the social forces that contribute to archival destruction and loss. This includes understanding the role of patriarchal, racist, and capitalist social relations in defining what is considered worthy of archiving and the systematic and brutal suppression and destruction of records in the Middle East, as seen in the case of the Kurds.

Without meaningful dialogue between the feminist approach and a dialectical historical and social analysis, the ethics of care remains vulnerable to being reduced in practice to an individualized culture of archiving, placing the ethical burden solely on caregiving archivists. Meanwhile, militarized capitalism, with its various ideologies of Islamism, nationalism, and fundamentalism, continues to perpetuate large-scale destruction of archival records, libraries, and cultural centers in the Middle East.

To avoid this, it is helpful to build a theoretical conversation between Caswell and Cifor's feminist approach and Marxist theory. Marxist feminists have employed Marx's critique of ideology in their scholarship, demonstrating how ideologies of racism and patriarchy play a significant role in mediating and normalizing the ruling relations of capitalism.[47] A Marxist-feminist approach recognizes that archives are not neutral repositories of historical information but are shaped by power structures and class interests. It seeks to expose and challenge the ways in which dominant classes and patriarchal systems have historically controlled and shaped archival collections, leading to the marginalization and erasure of certain voices and experiences. A Marxist-feminist approach to archiving further recognizes the potential of archives as tools for activism, advocacy, and social justice, leveraging archival materials and narratives to challenge dominant ideologies.

The application of Marxist feminist theory further enables us to comprehend the role of institutional mandates at a more analytical level. Within an organization, discourses and texts serve to "co-ordinate" individuals' activities and "organize" the relationships "between individuals and knowledge."[48] Institutional and organizational texts function as "organizers and co-ordinators of social relations."[49] The Marxist feminist approach aims to creatively reinterpret, redefine, and rewrite institutional mandates to recover and document the experiences of marginalized groups, such as working-class women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and other minoritized, oppressed, or underrepresented groups.

In archiving Amir Hassanpour's personal collection, we were inspired by his Marxist approach to the archives, aiming to incorporate it into archival processing while also adhering to the ethics of care and best practices. Reflecting on this process, Daniela Ansovini, a UTARMS archivist, highlights the significance of collaboration and the emergence of essential questions surrounding language and the political implications embedded within the records. These developments prompted the archives' staff to engage in profound introspection, enabling them to critically examine their capacity to perceive and interact with records and individuals, and, on a broader scale, their responsibilities in navigating cultural differences and addressing power imbalances.[50]

We aimed to break free from the constraints of traditional archival practices and envision a future that is more inclusive, equitable, and transformative. This shift necessitated broadening and reimagining the archives' purpose and a reevaluation of the power dynamics entrenched within the institution. Through the UTARMS's staff unwavering dedication to this transformative process and their acknowledging the archives' potential as a site of resistance and social change, the UTARMS archivists sought to actively amplify the voices of historically marginalized communities and provide a platform for alternative narratives to flourish. UTARMS serves as both the official repository for the University of Toronto and an archives that preserves the papers of individuals and groups associated with the university. The staff embarked

on a creative reinterpretation of the latter service with the primary aim of simplifying the process of acquiring Hassanpour's complete collection, including his valuable reference materials. This strategic reinterpretation allowed them to tap into the full breadth of Hassanpour's collection, ensuring that his extensive reference materials, integral to his work and legacy, as well as essential resources for further research and study, could be acquired and preserved effectively.

In the following sections, I will briefly discuss some of the approaches employed by UTARMS to implement the acquisition of Amir Hassanpour's counter-archive.

Building Relationships

In practice, gaining access to a private archive often involves establishing social connections with the individual. Personal archives have also been the subject of case studies aimed at expanding the field of archiving by focusing on collaborative work with the archive owner, not only concerning traces of the past but also ongoing lives. Ashmore, Craggs, and Neate note how working with the owner facilitates conversations, divergences, and stories that contribute to contextualizing the archival materials.[51] In the case of Hassanpour's personal archive, the close relationship between UTARMS and Dr. Shahrzad Mojab, who was Hassanpour's lifelong intellectual partner and collaborator on several projects, played a crucial role in contextualizing and describing the fonds, as well as ensuring appropriate terms of restriction, as will be discussed further.

Moving beyond Institutional Appraisal Practices

UTARMS typically accepts original materials and avoids duplicates or copies. However, considering the sensitivity of Kurdish historical documents, as discussed earlier, our appraisal procedure was expanded to include certain copied materials. We evaluated the accessibility of each document or publication based on the type of censorship described previously. This resulted in the retention of records that may have been duplicated, but their preservation was deemed important due to their political significance.

Privacy Considerations

Similarly, we took into account the political context as a significant factor when considering access restrictions for individuals implicated in the records. While considering the effects of making private information publicly available is routine in the archival profession, in this case, we approached it with heightened awareness of potential risks. In doing so, in addition to my historical and legal understanding of the situation in Iran, we worked closely with Dr. Mojab to gain insights into potential

areas where this information could be revealed. Her understanding and involvement in aspects of some of Hassanpour's projects helped determine appropriate terms of restriction.

Multilingualism

Amir Hassanpour, a linguist, directed his attention toward the connection between language and identity. He vehemently criticized the process of language purification and the imposition of monolingual policies, which led to the suppression and, in some cases, the eradication, of marginalized languages. Additionally, the multilingual nature of the records emphasizes the existence of the multiple cultural contexts in which they are embedded.[52] As we worked on developing the English finding aid, we drew inspiration from Professor Hassanpour's commitment to safeguarding multilingual collections. Therefore, we were determined to make the finding aid available in relevant languages, particularly Persian and Kurdish (Sorani dialect), as these were frequently used by Hassanpour. We also included Kurmanji, the Kurdish dialect that Hassanpour passionately argued should become an official language in the Iraq Kurdistan Regional Government.[53] This approach aimed to ensure accessibility for diverse researchers and communities, both in Toronto and abroad.[54]

Transliteration

From the beginning, we were diligent in capturing the languages represented within each file and considering the transliteration of the text. Transliteration from one alphabet to another depends on the specific language and the different standards used in various contexts, such as the Library of Congress versus an encyclopedia. When handling Hassanpour's records, we followed the transliteration used in each document and the way Hassanpour himself labeled/transliterated names or titles. Capturing his own process through his records was crucial in reflecting the contextual nature of each decision within his approach.

Digitization

In addition to language considerations, our awareness of the geographically dispersed Kurdish diaspora led us to think about how researchers would access the materials. Digitization serves not only as a method of dissemination and providing access but also, in the case of materials that have been displaced or are significant to a dispersed community, as a form of digital repatriation and the consolidation of materials held across multiple personal fonds. However, when digitizing and circulating materials more widely, archivists must consider digital ethics and

prioritize people's safety. In the case of the Hassanpour Fonds, in the initial stage, we prioritized digitizing certain original historical documents dating back to the early twentieth century, taking care not to jeopardize people's safety.

Conclusion: Archiving a Diasporic Personal Archive

In the past decade, there has been an ongoing debate within the archival profession regarding the role research institutions should play in preserving community archives. The conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have resulted in the destruction of numerous records by ruling states, insurgent groups, and foreign forces.[55] However, exiled activist scholars and diasporic communities continue to preserve the history of their national struggles and cultures. Meanwhile, North America has witnessed a significant increase and diversification of its immigrant communities from the MENA region, leading to a changing landscape for archives there.

Research institutions can play a crucial role in preserving and safeguarding the diasporic archives in North America. Diasporic archives serve as repositories of cultural, historical, and social records, documenting the struggles, experiences, contributions, and narratives of various diasporic communities. By actively collecting, organizing, and preserving materials, such as photographs, documents, oral histories, and other artifacts, research institutions ensure the long-term preservation and accessibility of diasporic heritage. These archives not only serve as custodians of collective memory but also facilitate research, education, and community engagement.

As I demonstrated through my personal narrative, authoritarian regimes frequently control and manipulate information to uphold their power and to stifle dissent. Archivists and scholars who have experienced such regimes firsthand understand the extent to which information is censored, distorted, or hidden. This understanding not only fosters a deeper recognition of the significance of counter-archives in safeguarding alternative perspectives, marginalized voices, and suppressed historical documentation, it also guides the development of strategies, initiatives, and advocacy efforts aimed at preserving, cataloging, and providing access to counter-archives.

It can be argued that UTARMS's approach to processing Amir Hassanpour's collection represents an attempt toward a progressive archival praxis that goes beyond merely supporting the institutional narrative and acquiring mandated records. This archiving effort is not solely aimed at reflecting the Kurdish community in Toronto or supporting potential future Kurdish studies at UT. It also has an ethical and intellectual objective of engaging in proactive humanitarianism, as described by Gilliland, by supporting the immediate needs and records of millions of forcibly displaced Kurdish diasporas.

Through a close examination of the creator's archiving visions and understanding of his archival practice as part of his lifelong intellectual and political struggle against the oppressive forces of imperialism, capitalism, and nationalism, we sought to activate the Amir Hassanpour Fonds by reinterpreting institutional practices and leveraging the financial resources and intellectual relationships available at UTARMS.

Notes

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4   Gilliland, "A Matter of Life or Death."

5   Natalia Bermúdez Qvortrup and Marta Lucía Giraldo, "Evidence of Jorge: Documentary Traces of a Forced Disappearance in Colombia," *Archivaria* 94, no. 1 (2022): 204–30, https://archivaria.ca/index. php/archivaria/article/view/13875, captured at https://perma.cc/PCE8-6VHV.

6   Henria Aton, "Documenting Disappearance: Personal Archives, Life Writing, and the Self in Sri Lanka," *Archivaria* 94, no. 1 (2022): 232–57, https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/ view/13877, captured at https://perma.cc/45T2-Q32K.

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9   For a study on the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, see Abbas Vali, *The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

10   Amir Hassanpour Fonds, University of Toronto Archives and Records Management Services (UTARMS), B2019-0004.

11   For studies on the Confederation of Iranian Students, refer to Manijeh Nasrabadi and Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Iranian Student Movement and the Making of Global 1968," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), 443–56, https://doi. org/10.4324/9781315150918-41; Afshin Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2002).

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[16] Qaraei provides a report on the destruction of a Christian historical cemetery in Kerman, see Vahid Qaraei, "injā ḥata murdihā ham ārāmish nadārand," *Hamshahrī* (2018).The US Department of State's Office for International Religious Freedom also discusses the destruction of minoritized faiths' holy sites in its 2018 report on Iran, https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran, captured at https://perma.cc/PXL9-3962.

[17] Shahrzad Mojab, "The State and University: The 'Islamic Cultural Revolution' in the Institutions of Higher Education of Iran, 1980–87" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1991).

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[22] Blair Kuntz, Daniela Ansovini, and Mahdi Ganjavi, "A Revolutionary Commitment: Amir Hassanpour's Vision and Achievement in the Preservation of Kurdish History, Culture, and Struggle," in *The Political and Cultural History of the Kurds*, ed. Amir Harrak (Bern, CH: Peter Lang, 2021), 1–18.

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49 Carpenter and Mojab, *Revolutionary*, 102.

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