



**University of
Sheffield**

**Capturing Social Movements: Web archiving needs of Activist Collections in
'The North'.**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
Information School

August 2023

Acknowledgements

When I am asked how long I have been doing my PhD, I think how old my daughter is, who arrived six months into my first year. Becoming a new parent whilst writing my thesis (& all during covid) has been very challenging and my first thanks are to those who believed I could 'do it all'.

My partner Dan has always given me a gentle nudge, knowing better than I do what I am capable of – thank you for being proud of me.

My brother Alex, who is younger but far wiser, helped me every which way he could, from proofreading to enduring incredibly long phone calls – thank you for making yourself available to me.

Thank you as well to my parents and grandparents who have been unwavering in their emotional and financial support.

I also want to thank my supervisors Andrew Cox and Sara Vannini for their wonderful guidance and reading every word I've ever written multiple times. Jorge Martins, too, thank you for your insight during my first year.

A very special thank you to all my participants not only for your involvement in my research but for the work you do to save and share our memories of activism. Everyone at the Sheffield Feminist Archive, the 1 in 12 Club, the Sparrow's Nest, Steel City Queer History, Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Centre, Spirit of Revolt, Govanhill Baths Community Trust, Political Song Collection, Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive, Glasgow Women's Library, and Marx Memorial Library, as well as Jason Scott (Internet Archive), Ed Summers (Documenting the Now), Nicola Bingham (UK Web Archive), and Audrey Wilson (CAHG Scotland), thank you.

Abstract

This thesis explores activist-archivists' experiences of and attitudes towards web archiving in the context of digitally enabled social movements focusing on archives in post-industrial cities in northern Britain. Activist-archives were created to confront the 'archival silences' in official records (Caswell, 2014); the increased use of digital media throughout the life cycle of campaigns (Tréré, 2018) creates a need for activist-archivists to engage with web archiving to ensure these silences do not resurface in web archives. My research questions addressed: How the use of digital media by social movements affects the way activist archives are documenting them; how activist archivists anticipate their archive collections being accessed and used by their communities; the ways in which activist archivists currently engage with web archiving; whether activist archivists see a need for activist web content to be archived; the kinds of barriers these archives experience with regards to archiving the web; and concerns activist archivists have about where activist web content is currently being archived.

Working within an interpretivist postmodern feminist research paradigm, I conducted qualitative ethnographic research via semi-structured interviews and elicited diaries. Between March 2021 and January 2022, I conducted twenty interviews with sixteen activists-archivists from feminist, anarchist, race equality, queer rights, and working-class collections. I also interviewed four archives sector professionals involved in supporting community archives. Seven participants wrote themed diaries which were combined with interview data and analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (2022).

None of the activist-archivists were archiving the web due to a lack of resources including time, skills, and funds. They did, however, recognise the internet's embeddedness in contemporary protest culture and the value in capturing activist web-content to support their missions in reclaiming absent or misrepresented narratives, informing present and future activism, democratising access to information, and archives as evidence for holding authorities to account. They felt a need for more visible and tailored mechanisms of support in amateur web archiving, either in terms of peer-to-peer networks or strengthening existing infrastructures of support. Participants from anarchist-archives also raised concerns around the safety of their communities and archives: they felt that the increased visibility of hosting a web archive could put them at risk of negative attention from law enforcement or alt-right groups.

By focusing on the experiences of amateur archivists, this research offers novel insights regarding the barriers of top-down participatory web archiving efforts, which are typically examined on a macro level. Existing literature in critical archive studies on the archival turn in activism largely deals with the phenomenon in relation to feminist and queer archives in the US, my research deepens our understanding through include under-researched communities, namely black and working-class movements. Finally, this project contributes to the burgeoning field of political memory work emphasising the potential for archivists to have an active role in the shaping and sustainability of social movements.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

The following publication has arisen from this thesis:

Aylward, B., Cox, A.M., Vannini, S. (2023). The revolution will (not) be archived: Web archiving needs of activist collections in the North. *CIRN Prato 2022 Proceedings, 20 YEARS OF CIRN: Examining the past, present, and future of communities and technology Conference, 9-11 November, 2022.*

1. Introduction

“When we lose the records of social movements, we lose the possibilities they offer. We lose possible ways of living our own lives. Our world is poorer for the loss.” (Ziegler, 2014: 105)

1.1. Outlining the contemporary socio-political climate

This thesis will explore the contemporary collecting practices of activist archives in the UK and more specifically in the context of the hybridisation of social movements in the twenty-first century, operating across a combination of online and offline environments (Treré, 2018). Since beginning this doctoral research in October 2018 our world has changed: Britain has had four prime ministers (only one of whom was publicly elected); existing societal fissures have been exposed by the outbreak of Covid-19; and policies including the Police, Crime and Sentencing Act (2022) and Illegal Migration Bill (2023) have given credence to notions of “us” and “them” acting as authorisation of the purification of the UK of all forms of “otherness”.

With digital technologies reshaping our world, the modes of popular engagement in political and social issues have been reconfigured. Not only through the provision of an online arena for debate and commentary in addition to traditional means of protest and advocacy, but by enabling geographically disparate activist groups to connect with parallel organisations and participate in movements on a global level (Fenton, 2016). Since 2010 there has been mass participation in worldwide campaigns such as: the Me Too Movement, advocating for an end to sexual violence (<https://metoomvmt.org/>); Black Lives Matter, against police brutality and systemic racism (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>); and the BDS Movement, for Palestinian liberation from apartheid Israel (<https://bdsmovement.net/>). The current British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and the string of Conservative Party predecessors, have come under widespread scrutiny on issues including but not limited to: the crisis in the NHS; the gender pay gap; the handling of Brexit; continued fracking; homelessness and universal credit; arms deals with Arab nations; the Windrush scandal; and issues of personal integrity, all of which have incited numerous and multi-faceted forms of resistance. Whether the current political climate in Britain includes a decidedly more far-reaching and determined opposition to the prevailing regime, or simply the means of mounting challenges has emigrated to a more accessible and visible platform is yet to be determined. However, this amplification of activism through the use of digital media technologies to incite, coordinate, and commentate on social movements brings with it the ability for connections to be made between local issues and causes being played out on the international stage (Klein, 2000).

The term ‘thinking globally, acting locally’ was coined around the time of the Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 by environmentalist and humanist Rene Dubos (Gerlach, 1991). It has since been adopted as a guiding principle for movements built from the grass roots up.

Gerlach's paper (1991) found that protest and lobbying groups alike will take on global perspectives as a way of legitimising their activities at a local level, as well as providing an ideological basis for forming ties with diverse groups (Gerlach, 1991). Whilst Gerlach's (1991) insights are limited to environmental movements, there are examples of these types of interactions across the spectrum of activist movements.

Of the vast array of causes attracting popular participation in contemporary society, a substantial proportion can be referred to as "New Social Movements" (NSM). Buechler (1995) outlines NSMs as being centred around social identifiers such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, and religious beliefs, and therefore distinct from earlier movements where collective protest identities were constructed around class or economic situation. Just as the New Social Movements developed out of the labour movement of the early twentieth century, New Social Movement theories developed out of, as well as reacted against Marxist analysis of collective action (Buechler; 1995). The following are features common to NSMs: non-hierarchical organisational structures; reorientation of values towards decentralisation of power, de-growth, self-determination, and ecological awareness; and the goal of societal transformation as opposed to political revolution (Gundelach, 1988, and Melucci 1989, both cited in Peterson, 1989: 420-425). Such features can be found in contemporary activism where the collective identities are issue-based, for example environmentalism or pacifism, in addition to the previously mentioned social groupings. The roots of NSMs can be traced to the counterculture movements and student uprisings of 1968, it is also around this time that the foundations of the community archiving movement are beginning to be laid. Though it has not been until the twenty-first century that the community archiving movement has gained momentum (Cook, 2013), critiques of the traditional archive and attempts at democratisation have long existed, most famously, Howard Zinn's 'Secrecy, archives and the public interest' (1977). In addition to encouraging archivists to acknowledge their power and influence over the narrating of history, Zinn (1977) admonishes the traditional archive for its bias towards the powerful, the wealthy, the white skinned, the men and the resulting neglect of everyone else who does not fit into those categories deemed worthy. Despite the synchronicity of their development, the interconnectedness of community archives and NSMs, particularly since the advent of the digital age, has not been fully examined by archival literature. Through the exploration of local activist collecting practices in an increasingly digital society, I will contribute to the field of critical archive studies by increasing our understanding of the archival turn in activism in three novel contexts: the collection of activist materials hosted on the web; the perspective of anarchist and working-class movement archivists; and British urban centres outside of London.

Parallels certainly can be drawn between social activism taking place at a regional level and that which garners support nationwide. In recent years, grass roots activism in Sheffield gained the attention of the mainstream media when the signing of the controversial £2.2billion 'streets ahead' PFI contract in 2012 sparked the mobilisation of local communities and the formation of Sheffield Tree Action Groups (STAG) against the felling of thousands of the city's trees (<https://savesheffieldtrees.org.uk>). In the spring of 2017 eight tree-campaigners were served injunctions by Sheffield City Council, including a Sheffield Green Party councillor (Pidd, 2017; STAG, n.d.) with a further spate of arrests occurring in early 2018. There are perceptible ideological and strategic links between this instance and the anti-fracking protests in Lancashire resulting in the arrest and subsequent high-profile court cases of activists (Baynes, 2018). Taken together these pockets of activity demonstrate the existence of an environmental 'movement' that challenges the pursuit of economic growth at the expense of green spaces and minimising carbon emissions, as opposed to incidents isolated from a narrative of discontent around green issues. Moreover, a growing national consciousness surrounding our environmental impact is reflected by gains made by Green Party councillors in local elections over the last ten years both nationally and within Sheffield specifically, and the participation on a huge scale in the Extinction Rebellion protests and Global Youth Strikes (BBC, n.d.; Extinction Rebellion, 2019; Sheffield City Council, 2018).

As a researcher and activist archivist living in Sheffield, the ways in which the city's culture has been moulded by its activism past and present has provided the foundation for my interest in the relationship between archival work and social movements. The ongoing struggle between STAG, Sheffield City Council, the South Yorkshire Police, and Amey Plc has had and will continue to have a significant impact on shaping the collective memory of the people of Sheffield. A collective memory which arguably has already been sculpted by the city's long, rich history of protest; from clandestine printing activities in the eighteenth century, through the women's movement and the miners' strike action bookending the twentieth century and up to the present (Briggs, 2017). So strong is Sheffield's connection with social activism that it almost seemed as though 2018 was dedicated to celebrating the stoicism of the city's communities through a series of events and exhibitions, festivals, and film screenings. 'Sheffield: Protest and Activism', coordinated by Museums Sheffield, ran from February to July across their four sites (Welcome To Sheffield, 2018), and various institutions and organisations were involved in the annually curated celebrations SheFest, Festival of Debate, Migration Matters, and Melanin Fest among many others. With activism featuring so heavily in the cultural memory and present activities of the people of South Yorkshire, it appears vital that both physical and digital materials relating to protest culture are archived as a significant facet of people's lives.

1.2. Archiving the web

Whilst many of the activities discussed above occur in offline environments, the promotion of, reportage, and conversations around, instances of current activism, including citizen journalism and the coordination of campaigns, as well as celebration of protests past can be found on the web, most significantly on social media platforms (Velte, 2018). In the case of the Occupy Wall Street movement, certainly there was an enormous offline element to their activism, the movement as a whole though would best be described as hybrid with digital technologies playing a significant role (Treré, 2018). The Occupy movement originated on the web, gained momentum on the web, and brought their fury to the rest of the world via the web (Castells, 2012). The impact of the movement's reach has profoundly shaped the character of contemporary social activism; laying the foundations for a society where popular participation in socio-political issues is nothing out of the ordinary.

The ease of public engagement with causes through digital platforms, in combination with both a broadening perspective from the hyper-local to the global and an increasing sense of the relatedness of injustices (Fenton, 2020), leads to the question, is this aspect of our shared experience being captured? Without archives containing the narratives published and shared by movement actors on social media, how will those histories be pieced together in complete and representative ways (Velte, 2020)? The internet has brought with it a new vehicle for agency and the amplification of previously stifled voices, the traces of which remain on feeds and threads of multiple social media platforms, ripe for inclusion in the archive (Cook, 2013). As Pennock (2013: 3) emphasised in a report for the Digital Preservation Coalition, the internet has transcended its original function – “It is now not only a communications hub, but also a unique record of twenty-first century life”, and therefore must be considered a priority when archiving the present day for whatever purpose, be it for future generations or immediate use.

The ephemerality of websites, especially social media platforms – according to the British Library, the life expectancy of a website is as little as seventy-five days and other research suggests as much as eighty percent of webpages are lost a year after publication (Bingham & Byrne, 2021; Costa, Gomez & Silva, 2017) – makes finding a solution to capturing web content all the more urgent to ensure that the most authentic and robust narrative possible can be created before it disappears. To compound the issue, modern archival practice has seen a shift towards public participation across each stage of the archival process, from creation to the gatekeeping of materials. National archives are increasingly engaging with users via initiatives such as digital tagging (Cook, 2013; Ceeney, 2008); archives of every imaginable incarnation are utilising digital media platforms to promote collections and interact with their users; and as Caswell reports (2014), there are cases of community-run

archives employing post-custodial collection models resulting in a rise of speciality archives operating without a physical premise with all their materials hosted virtually.

The concept of archiving the web gained traction as an aspect of the broader digital preservation movement spearheaded by memory institutions at the end of the twentieth century, responding to the need to archive state documents hosted on the web (Ogden, Halford & Carr, 2017). Alongside the systematic collection by National archiving bodies of web-hosted government documentation in-line with national guidelines, such as the Public Records Act (UK), organisations such as the Internet Archive began ventures to capture the web in its entirety purely for its social and cultural significance (Pennock, 2013). However, large-scale web archiving initiatives face the monumental challenge of collecting a near impossible volume of web pages that are constantly being updated and rendered to increasingly complex specifications, which has resulted in the partial capture of content and consequently diminished authenticity of records (Cowl, 2017; Pennock, 2013).

To circumvent this problem, it has been suggested that smaller projects, for example, those that are thematically or geographically bounded, could adopt a “selective collection” policy whereby websites are hand-picked for inclusion based on their relevance (Pennock, 2013). Cowl (2017) refers to this strategy as the “Whole of a Part” approach with the aim of preserving the website in a complete state. Indeed, the research of Vlassenroot et al. (2021) found that where national archiving bodies were archiving social media content, exclusively use selective crawls focussed on events, acts of protest, even responses to emergencies, and occasionally themes to populate their collections. This may be a desirable course of action for archives run independently from the local authority network who wish to preserve their own web-content, which may include public websites and social media accounts, private email and direct message exchanges between organisers, along with a select number of websites related to their archival community, activist networks, engaged publics and any affiliated organisations. The challenges of creating a representative and inclusive web archive, specifically the inclusion of marginalised and fringe content will be further explored in section 2.6 of the literature review.

1.3. Defining the community archive movement

There is evidence of community archives existing as early as the 1930s (Eichhorn, 2013; Mason & Zanish-Belcher, 2007), but it is generally accepted that the last fifty years has witnessed the rise of this movement and its subsequent impact on traditional archival practice (Cook, 2013; Welland & Cossham, 2019). Before tackling the “what?” of the community archiving movement, I first want to briefly outline The “why?”. Through a variety of manifestations, a community archive aims to address the inadequacies in institutional archives in three key areas: inclusion, context, and control

(Schreiner, 2014). The community archiving movement, therefore, is a response to marginalised people's inability to see themselves documented in history and the decision to take the task of creating that narrative into their own hands by building their own collections. The term can refer to any archive run partly or wholly independently from the state or academic institutions by members of a self-identifying community. For instance, though local history archives and LGBTQIA* archives are vastly different in their collecting and their membership, they are both considered community archives (Cook, 2013).

Despite the surge in literature relating to the community archiving phenomenon in recent times, the terminology remains problematic and ultimately inadequate in encompassing the variety of motives and activities engaged in by such projects (Flinn, 2011). Gilliland and Flinn's Keynote address, "Community Archives: What are we really talking about?" (2013), highlighted that, from the outset, there is a fundamental hurdle to finding an appropriate term that captures the essence of the work done by a myriad of grassroots memory-based projects - the combining of two deeply contested concepts "community" and "archive". The first is more commonly disputed on the ground of its lack of specificity as well as an association with "otherness" when used by governing bodies and mainstream media to refer to groups seen as distinct from the majority of a population (Gilliland & Flinn, 2013). Relatedly, Brown (2020) and McKinney (2020) have drawn attention to the issues surrounding this hold-all approach to defining independent archiving efforts, specifically relating to LGBTQIA* archiving. Both scholars asserted that the term community helps to sustain power imbalances within the queer community where the nuances of black and trans experiences are subsumed into cis-normative white narratives of queerness (Brown, 2020; McKinney, 2020). Second, though less widely contested, the application of "archive" to community-based projects, is connected to a rigidity within the archival profession around the traditional notion of what an archive is and what it collects, and the standards employed to care for collections (Gilliland & Flinn, 2013). Compounding the issues above is that not all community archives define themselves as such, resulting in a situation where the academy, the state, and the formal heritage sector are discussing the phenomenon with their own vocabulary that neglects to acknowledge the self-determination of the groups about which they speak (Poole, 2019). On this point, Gilliland and Flinn (2013) suggest that, as long as the term is used with care and respect for the collections and the people who create, manage, and use them, the broad scope of its meaning can be very useful for encouraging conversations and deepening of understanding around the nuances of the phenomenon as a whole.

Circumventing the challenges of defining community-based archival work, prominent scholarship interested in this area have instead offered sets of attributes or themes as frameworks for understanding (Gilliland & Flinn, 2013; Welland & Cossham, 2019). Gilliland and Flinn's keynote

address (2013) deals comprehensively with the characteristics of community-based archiving in terms of; collection, form, aims and objectives; and structures and governance. Welland and Cossham (2019), on the other hand, provide a stripped back set of four key themes based on an analysis of community archiving definitions, which are as follows:

1. Active support and participation in the archival work by a self-defined community;
2. Spaces - physical or virtual - that provide their communities with validation, and access to collective memory and the narratives that may be created from it;
3. A more flexible collecting approach: expanding the boundaries of what types of materials an archive contains;
4. Autonomy over their collections - operating without direct government funding or control.

For the purpose of mapping the community-based archives identified in the preliminary research undertaken for this study into activist community archival work, I have used a set of five key principles posited by Caswell (2014), in combination with definitions of activist archiving (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie, Goldstein, Fair & Hoyer, 2015). Caswell's principles have been chosen because they mirror and expand on the themes outlined above (Welland & Cossham 2019), centring the innate politicism of community-based archival work. As well as the aforementioned participatory approach to archiving, shared stewardship of collections between archives and their communities, and diversity of histories being captured in a range of formats including materials not typically accessioned by traditional archives, Caswell's principles emphasise a distinct political agenda in the celebration of marginalised voices and a mindfulness of the constant evolution of collective and individual identity (Caswell, 2014). Shared stewardship, which sees the role of preserving materials and allowing access to the archive as a collaboration between community members and archivists, is a feature that is emphasised unwaveringly across the literature to varying degrees. In some cases, stewardship is ideally relinquished completely so that the community being documented is solely responsible for the archive (Ziegler, 2014) and in others it is seen as a way of bridging the gap between researchers and the researched allowing for the creation of mutually beneficial relationships (Teetaert, 2014). Another factor when considering activist archives for inclusion in this research, which ties in with the theme of more fluid collection policies, is the use of the terms 'library' and 'archives' interchangeably and the frequent merging of collections and access models (Caswell, 2014; Gilliland & Flinn, 2013; Welland & Cossham, 2019). Ziegler (2014) notes that it is common for community archiving projects to collect published writings alongside unique documents which come together to form the documentary heritage of a movement, relatedly, community-based archiving projects frequently refer to themselves as libraries, resource centres or historical

associations to better capture the collections they hold and the work that they do (Sheffield, 2017). Indeed, a number of projects participating in this research embody this model.

The term *activist archive* and its associated definitions link in with Caswell's assumed political character of community archives by outlining various categories of interactions between archives and activism. Three main categories are considered in the writings of Flinn and Alexander (2015) and Sellie, Goldstein, Fair and Hoyer (2015), and are as follows: *active archivists*, *archiving activism*, and *activist archiving*. Archive professionals who reject the archival tradition of passive and neutral record-keeping, instead advocating for absolute transparency of their influence on each stage of the archival process are considered *active archivists* (Flinn & Alexander, 2015). *Archiving activism* is defined as the collection and documentation by any archive of materials created by or in association with activist groups and campaigns; an example of this within the research region can be seen in Feminist Archive North (FAN) which is housed at Leeds University library (<https://feministarchivenorth.org.uk/>). It is emphasised that no relationship between the archive and the community is assumed beyond the collecting of items (Sellie et al. 2015). *Activist archiving*, however, refers to archival activities engaged in by individuals or communities that self-identify as activists and whose collecting is often bounded to a single cause, campaign, or social group. Their archival work is regarded as a fundamental aspect of their activism as opposed to agenda-free documenting of undisputed narratives; The Sparrow's Nest, an anarchist community collecting protest material within Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire, is a good example of this (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015; <http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/index.php>). Taking into consideration the criteria put forward by Sellie et al. (2015), an archive can only be truly activist in nature if it is both a collection of activist materials and under the control of the community it represents. Therefore, all *activist archives* correspond with the themes of community-based archives, yet not all community-based archives are explicitly activist; this is a distinction I will endeavour to maintain throughout the research process.

1.4. Community archiving and social justice

Early connections between political theory and contemporary archiving realities are largely found in feminist archival literature (Eichhorn, 2016; Mason & Zanish-Belcher, 1999), however, evidence of community archives "facilitating movement building" exists across the full spectrum of causes captured by the concept of New Social Movements (Cook, 2013; Tobar, 2015: 17; Yaco, Jimerson, Caldwell Anderson & Temple, 2015). A handful of case studies conducted in both the US and Britain emphasised that community archivists perceive their collections as vital tools for realising the goals of their activism (Sadler & Cox, 2017; Sellie et al., 2015; Tobar, 2015; Yaco, et al., 2015). The prioritisation of access over preservation is a position shared irrespective of the specific social

movement the archive identifies with and the institutional structure within which it is operating. Ethnographic research at the Interference Archive (Brooklyn) saw volunteers referring to their approach as “preservation through use”, emphasising how the social utility of their collection is activated by people’s interaction with it (Sellie et al., 2015: 461). Similarly, organisers of the Sheffield Feminist Archive liken their collection to a Public Information Service with access to materials being paramount to widening awareness of prevailing gender inequalities beyond their current sphere of influence (Sadler & Cox, 2017).

The community archiving movement has been receiving attention from archival scholars from as early as the 1970s but gained momentum at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Over the last two decades a significant amount of research has been conducted into their creation, processes, and use; their relationship with the communities or institutions within which they are embedded; as well as theoretical work - dominated so far by post-modernist thought (Cook, 2013; Craven, 2008; Prescott, 2008). Whilst the concept of collective identities being constructed through community archives and the shift in power brought by challenging dominant narratives preserved by official archives is certainly valid, the extent of the politicism of some cases cannot be understood through this lens. Flinn (2011) and Caswell (2014) both posited that the community archive movement is inherently political: enabling the empowerment of marginalised pockets of society through the creation of collective memories and reclamation of hidden histories. I believe this line of thought suggests that empowering communities is the political objective of community archiving, yet the aforementioned cases also see that empowerment as an essential prerequisite for participation in social activism. Therefore, a portion of this current research will aim to reinterpret this empowerment as a means of enabling communities to directly challenge authority and influence positive change by exploring the relationship between community archives and New Social Movements.

Following the murder of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson the #blacklivesmatter Web Archive was born, an event-based project using the Archive-It service of the Internet Archive (Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015). Tweets about the events of Ferguson were collected, along with embedded URLs, which were then used as the basis for web crawls. The resulting collection contains a second-by-second account of the events of Michael Brown’s murder, responses to it, and subsequent police violence and social unrest in other cities across the US (Rollason-Cass & Reed, 2015). This model of a living web archive, where events are archived as they occur, may be the type of collection activist collections are seeking to build; web archives dedicated to preserving individuals’ interaction with global issues through the collection of social media content and links to relevant activist web content.

1.5. Aim, research questions and objectives

1.5.1. Aim

My research will identify the web archiving needs of activists archiving the documentary heritage of social movements in post-industrial cities in the north of England and Scotland.

The theoretical and empirical strands of my thesis will provide insights into the role contemporary social movements play in the formation and use of activist archives and the extent of their impact, whether operational or ideological, on archival processes in the twenty-first century. The increasing use of digital media platforms throughout the life cycle of social movements, highlights a tangible need for archives interacting with social activism to embark on web archiving initiatives if they are to continue preserving participation in significant causes of our time. My field work will endeavour to identify the web archiving needs of activist collections in the post-industrial north and work towards a long-term solution for mobilising and capturing local participation in social movements.

1.5.2. Research Questions

My research questions are as follows:

1. How has the use of digital media by social movements affected the way activist archives are documenting them?
2. How do activist archivists anticipate their archive collections being accessed and used by their communities?
3. In what ways are activist archivists currently engaging with web archiving?
4. Do activist archivists see a need for activist web content to be archived?
5. What kinds of barriers are these archives experiencing with regards to archiving the web?
6. What concerns do activist archivists have about where activist web content is currently being archived?

1.5.3. Objectives

To address the above I will:

1. Review the existing literature in the following areas:
 - social movements and their evolution in the digital era,
 - interactions between archives and social justice,
 - theoretical and empirical research into community and radical archiving trends,
 - a history of web archiving and current strategies – the successes and shortcomings,
 - issues of ethics and bias when archiving the web,
 - imagined use of community-based physical and web archives in the twenty-first century.
2. Identify social movements in the north of the UK that are actively documenting themselves or affiliating with existing archives.

3. Spend twelve months collecting elicited themed diaries from participants in a range of activist archives.
4. Conduct interviews with activist archivists across research sites.
5. Analyse the data collected in accordance with reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).
6. Produce a theorisation of activist archivists' engagement with web archiving alongside narratives of local New Social Movement activist archives in the north of the UK.

Taken together, insights sought from activist archivists along with interpretations from the existing literature will shed light on the ways in which popular participation online in local, national, and global debates are being documented, as well as the motives behind their collections. Furthermore, it will contribute to the theoretical literature surrounding the politicisation of the community archiving phenomenon by concentrating on a hitherto neglected connection between archival activity and digitally enabled social movements. This research also has the potential to have a lasting positive impact on the activist archives involved. By working with archives whose ideologies and organisational structure overlap, it may be possible to build a regional network of community archives to collaboratively web archive an aspect of our shared experience that might otherwise be lost.

1.6. Positioning myself in the research

At this point I will disclose my motivations for exploring these themes, as well as consider the ways in which my philosophical position has influence over my methodological choices throughout the course of this research. I am a feminist researcher; by this I mean that I am committed to ensuring that the experiences of self-identifying women and marginalised identities more broadly are given equal space and received as valid and worthy; I acknowledge that the research process can allow for the perpetuation of societal power imbalances. Moreover, I believe in reflexivity on my location within my work – how my position influences the questions asked; how my insights are presented; and I see the research process as empowering (Ackman et al., 2001; England, 1994; Manning, 2018). Like others before me, I am keenly aware that my social identifiers as a white, middle-class, well-educated person will put me in a privileged position (England, 1994; Manning, 2018; Meadow, 2013), especially when working with members of activist archiving communities who may belong to marginalised groups that experience discrimination above and beyond their gender. Certainly, the challenges facing the unification of a women's movement that does not divide along lines of race, class and sexuality have long been a topic of discussion, with many viewing these differences as irreconcilable (Tobar, 2014). My potential participants risk being "Othered" due to their race,

ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation and their voices (unintentionally) appropriated (England, 1994). Therefore, in the spirit of feminist ethnographic research (Manning, 2018), I hope that we can embrace our commonalities and collaborate on a project that is just as much *for* my participants as *about* them (Risman, 1993; referenced by Meadow, 2013: 473).

A definite unifying feature of our identities is our participation in social activism. I identify as an activist both in physical and virtual spaces within my local community, as well as wider international movements, I have also been an active member of the Sheffield Feminist Archive' organising group since the summer of 2018 - my involvement in the activities of one of my key research sites will be unpicked in chapter 3. Consequently, my commitment to safeguarding human dignity in addition to my involvement in contemporary protest culture has shaped the direction of my inquiry throughout my academic life. Certainly, for me, the entanglement of archives with issues of social justice and their power to legitimise or discredit narratives – historical and ongoing – attracted me to pursue doctoral research in the field. I am aware that my political and social values have limited the scope of my research to the web archiving needs of groups documenting left-wing activism - as is the case with the majority of the existing literature (Flinn, 2008). Furthermore, with the rise of alt-right organisations globally, but markedly both within in Western democracies and coordinated via virtual platforms (Nagle, 2017), the complete capture of public engagement in socio-political issues cannot be achieved without inclusion of these groups and their activities. It is with this reality in mind that I offer my analysis of the potential contribution web archiving can make to the visions aspired to by the community and activist archives in the north of the UK.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction: Pinpointing the overlap of existing fields of study

The three key areas of this thesis: the community archiving trend; New Social Movements; and web archiving have previously been coupled to explain numerous phenomena of our time, however, the combination of the three into a single focus of study remains unexplored in formal scholarship (Merrill, Keightley & Daphi 2020). Taken individually, the advancement of digital technologies has had a profound effect on the way that social movement actors communicate and organise, this will be dissected in section 2.4 of this literature review. Section 2.5 will consider the emergence of web archiving as a response to the documentation and preservation of our increasingly digital existence. The pitfalls of current web archiving initiatives will be explored in section 2.6 and the specific barriers facing independent archiving efforts to archive content hosted on the web in section 2.7. I will dedicate section 2.8 to understanding the ‘archival turn in activism’ – the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between social movements and community archiving projects as well as the motivations and manifestations of activist archival work. Initially, however, it is important to understand the nature of contemporary social movements, their origins, their grievances, and their organisational ethos; these will be outlined in section 2.2. Following that, alternative schools of thought surrounding social movements will be summarised in section 2.3. I will be concentrating chiefly on the intersection of digital technologies and contemporary social movements and their interaction with activist archival work. These areas of literature support my decision to focus on the engagement of activist collections with web archiving technologies and the methodological choices of my research design.

2.2. The Character of Social Movements in the Twenty-first Century

The character and popularity of contemporary social movements can be understood through the pervasive disenchantment with traditional political processes (Castells, 2012; Tufekci, 2014; Turner, 2013). Since the very tail-end of the twentieth century there has been a shift in socio-political orientation resulting in an engagement with political action rooted in hope, grief, and the will to change society, most markedly in the younger generation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Not only has there been a raising of political consciousness, but a trend towards activists seeking ways to engage with issues outside of mainstream political arenas, turning towards NGOs and New Social Movements (NSMs), the structure of which better reflect the fragmented and individualised character of contemporary communities (Fenton, 2016). Clustering of individuals into identity and issue-based movements is a clear departure from the economically motivated labour struggles of the first half of the twentieth-century (Beuchler, 1995); and whilst NSMs have been the predominant type of activism since the late 1960s, the last two decades has seen growth in individual

empowerment rooted in identity politics (Mason, 2012; Fenton, 2016; Wolfson, 2012). Contemporary social movements may differ vastly in their memberships, their causes, their campaign strategies, yet, they share an ideology - anti-hierarchical organising (Atton, 2010; Fenton 2020; Wolfson, 2012), a prefiguration of the true democracy many of these movements hope to build. Four reasons for increasing loss of support in the state are offered by Tufekci (2014) and are as follows: the 2008 financial crisis and its exacerbation of unfair distribution of wealth across populations; the failure of presiding governments to effectively address global issues such as the climate crisis; increasing authoritarianism and fake democracies; and the rise of oligarchies in the West. Citing Naomi Klein, Fenton (2020) both confirms and extends Tufekci's logic, emphasising the interrelatedness of the havoc being wreaked on people and planet, as well as noting the greater presence and influence of the far-right. Underscoring all of this is the amplification of people's experience of inequality based on their gender, race, and class and a growing consciousness that the conditions of global capitalism are at the root of the problem (Fenton, 2020).

In line with the classification of New Social Movements detailed in the previous chapter, since the millennium there has been a significant rise in issue-based activism responding to the climate crisis, nuclear expansionism, and so forth, as well as grievances attached to group identities including, but not limited to, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Fenton, 2016). More specifically, there is a trend across the literature tying the upsurge in protest movements witnessed in the twenty-first century to the neoliberal economic doctrine of globalisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Flinn, 2008; Mason, 2012). Many pointing to the formation of the Zapatistas (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN*) in Chiapas, Mexico, 1994, as the forerunners of a new logic of resistance, and paving the way for the creation of the transnational activist media network, Indymedia, five years later (Atton, 2010; Fenton, 2020; Wolfson, 2012).

Activism, through the lens of radical democracy – as so many of these contemporary movements work within – manifests in the union of excluded voices that “no longer fit within the liberal parliamentary arena” (Neumayer & Svensson, 2016). This feeling of exclusion is most keenly felt among communities of colour who generally feel they have greater autonomy over their identity and their actions in digital environments (Fenton, 2016). Habermas emphasises the strength of rejection of the “productivist” vision of progress and its ability to bring together a heterogeneous movement of actors from diverse backgrounds (Habermas, 1986: 12). As well as the fragmented nature of identity politics cultivated by the individualisation of society, the existence of a common enemy has encouraged the formation of anti-austerity alliances across age, gender, race, and class (Habermas, 1986).

Activists have identified the neoliberal apparatus, characterised by laissez-faire economic liberalism and free-market capitalism, as the perpetrator of a significant proportion of injustices, especially surrounding economic exploitation - disparity between labour markets in the global south and north, unfair trade agreements, appalling working conditions and negligence of labour rights – and its environmental impact – deforestation and destruction of habitats, increased carbon emissions and water scarcity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells 2012). For instance, Mason’s (2012) commentary of Hosni Mubarak’s removal in 2011 cites Western neoliberal economic intervention, coupled with state corruption and greed, as responsible for the political awakening of the oppressed communities of Cairo. 2011 was a watershed year in the history of social activism, the catalyst of which can be pinpointed to a universally felt “crisis of political legitimacy... following the financial crash of 2008” (Swann & Ghelfi, 2019: 697). In the West, anti-austerity campaigns flourished in Greece, Spain, the UK and the US, and pro-democracy campaigns erupted across North Africa and Southwest Asia (Castells, 2012; Mason, 2012; Swann & Ghelf, 2019).

Disillusionment with neoliberalism extends beyond the grievances regarding the prevailing political system to encompass a deep-rooted distrust of traditional politics and the mainstream media (Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2016; Kavada, 2016). The complexities arising with regards to the circulation of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation via social media networks, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here I want to be clear in my bounding of mainstream media to refer to the printed press and its migration into digital formats (televised, radio, and web broadcasting). A common manifestation of NSMs’ abhorrence of institutional politics is their refusal to engage with power structures via conventional channels; contrary to twentieth-century social activism, current movements are resolutely non-party-political, rarely formally organised, and unlikely to mount challenges on a legal or policy basis, aspiring instead towards societal transformation (Castells, 2012; Mason, 2012; Tufekci, 2014). In a socio-political climate in which mainstream traditional media is increasingly viewed as untrustworthy, digital media - whilst bringing with their own set of challenges regarding accuracy - have become valuable tools for sharing information and connecting like-minded individuals. Early instances of digital activism, such as the establishment of alternative news platforms such as Indymedia and temporary media hubs, developed out of anarchist traditions and tight peer-to-peer networking practices (Juris, 2005), and the architecture of the Internet seemed at this time, fertile soil for grassroots organising (Fenton, 2020). According to Castells (2012), digital media platforms, being largely beyond the control of the state, provide New Social Movements the autonomous spaces essential for discussing and mobilising oppositional activism. Though, Fenton (2020: 1054), writing almost a decade later, notes a pervasive disenchantment with “the revolutionary potential of the Internet that has been well and truly

captured by capitalism” marked by rampant marketisation of social media platforms, the regulation of content, and algorithmic biases. It also is important to remember that online activity has not replaced offline protest movements and actors shift between digital and real-world environments dependent on the task at hand; Juris (2005) notes how planning and relationship building still occur face-to-face. The simultaneous use of online and offline environments for coordinating action is discussed at length by Treré (2018) in their research on hybrid media activism.

2.2.1. Covid-era Activism

“The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems”. – António Guterres, UN Secretary General.

At first glance the limitations of minimal contact and restricted movement put in place during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic seem at odds with the very nature of social activism; disgruntled masses airing their grievances in a public or significant space has become the classic method of demonstrating Tilly’s criteria for successful action (1999) – worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (Gerbaudo, 2020). An article for the Guardian (Chenoweth, Choi-Fitzpatrick, Pressman, Santos & Ulfelder, 2020), however, reported that activism has all but disappeared during periods of national lockdown; people have created new ways to raise awareness and pressure governments without breaking lockdown measures. There have also been multiple instances where adherence to restrictive measures has been disregarded in order for people to come together to demonstrate grievances. Examples of this can be seen in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations which occurred in wake of the murder of George Floyd (US), protests against gender-based violence after the murder of Sarah Everard by a Metropolitan police officer (UK), regular demonstrations against The Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act (UK), and marches in solidarity with Palestine.

The pandemic has exposed many ills that exist within our society, including but not limited to: the corruption of so-called democratic governments revealed by the handling of the crisis; parliament’s scapegoating of the public, the health service, the hospitality industry, schools, and migrants, and a whole host of others to distract the public from a number of issues they are (failing) to confront: the chaotic response to the pandemic; allegations of systemic racism and police brutality; and the catastrophic effects of long-term underfunding of public services, such as the NHS. All of this strengthens claims made that current participation in activism is rooted in a loss of faith in the neoliberal political doctrine and mainstream media (Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2016; Kavada, 2016).

Social media platforms have been pivotal in Covid-era activism; lockdown has seen usership of these sites increase dramatically since people have been cut off from meeting others face-to-face (Wiederhold, 2020). Research into the way social movements have responded to the pandemic has identified almost one hundred different ways people are advocating for change or expressing

solidarity including: “tweetstorms”, creating activist toolkits and accessible websites, airing teach-outs and seminars online, and building mutual aid networks (Chenoweth et al., 2020). The digital footprints left behind on social media, and activist news sources and blogs are the stories of our time, and they need to be captured. With national web archiving initiatives predominantly using large-scale popularity or domain-based crawling, these initiatives cannot be relied upon to collect the materials of dissent. It needs to be collected by the people, the communities that created them.

2.3. The genealogy of social movement theories

The 1960s saw a departure from the labour-centric social movements of the early twentieth century giving rise to identity politics and action focussed on equality in terms of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, but to name a few. Accompanying this paradigm shift, our understanding of the mechanisms of social movements has also changed. Before the cultural revolution, reaching a peak in 1968, two prominent theories existed; first, the idea that mass psychology induced collective behaviour; second, “natural-history conceptions of social movements modelled especially on the history of organised labour” (Tilly, 1998; 454). In light of the altered character of social activism, however, new theories began to emerge, namely political-process, rational-action and resource-mobilisation (Tilly, 1998).

In turn these theories, concerned largely with organisation structures, strategy, and resource distribution, received criticism from the new school of New Social Movements theory for their failure to encompass the human element of social action (Tilly, 1998). Specifically, the omission of self-expression and collective experience has rendered such theories inadequate in the study of contemporary social movements, where the personalisation of action frames and the individualised nature of participation through digital media platforms has garnered great success in the mobilisation of populations worldwide (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Tilly, 1998). Similarly, they relied too heavily upon outmoded assumptions that social movements operate within the arena of existing political systems, whereas, as section 2.2 of this review outlines, there has recently been a wholesale rejection of presiding political processes and a shift towards grassroots societal change (Gundelach, 1988 in Peterson, 1989; Tilly, 1998).

In a digital environment the application of earlier models of social movement theories is limited. Turner (2013) outlines how resource-mobilisation theory would focus disproportionately on the use of the internet as a tool aiding cheap and fast coordination of action. There is of course value in this perspective, but it is not rich enough to support the interdisciplinary nature of this research. A political-process lens on the other hand would see the role of the internet as a framing tool, influencing the nature of political and social discourse (Turner, 2013). Again, this is certainly a significant factor in the impact of digital technologies on contemporary social activism, yet, as with

resource-mobilisation, the human aspect is absent. Whilst considering these alternative theoretical perspectives I am inclined to take heed of what Fenton (2016) highlights as the risk of technocentrism within scholarship of this kind. It is important to remember that the roots of these types of social movements pre-date the internet, therefore, the role of technology in its evolution comes at a point when the cultural values and social structure of movements had already been well established. In this sense the internet has not shaped the nature of New Social Movements so much as it has provided the means for them to streamline and expand their current activities.

New Social Movement theory, gaining recognition at the end of the twentieth century, diverges from earlier theories by locating the desired outcome of activism in the transformation of life – not the claiming of power in existing political systems – and the elevated significance of cultivating ideologies (Buechler, 1995; Habermas, 1986; Tilly, 1998). Having considered the character of contemporary social movements – their operation outside of mainstream political arenas, and their use of historical narratives to strengthen collective identities – New Social Movement Theory will provide the lens through which to understand activists' engagement with archival work.

2.4. The impact of digital media on the evolution of social movements

The internet's power to mobilise the public against injustices having become commonplace in contemporary society, was - on the eve of the millennium - a tremendous shock that rippled across the developed and developing world, attracting attention from scholars across multiple disciplines, as well as activists and the mass media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2016; Kavada, 2016; Mason, 2012; Treré, 2015; Tufekci, 2014; Turner, 2013). Discussions of the role of the internet in contemporary social movements needs to occur with the caveat that advancement in web technologies has by no means dismantled the social stratification of offline society or levelled people's ability to freely express their views (Schradié, 2018). The mechanisms of digital activism may encourage democratic participation, but digital exclusion of low-income, and less-educated communities – of which minorities form a large proportion – means that systemic discrimination is still perpetuated in digital environments (Atton, 2010; Hegarty, 2022; Schradié, 2018). Therefore, when I refer to mass, public, or popular participation throughout the course of this research I do so with an awareness that financial and knowledge barriers still prevent completely equal participation in digitally enabled social activism.

The explosion of protests in 2011 mentioned previously consisted of two distinct types; lines can be drawn between movements based on motivation – social or political – and geography – the global north and global south. Despite the unrest and revolutions in Southwestern Asia and North Africa differing in character from the NSMs prevalent in Western democracies, the role of social media platforms in informing, coordinating, and documenting action is vital to our understanding of

the evolution of social movements as a whole (Castells, 2012; Mason 2012). The presence of an internet culture consisting of social network users, bloggers, and cyber-activists was critical in the build up to the Tunisian revolution in 2011, with the social media platform Twitter playing a prominent role in enabling discussion between actors and the coordination of action (Castells, 2012). Similarly, Iceland's "Pots and Pans Revolution", 2009-2011, relied heavily on the internet as a means of mobilising the population, ninety-four percent of whom were connected (Castells, 2012). In the case of the Egyptian revolution, a hybrid model of offline and online activism developed enabling the creation of a fundamentally leaderless movement against the regime, although it has been noted that the vanguard of the resistance were digital activists using social media platforms to deliberate and disseminate information to the wider population (Castells, 2012). This point is reinforced by the regime's attempt to quell the uprising through the systematic blocking of virtual communication channels (Mason, 2012). Just as in Tunisia, Twitter was used to great effect by the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 to connect various camps and coordinate specific action, and Occupy now serves as an archetype for socio-political activism in the absence of vertical authority (Castells, 2012). These movements, characterised by the centrality of communication technologies to coordinate local action and inform global publics, are a continuation of the ways in which the EZLN, and later Indymedia, mobilised geographically disparate actors during the infancy of the modern internet (Atton, 2010; Wolfson, 2012), a key distinction, though is the use of ready-made networks on third-party platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as opposed to the creation of alternative media hubs by activists themselves.

In terms of the internet's impact on the development of NSMs, a strong trend in the academic literature concerns the new organisational dimension of activism in virtual environments (Atton, 2010; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Treré, 2015; Tufekci, 2014; Turner, 2013; Wolfson; 2012). Further areas of discussion include: connecting – with immediacy – the local to the global (Fenton, 2016; Juris, 2005; Klein, 2000); new emphasis on autonomy (Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2016); the heightened significance of communication (Atton, 2010; Castells, 2012; Kavada, 2016; Wolfson, 2012); and the changing concept of collective identity in twenty-first century protest culture (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Kavada, 2016; Manson, 2012; Treré, 2015; Tufekci, 2014).

2.4.1. The utopian/dystopian dichotomy

The ease with which individuals can participate in social issues in online environments is not always framed positively. A portmanteau of "slacker" and "activism", "slacktivism" has entered scholarly vocabulary to refer to the disconnect between consciousness and coordinated action due to the use of social media platforms by social movement actors (Glenn, 2015). Understood as actions which require minimal time, effort, or commitment (such as 'liking' or 'retweeting' content on social

media) and result more often in person satisfaction than tangible impact, “Slacktivism” emerged as a term to refer to the diminishing impact digital forms of activism can have on participation in direct action (Morozov, 2011). Morozov argues that digital forms of activism, in addition to being generally less impactful than physical demonstrations of opposition, also diminish popular participation in physical protest culture by offering what is perceived to be a low cost, low risk alternative.

Critiques of this position draw our attention to the fact that Slacktivism attempts to establish a causal relationship “between acts of digital micro-activism and the desired political outcome in isolation” (Dennis, 2018: 30). Not only does this position fail to grasp the interrelation of individual instances of participation, but it also neglects to acknowledge the hybrid character of contemporary social movements, treating online and offline as entirely distinct realities (Jurgenson, 2011; cited in Dennis, 2018). Knibbs (2013) attempts to balance the positive and negative positions towards slacktivism, they concede that whilst liking and sharing content on social media is unlikely to impact policy, it can be very effective in raising awareness around issues previously confined to the fringes of society. Fenton (2020) adds another dimension to this debate in the shape of the erosion of impact over time. In a piece on the legacy of Indymedia, Fenton reflects on the significance of the opposition mounted to the World Trade Organisation in 1999 via a web-circulated petition; “Back then, that seemed to count. Now of course, hundreds of thousands can sign petitions from all over the world and no one blinks an eye.” (Fenton, 2020: 1053)

2.4.2. Horizontal communication = horizontal organisation

“Any technology that enhances human contact has democratic potentialities.” (Feenberg, 2002: 92)

In the past, social movements have, by and large, relied upon a variety of communication systems – Castells (2012) mentions rumours, sermons, pamphlets and manifestos, to name a few. The impact technological advancement has had on NSMs’ mechanisms of communication is manifold, as well as allowing instantaneous multilogues between geographically disparate autonomous individuals (Atton, 2010; Wolfson 2012), the architecture of the Internet was seen to provide the tools for maintaining and expanding the horizontal organisational structures of analogue activism (Castells, 2012; Juris, 2005). The adoption of digital media platforms by NSMs has allowed them to interact with the wider population, to reach previously politically unconscious individuals and for audiences to be involved in decision-making processes and collaborate with the movement at large (Mercea, 2011; Nuemayer & Svensson, 2016). The latter is clearly illustrated through Indymedia’s use of open publishing software to allow any independent journalist and/or activist - as these are not always mutually exclusive - to disseminate their reportage, without prior approval or review via the IMC Website (Atton, 2010). Similarly, Mercea (2011: 163) points to how FânFest used their blog to recruit

involvement in the planning stages of their upcoming event, transforming the aforementioned blog into a “portal for marginal actors external to the ‘festival’s coordination team’ to have their say on the running of the event publicly registered”.

Tufekci (2014) asserts that the migration of NSMs to digital spaces did not bring about the decentralising of organisational structures, but simply provided an environment in which horizontality was more achievable; the origins of this model can be traced back to the movements across Western Europe and the US in 1968, if not earlier. Evidence for this can be seen in the continuation of offline practices despite the shift to activism hosted in digital environments: NSMs continue to conduct meetings face-to-face where unanimous consensus is sought; meetings are facilitated – not lead – in order to ensure equitable participation; and roles are rotated amongst members to avoid monopolisation of skills or power and spread accountability across participants (Sutherland, Land & Böhm, 2014). The Occupy Wall Street movement, for instance, accepted proposals for discussion items from its members prior to meetings, and uploaded the minutes to nycga.com, as well as sharing live streams and tweets of the proceedings allowing broad participation at each organisational phase (Kavada, 2015). However, scholars are frequent in their reminders that systemic oppression is more often than not perpetuated in digital environments (Atton, 2010; Fenton, 2016; Hegarty, 2020), therefore participation in horizontal organisations is a privilege accessible only to those unaffected by digital divides.

Most frequently discussed by commentators on digital social movements is the impact of internet technologies on the organisational structure of contemporary activist groups. The origin of New Social Movements and the popularisation of leader-less activism has been traced to the widespread civil unrest in the late 1968 encompassing the climax of the student movements across the US and Europe and the Civil Rights Movement in the wake of Dr Martin Luther King jr's assassination. Considering the role of leadership in contemporary social movements, Sutherland, Land and Böhm (2014: 768) found there to be widespread rejection of the promotion of individuals to leadership status as it mirrored the existence of “asymmetrical relationships” in liberal politics and was therefore in direct conflict with their ideological stance. It is generally agreed that the utilisation of digital media platforms by New Social Movements has shifted the parameters of decentralised organisational structures as it has widened the scope of participation across the lifecycle of campaigns (Castells, 2016; Fenton, 2016; Juris, 2005; Mercea, 2011; Neumayer & Svensson, 2016; Swann & Ghelfi 2019; Turner, 2013). This heightened participatory character has resulted in Castells’ coining of the term “Networked Social Movements” in their *Networks of Outrage and Hope* in 2012. Castells (2012) believes that the degree of participation in a movement is directly linked to its ability to function in a less hierarchical way with the internet providing the

perfect infrastructure for this model of political engagement. Furthermore, Tufekci (2014) emphasises that for activists the worth of social media goes beyond its use as a tool – disconnected from the inner mechanisms of the social movement in question – to become an integral component of the organisational makeup of a movement which is increasingly indistinct from its communication network.

It is also put forward that NSMs communication practices are prefigurative, acting as a prototype for the way movements envision society changing for the better, where individuals are empowered and democracy is authentic (Atton, 2010; Kavada, 2015; Swann & Ghelfi, 2019). The very nature of the way in which information is created and used sees a great departure from previous models of activism. Social media platforms allow for the co-production and co-distribution of content, replacing the traditional model of organisationally brokered relationships and top-down dissemination of content (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this way the inherently vertical relationship between author and consumer is removed, empowering the public to be involved in the process of knowledge production and circulation (Atton, 2010; Juris, 2005). There has also been a perceptible shift in the way that grassroots, anti-institutional organisations interact with NGOs; where once the prescription to a rigid ideological base was an essential prerequisite for membership to an organisation, we can now see looser relations between official organisations and the public (Bennett & Segerber, 2012). This reflects the heterogeneity and fluidity of NSMs and their desire to work with NGOs as affiliates rather than leaders of activism.

2.4.3. Communicating between the global and the local

Another rather obvious but by no means insignificant effect the internet has had on the evolution of NSMs is the speed with which hitherto geographically disparate actors can now communicate with each other (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Fenton, 2016; Juris, 2005; Klein 1999; Turner, 2013). The utilisation of digital media platforms by NSMs has enabled them to organise and coordinate action in a way that rapidly responds to the site of injustice with the added bonus of using minimal resources (Fenton, 2016).

The immediacy of news and contact made possible through digital media technologies has fostered strong links of solidarity between the local manifestations of global movements (Juris, 2005). The first success in such an approach can be seen in the cross-cultural dialogue encouraged by the Zapatistas in cultivating global support for an act of local resistance, helped in part by the visibility of their message through mainstream media channels (Atton, 2010). When the EZLN convened the *Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism* in 1996, it brought thousands of delegates from over 40 countries and a vision was put forward for a global justice movement with alternative communications infrastructures at its core (Wolfson, 2012). Baek (2018)

also uses the case of the Occupy Wall Street movement to demonstrate how the exposure of large publics to global issues via social media platforms has assisted in the cultivation of a sense of belonging to a global community, ultimately leading to participation in activism beyond their locales. In this sense, the global and the local have become increasingly interconnected through the virtual expansion of geographical boundaries with the internet supporting links of solidarity and empathy through the awareness of common grievances (Baek, 2018; Juris, 2005). This interconnectedness has been adopted as a tool for grassroots and global movements alike, whereby we are seeing the framing of local issues in relation to the global narrative to incite effectual activism within small geographies, and conversely, the application of global perspectives to local causes in order to bolster participation (Gerlach, 1991; Juris, 2005; Koinova & Karabegovic, 2017). Furthermore, connections are not only being established between parallel movements but across different types of movements, creating a network of knowledge sharing and camaraderie in the fight for a better future (Fenton, 2016).

Whilst digital advancement has been fruitful for social movement actors, enabling quick, transnational communication, it may prove detrimental to the archiving of these activist communities. I have previously mentioned that the difficulty in capturing instances of social activism, which, as Evans and Wilson describe, is a “dynamic and perhaps ephemeral affair” (2018: 859), is exacerbated by NSMs’ utilisation of the internet, where neither location nor membership remain static. Evans, Perricci, and Roberts (2014) echo these sentiments and extend them to include not only the transitory membership of the social movements themselves but also the organisations attempting to document their stories.

2.4.4. The changing faces of collective identity

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that whilst the issues at the heart of NSMs are reminiscent of the activism born out of the 1960s cultural revolution, the mechanisms of solidarity have become much more entrenched in the personal as opposed to the common cause. The fluidity of content and membership of digital activist movements has led to assumptions that they are incapable of cultivating strong collective identities due to their ephemerality and the ease with which they can be erased (Fenton, 2016). Social media platforms such as Facebook are seen as culpable in the erosion of the collective identity as they rarely elicit anything more than superficial, low-risk commitment from users (Gladwell, 2010 in Kavada, 2015; Morozov, 2011). The individualisation of society, exacerbated by social media, has replaced the cultivation of a collective identity with the rallying of individuals around a common issue (Juris, 2012); this phenomenon has been termed “connective action” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The absence of a static concept of identity is not necessarily a failing. Juris (2005: 198) emphasises how network politics allows for the “creation of broad umbrella

spaces where diverse organisations, collectives and networks converge around common hallmarks while preserving their autonomy and specificity.”

2.5. Digital media and web archiving

Before the Twitter revolutions across North Africa in 2011, even before precursory instances of social media-propelled unrest in Southeast Europe (Mason, 2012), archival scholarship was beginning to discuss the need for the field to proactively engage with digital activism and develop sustainable strategies for capturing society’s footprints hosted on social media platforms (Flinn, 2008). In the wake of these events, it would be difficult to contest the integral role of the web as a vehicle for social change in the twenty-first century, and therefore it becomes the vital work of archivists, whether professional or amateur, to preserve the sites of such monumental moments in our contemporary history.

Flinn’s discussion of archiving in a digital world (2008) mentions the heightened vulnerability of small, single-issue campaigns whose physical and digital presence is often short-lived, increasing the likelihood of their vanishing into obscurity, and eluding capture by institutionally run physical and web archives alike. With the focus of this research being small-scale regional activism and local participation in global movements, the task of documenting digital manifestations of local campaigns is made more difficult by their ephemerality offline. Certainly, a consideration when working with oppositional movements and the archives striving to document them, is the extent to which they will cooperate in being recorded. Legal repercussions are cited as a potential deterrent for some activists, whilst others are thought to have developed custom virtual networks to avoid detection by the authorities, leaving little or no trace of their activities available for preservation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Flinn, 2008).

This point is reinforced in Evans, Perricci, and Roberts’ research with the Occupy Wall Street movement (2014), in which they encountered challenges creating an archive that could be by law enforcement to incriminate protestors. This threat is felt most acutely by black and brown activist communities who already experience a heightened degree of policing in physical environments. In their 2020 paper, Aziz and Beydoun suggest that greater visibility of black and brown oppositional activities online increases the risk of their networks being surveilled and infiltrated by law enforcement. In the UK the passing of the Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) legitimates law enforcement’s use of historical instances of activism documented and discussed online to bring criminal charges to oppositional actors. Prior to the Act becoming legislation, the London Metropolitan Police were known to be using social media to gather information on thousands of individuals, purely on the basis of their involvement in activist networks (Kopfstein, 2013; Shabaz & Funk, 2019). The increased discoverability of individuals, which could lead to their

exposure to persecution physical harm, was an important consideration for the UK Web Archive during their efforts to capture ongoing anti-racism activism in the UK (Bingham & Byrne, 2021)

The utilisation of digital media platforms by social movement actors enables researchers to trace exchanges between actors and map the processes of building and maintaining movements (Kavada, 2016), thus reinforcing the idea that the web is an invaluable record of our time. Kavada's paper (2016) gives prominence to the role of communication in digitally networked NSMs, drawing particular attention to the bringing together of disparate actors into a collective through conversations taking place in digital environments. Whilst communication between activists can remain private in what Treré (2015) refers to as the social media 'backstage', the public faces or 'front stages' of social movements have never before been so visible. The unfolding of our history can be witnessed through Twitter and Facebook feeds, with their temporal and geographical metadata preserved with time and location stamps – all it would appear is left to do is capture it. Swann and Gelphi suggest just that; "platforms such as Twitter [can act] as a dataset from which events of the movement and the dynamics of how it self-organised can be assembled." (Swann & Gelphi, 2019: 703). Based on the assumption that activist content on social media platforms and blogging sites is the natural progression from posters and pamphlets traditionally used to publicise coordinated action, the same issues exist for archivists concerned with the preservation of public engagement past and present.

2.6. Archiving the web: top-down

Whilst the notion of the archivist as active and influential in the archival process has been largely accepted within the field (Cook, 2013), the opacity of the factors affecting the construction of web archives, both operational and ideological have recently come under scrutiny (Dougherty & Meyer, 2014; Hegarty, 2022; Maemura et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2017). In response to this, there have been concerted efforts to increase the transparency of the web archiving process, for instance, Documenting the Now have developed a tool for embedding the documentation of archivists', librarians', and researchers' decision-making into the web archival process (Dolan-Mescal, 2017 cited in Bingham & Byrne, 2021). Decisions such as how to bound automated internet crawls can have an exclusionary effect on information created and accessed by communities that already experience marginalisation offline. The absence of marginalised voices from the official narrative is widely discussed in terms of how the processes of archival work can aid the perpetuation of existing structural inequality, also acknowledged is the power of the archives to dismantle the status quo (Anderson & Christen, 2019; Eagle, 2019; Morrone, 2014; Teetaert, 2014).

The work of Ogden et al. (2017) notes the over-emphasis of website "popularity" in programming large-scale automated crawls, this kind of prioritisation undoubtedly leads to the

failure to represent that which lies outside the confines of mainstream culture. The domain-based approach to bounding crawls is also guilty of maintaining power imbalances; as Bingham and Byrne note (2021), the UK Web Archive's inability to include comments appended to news items or within blogging platforms for technical reasons leads to the disproportionate representation of official voices and fails to capture the interactions of the public with current affairs. Furthermore, national web archiving initiatives are most prevalent among developed countries, therefore contributing to the uneven capture of information globally (Costa et al., 2017), and the strengthening of western-centric ideas of progress and civilisation as global south countries depend on the web archives of the global north to preserve their online heritage (Rockembach, 2017). Within nations, the prioritisation of official languages also means that domain-based collecting cannot successfully represent the vibrant multiculturalism of populations (Costa et al., 2017).

That these national initiatives are attempting to create representative web archives needs to be discussed with the caveat that the internet is still an exclusive place and care must be taken not to ascribe to what Leary refers to as the "illusion of completeness" (Leary, 2010 cited in Roland & Bawden, 2012). In spite of the widespread use of mobile devices, there remains a sizable portion of the global population who are not connected – in 2012, 9 million brits were digitally excluded (Roland & Bawden, 2012). Victims of digital inequality invariably belong to communities which experience marginalisation offline; it is therefore crucial to reflect on who has the ability to contribute to the web when discussing the inclusivity with which it can be archived (Hegarty, 2022). With that in mind, Hegarty reminds us that more extensive top-down web archiving does not necessarily recalibrate representation, rather mainstream society is more thoroughly documented and those on the edges continue to be neglected.

That systematic biases exist in the basic processes of archiving the web – an issue that echoes long-standing challenges surrounding the dominance of narratives in traditional practice – informed in part my decision to focus on activist web archiving efforts. Eagle (2019) observed that record keeping has long been a vehicle of state control in three chief ways; the destruction of records, failure to create records to begin with, and surveillance through record keeping, and the response of activist archives to these issues in a digital context is in need of exploration. However, the biases that exist in large-scale web archives are not always the fault of the individual archivist. Existing legislation was applied to and not developed for the digital age which imposes limitations on the capture and preservation of digital materials by memory institutions (Roland & Bawden, 2012). Compounding this situation are the technical limitations of using broad crawling technologies which are ill-equipped to archive dynamic content such as that hosted on social media platforms. Bingham

and Byrne (2021) noted that this has a narrowing effect on representation as these platforms are where a great deal of material by and for private individuals and community groups are hosted.

Efforts have also been made to increase the inclusivity of national web archives through the development of specially curated collections; Schafer and Winter (2021) list some of the collections at the UK Web Archive aimed in the most part at capturing queer and diaspora narratives, some of which have seen the incorporation of community collecting practices. However, public participation in these initiatives is by no means systematic (Schafer & Winters, 2021), and the question of who should be collecting and caretaking for the web archives of marginalised communities endures.

2.7. Challenges in bottom-up web archiving

Unfortunately, as prominent scholarship in the field of community archiving has highlighted, the current prospect of web archiving by community-led projects is rather bleak as the majority are cared for by volunteers with limited resources and/or technical skills. It is important to note that in addition to the ephemerality of web content, community archives, particularly those documenting social movements, have always been racing against the rapid evolution of causes (Evans, Perricci & Roberts, 2014). A reality which no doubt has been exacerbated by the adoption of digital media technologies to coordinate action. This reality, in part, informs the decision to concentrate on researching activist archives in the North of England and Scotland where the demand for solutions in web archiving the experiences, concerns, and activities of the surrounding communities is most acutely felt.

The reality is that there is very little research into the web archiving capabilities of community archives. Evidence of the barriers facing them in this capacity tend to be anecdotal remarks given in interviews within case studies on individual initiatives. A useful comparison is offered in McKinney's research (2020) which notes that the Lesbian Herstory Archive is atypical in its early embracing of digitisation; many parallel projects were reluctant to begin digitising their collections on the basis that they are insufficient in labour power, expertise, and funding. To understand community archives' engagement with web archiving technologies, I will outline the issues identified by community archives scholars in relation to building independent archives and the upkeep of physical collections.

The challenges facing community archives bleed into each other. As the majority of community archiving projects exist independently from government or academic institutions, they are usually operating in conditions of scarcity with precarious financial situations leading to issues in staffing, housing, and providing access to the archives (Caswell, Cifor & Ramirez, 2016; Flinn, 2011; Sadler & Cox 2017; Schreiner, 2014; Tobar, 2015; Wakimoto, Hansen and Bruce, 2013). Without the aid of a parent organisation, community archives must rely on grants and community donations to

fund projects, even in the face of desperate situations some archives have taken the position of rejecting any funding from a government which continues to systematically oppress their community (McKinney, 2020; Nestle, 1990 in Wakimoto, Hansen and Bruce 2013). In some cases where there is not the funding for a premises that enables access, community archives have entered into agreements to have their collections housed at university special collections or local authority archives for there to be any chance in guaranteeing their preservation (Sadler & Cox, 2017). Remaining independent, though being the more ideologically sound choice, can compromise other areas of the organisation's ethos. The Lavender Library, Archives and Cultural Exchange in California (LLACE) is unable to house their whole collection on their premises and visitors must request materials in advance, this can create barriers, not only deterring people from visiting the archive but their ability to discover material once they are there (Wakimoto, Hansen and Bruce, 2013).

During their research into 56a Infoshop in London, Pell (2015: 40) participated in one of their regularly held archive nights where volunteers document materials and map the archive – they described the experience as “daunting” in the face of a “vast” and never-ending “backlog”. Pell also discovered that the archive lacked the resources for improving or developing their collection's interface such as finding aids or a rudimentary catalogue, a situation not uncommon for community archiving projects (Pell, 2015). Similarly, McKinney's research into the Lesbian Herstory Archive (2020) notes that as the volunteers set out to digitise their collections it was acknowledged that they were likely never to finish, yet they took it on regardless. The reality is that many of these independent projects exist because a few people regularly donate a few hours of their time to chip away at the mountains of materials that need to be processed.

It is more common that activist archivists are not paid for their time. Most often, projects rely on teams made up entirely of “unskilled” volunteers, though sometimes, in the absence of paid positions within the community organisation, trained archivists will be involved on a voluntary basis (Caswell, 2014; Wakimoto, Hansen & Bruce, 2013). As has been the case with the Sheffield Feminist Archive, Eichhorn's research (2013) found that feminist libraries and archives often take on librarianship and archives students on placement, and whilst additional volunteers are always welcome, this does not allow for creating a stable pool of dedicated activist archivists. Evans, Perricci, and Roberts (2014) highlight how challenging it is for activist archives to attract people with the time and means to dedicate themselves to long-term stewardship, when social movements in their very nature are transient, with fluid and idiosyncratic participation.

In light of the obstacles I have outlined in this section, it would be safe to conclude that any meaningful engagement with web archiving technologies is beyond the capabilities of community archiving initiatives at the present. Whilst the UK Web Archive (UK Web Archive, n.d.) at the British

Library runs a scheme whereby the public can nominate websites for preservation, this does bring about issues of ownership. Caswell (2014) and Ziegler (2014) both emphasise the importance of community custody over their narratives and the very idea of relinquishing control to an institutional body is problematic for community archives that are documenting marginalised communities and activist groups that are in opposition to the state.

2.8. The relationship between social movements and community archives

We are beginning to see developments both in social movement studies and “memory studies” that consider the overlapping of these fields. The former is acknowledging the power of memory to cultivate social movement identities, strengthen existing ideologies, and bolster mobilisation efforts. The latter sees activist movements as previously untapped sources of cultural remembrance, where participation fosters strong ties within and between communities (Merrill, Keightley & Daphi, 2020).

In terms of overtly radical or activist archival work, there are several significant contributions considering non-Western and/or non-anglophone cases (Butler, 2020; Howard, 2019; Saber, 2020; Saber & Long, 2017), though much of the literature is coming out of North America (Eichhorn 2013; Fair, 2014; Moran, 2014; Teetaert, 2014; Tobar, 2014; Ziegler, 2014), and Britain (Burin & Sowinski, 2014; Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Pell, 2015; Pell, 2020; Sadler & Cox, 2017). The digital dimensions of archival activism have also begun to gain scholarly attention, for instance, there is a very recent exploration of participatory digital media platforms as sites of enacting and documenting resistance (Fife, Flinn, & Nyhan, 2023). As for research located directly at the intersection of contemporary activist archival work and web archiving, the topic is thus far underexplored.

The catalyst for this doctoral research was my joining the Sheffield Feminist Archive (SFA) as an organiser in 2018, with our activist archival work at the centre of my research, my exploration of literature was influenced by a) our organisation's vision statement to reclaim women's place in history and inspire intersectional and inclusive feminist activism and b) organisers' knowledge of the radical DIY archival practice of queer archives in New York. Consequently, I have drawn on a substantial amount of literature focussed on cases in the US, certainly, these discussions cannot simply be transplanted into research on UK activist archiving projects, and care must be taken to consider the specific conditions for the creation of my participating research sites.

2.8.1. Reclaiming the narrative

The complicity of institutional archives in perpetuating existing power imbalances within society is widely acknowledged (Anderson & Christen 2019, Caswell, 2014; Eagle, 2019; Ernst 1999; Frank, 2019; Pell, 2015; Zinn 1976); therefore, an important aim of the independent archive is to “intervene in dominant discourses, claiming the authority and rights to represent themselves” (Pell, 2015: 34).

As the introduction to this paper briefly discussed, the community archive embodies a significant role in the fight for self-determination and recognition of otherwise marginalised communities (Caswell, 2014; Schreiner, 2014). Women, people of colour, and queer communities have traditionally been excluded from official narratives of history, which goes towards explaining the explosion of independent collections centred around these social identifiers and their use as tools in the fight for recognition (Frank, 2019; X, Campbell & Stevens, 2009). Within the existing literature, community archives are described as spaces of empowerment, autonomy, and cultural production, as well as being considered complementary to the demonstrations, educational workshops and lobbying also undertaken by activist communities (Pell, 2015). The role of archives in the silencing of groups of people deemed inconsequential to the recording of history was first discussed in Michel-Rouch Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995). Trouillot's conceptualisation separates the production of history into four stages: making records; collecting archives – where the formation of 'archival silences' occurs; forming narratives; and writing histories. Twenty years on, Caswell (2014) built on Trouillot's concept of archival silences by highlighting the trauma of archival silence as experienced by marginalised communities and the need to combat a phenomenon they entitle 'symbolic annihilation'. Caswell's consideration of symbolic annihilation (2014) asserts that the pursuit of power is what sets community archives apart from local history archives – the process of activating the archive materials against the marginalisation of non-white, female, immigrant, poor, queer and gender queer communities. Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge (2013) likened the founding of queer archives in California to the hollering of Queer Nation's slogan "We're here and we're queer"; a way for queer communities to stake their claim over histories that are otherwise silenced. Another, poignant, example of resistance to erasure through archival activities can be seen in the proliferation of memory work around Palestinian cultural heritage (Butler, 2020). Butler (2020) shines a light on Palestinian archival activism, including numerous web-based projects documenting life and land before and during the Nakba, and how these collections of map, photographs and oral histories stand as powerful acts of reclamation and resistance to the ongoing destruction of Palestinian existence.

Community archives literature discusses at length the relationship between community and institutional archives and the various motives for wanting to maintain autonomy over community collections. The Lesbian Herstory Archive (New York) is a well-known example of a community archive adamantly refusing governmental support despite the resulting challenges in staffing and funding the project (McKinney, 2020). Ziegler (2014) offers two very different examples of why certain communities would be reluctant to have their archives housed within institutions: the first is the Occupy Wall Street movement's refusal relinquish control of their collections to a formal archive

on the basis that they reinforce existing power structures; the second is the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials' call for repatriation of Native American narratives and items (Mathiesen, 2012; Samtani, 2011; Schuessler, 2012 all cited in Ziegler, 2014).

Eichhorn's monograph (2013) considering *The Archival Turn in Feminism* contains three case studies of Riot Grrrl and third wave feminist zines and ephemera collections in US institutional archives. These case studies demonstrate perfectly the definition of archiving activism as the collection is housed separately from the community that created it (Sellie et al., 2015). Typically, community archives are reluctant to hand over their collections to state or other institutional archives owing to historical or ongoing exclusion, intimidation and persecution (Cook, 2013), and, as Eichhorn (2013) reveals, limited access to non-scholars is a contested yet strictly adhered to practice in the case of the Fales Library, New York. However, the edges become blurred as it is made clear that the stewards of all three collections self-identify as either activists, feminists, Riot Grrrls or all of the above. They discuss how their affinity with the third wave feminist community puts them in a unique position to caretake for these archives in an informed and considerate way and they view their work as vital in the repositioning of feminist histories within a contemporary understanding of the women's movement as a whole (Eichhorn, 2013). It is more common however, for community archives to be situated within the community that created them, allowing them to be more accessible by removing physical and emotional barriers between collections and their communities (Moore & Pell, 2010). Marginalised communities may not have the means to visit collections due to travel expenses or work commitments, this reality is compounded by the intimidation members of these communities may experience visiting institutional buildings (Moore & Pell, 2010).

2.8.2. The archival turn in social activism

Mason and Zanish-Belcher's paper *Women's Archives in the year 2000* (1999) gives an overview of the development of women's collections over the course of the twentieth century and the relationship between archival work and activism; I will briefly summarise its contents here. Starting in the 1930s two prominent first wave feminists launched the World Centre for Women's Archives in the US aimed at encouraging research into women's issues, preserving campaign materials, and inspiring activism in future generations of women (Manson & Zanish-Belcher, 1999). An explosion of women's activism in the 1970s – the second wave of feminism – saw the establishment of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York and the Bethune Museum-Archives for Black Women's History in Washington DC, among many other smaller feminist collections (Mason & Zanish-Belcher, 1999). As the forerunners of second wave feminism grew older there was an acceleration in the establishment of women's archives reflecting the urgency felt by younger generations of feminists to capture the history of the movement before it is lost along with the women who participated in it

(Mason & Zanish-Belcher, 1999). This was a common motivation across the literature, cited by the Sheffield Feminist Archive as the catalyst for embarking on their oral history project (Sadler & Cox, 2017). Outside of the feminist archiving scene, alternative reasons for the relationship between social activism and archival work are offered. For the anarchist movement, Moran sees the tradition of radical libraries and archives as a natural continuation of the centrality of literature to anarchism and libertarian-socialism, which have a strong material culture which was used for disseminating ideas and mobilising actors (Moran, 2014).

I have previously mentioned a perceived link between the neoliberal political system and the quality of New Social Movements, with the latter blaming the former for a variety of ills plaguing contemporary society, as well as triggering a shift in the way oppositional politics is conducted. Eichhorn (2013) also attributed the archival turn in feminism to the political and economic effects of neoliberalism. They argued that the erosion of individual political agency has instigated a widespread reorientation towards past activism to create footholds for movements in the present (Eichhorn, 2013). Eichhorn's research (2013) examined how from the 1990s the archives have become an increasingly central site of resistance, at least with regards to the feminist movement; collecting around their cause has been equally oriented towards inspiring present and future feminism as preserving past triumphs since at least the origins of the third wave. The emphasis on reclaiming narratives and ensuring access to alternative histories within feminist archives reinforces the inherent politicism of community archives in general, allowing them to be understood as a broad spectrum of collections that interact to varying degrees with politics. At one end you have a community group committed to preserving their local history whose existence as an archive outside of the institution is a political act in and of itself, and at the other you have field archives on the site of Occupy Wall Street camps attempting to record and disseminate activism as it happens (Castells, 2012). However politically oriented these archives are, one thing is certain, the mere act of creating an archive outside of state institutions is a very strong, very deliberate political act (Caswell, 2014; Wakimoto, Bruce & Partridge, 2013; X, Campbell & Stevens, 2009).

2.8.3. Collective memory making

The backbone of any social movement has always been the existence of a collective ideology, whether that be in the form of a common grievance or a shared vision of the future, and for decades the preservation of activist materials has been a vital part of cultivating ideologies (Pell, 2015). Research into the black feminist archive movement in Britain found archives to be not only a place of empowerment but a place of healing (Burin & Sowinski, 2014); a place where the voices of strong black women can comfort and inspire a new generation. They emphasise the importance of the validation that can be found in discovering equivalent experiences in the archive. Pell's ethnographic

study of 56a Infoshop (2015), a London anarchist archive, discussed how the collection is geared towards discovery. Housed in a social centre in Elephant and Castle in the South of the city, self-education is central to their mission, as is the provision of space to allow for the building of collective identities and community solidarity (Pell, 2015). In an earlier study, they referred to these spaces provided by archives where collective identities are constructed by marginalised communities as “counter-publics” (Moore & Pell, 2010). McKinney (2020) makes an interesting distinction between social movements and counter-publics, stating that the latter describes a more ideologically homogeneous group and views the archive as a valuable tool for enabling affective encounters with histories in order to collectively imagine an alternative future. Other cases too saw the merging of archives and social centres; anarchist libraries in particular are often used as spaces for activists to meet and socialise, but also discuss and disseminate the ideas of their movement (Moran, 2014; Sellie et al., 2015). Fair describes the Interference Archive (2015: 186) as an “archive ‘from below’ which would not only house our collective material culture, but also be a social space for learning about movements of the past and organising for present-day struggles”, and where networks of solidarity between and within communities are strengthened. Knowledge exchange is also hugely important for the members of the Grandmother’s Advocacy Network (GRAN) whose archive has become the foundation of intergenerational bonding through social activism (Chazan, Baldwin & Madokoro, 2015).

2.8.4. Archiving for present and future activism

Activist participation in archival work surrounding their organisation and cause is considered to nurture strong ideological foundations for social activism (Schreiner, 2014). The framing of archives as sites of resistance extends activist archival work beyond the documentation of social movements to become a valuable tool within the movements themselves. Instances of future-oriented archives can be found as early as 1935; the establishment of the World Centre for Women’s Archives (WCWA) in New York was “bound up in an urgent need to create an archive that might also serve as a catalyst for feminist activism in the present.” (Eichhorn, 2013: 33). Eichhorn’s monograph (2013) concludes by claiming that the inherent activist nature of archival work lies not in their representation of worlds past, but in the worlds that they encourage us to imagine and fight to realise.

In the case of the QPIRG Concordia Political Poster Archive (Teetaert, 2014), the collection and displaying of activist ephemera on the walls of the archive itself is intentional, with the aim of instilling its users with a collective memory of past activism. Similarly, one of the founders of Groundswell (Oral History for Social Change) states that their work is unequivocally geared towards “social transformation” and in order for that to happen the testimonies they record need to be

“mobilized by and for the protagonists of social movements” (Groundswell, n.d.; Tobar, 2014: 17). Moran (2014: 176) refers to anarchist archives as “weapons in struggle” and sees their work as two-fold; first, to rectify absences and misrepresentation in the official historical record through the collection of “subversive and counter-hegemonic” narratives; and second, by guiding future activism. Drawing on the example of an anti-gentrification campaign built around the materials and people gathered together by the 56a infoshop (Elephant and Castle, London), Pell’s research (2020) demonstrates how activist archivists are key players building sustainable social movements, bridging the gap between knowledge and action. She writes, “Alongside building historical discourses and supporting collective identities, activist archiving can strengthen self-determination, as groups engage in collecting, valuing, and using their own knowledge to strategically inform their activism.” (Pell, 2020: 173). Considering the role of activist archives in building historical discourse, Tobar (2014) also underlines how these counter-narratives enrich research into and education surrounding protest movements and social activism. Carlton and Russell (2018) urge researchers to explore outside of official truths, to use community archives, in order to construct more authentic, inclusive, and accurate narratives of social movements.

Caswell’s most recent work, *Urgent Archives* (2021), builds on the framing of archives as vehicles for social change. Instead of treating activist archives as resource banks of strategies and toolkits for activism, they emphasise the way in which archives enable communities to understand their histories not as linear progressions towards liberation, but as ongoing cycles of oppression that can be disrupted by the archives. Referring to these repeated patterns of violence as “corollary moments”, Caswell sees the value of records as most potent when connections are made between past and present struggles and the application of specific historical tactics to contemporary situations (Caswell, 2020: 53). This conceptualisation of activist archives as sites of “temporal rupture” has previously been explored in relation to queer archives where encounters with history are considered vital for imagining alternative futures (Munoz, 1999 cited in McKinney, 2020: 164).

2.8.5. Archiving for accountability

The original purpose of the archives was evidence; repositories containing every document produced about and by the activities of governments (Cook, 2013). The evidentiary value of the archives has more recently been harnessed by community-based archival projects – and the wider public – to hold authorities to account for historical and ongoing injustice (Caswell, 2012; Dirks, 2004; Flinn & Duff, 2020; Godoy, 2018; Hassan & O’Mealia, 2018; Moore & Pell, 2010; Wallace, 2020). This trend is particularly strong with regards to exposing the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes, (see: Caswell, 2012 – Cambodia; Godoy, 2018 – El Salvador; Hassan & O’Mealia, 2018– Kenya); Dirk’s paper (2004), which reframes accountability as complementary instead of

oppositional to archival mandates in service of memory and heritage, provides a number of examples where the abrupt dismantling of dictatorships has been accompanied by access to extensive and detailed records of state violence. Examples can also be found in Western democracies, for instance, the use of archives to seek justice for the 97 victims of the Hillsborough disaster (Flinn & Duff, 2020) – the 97th victim, Andrew Devine, died in 2021 from injuries sustained at Hillsborough stadium in April 1989 (Kay, 2021). Flinn and Duff's chapter (2020) explores how archives and records were used by community organisers to hold the Yorkshire Police accountable for their culpability in the Hillsborough disaster, as well as their demonisation of Liverpool fans via the tabloid press. Their writing emphasises that, in isolation, archival records do not have the power to alter dominant discourse (Flinn & Duff, 2020), in the case of Hillsborough, it was the collaboration between archive professionals, piecing together a narrative from dispersed archival materials, and community organisers, deeply committed to vindicating the victims and survivors of the disaster, that triumphed in uncovering the truth. This "community" aligns with the concept of *emergent publics* – nascent groups of people that "often arise in neighbourhoods, social movements, or audiences of publications (to name a few), and typically are politicised through attention to particular issues they believe warrant collective action" (Angus, 2001; Warner, 2002; Newman & Clarke, 2008, cited in Moore & Pell, 2010: 257). Moore and Pell's research on autonomous archives considers the centrality of archive construction by emergent publics in mounting resistance to hegemonic narratives through the validation and publicising of counter histories, highlighting the continuity between historical and ongoing struggles.

2.8.6. Subverting the field

Following the Publication of Howard Zinn's, *The Radical Historian* (1970) which encouraged archivists and historians alike to reassess their authority to navigate the course of the official record, the archival world has seen an eruption of engagement with, and creation of community run, progressive, and counter-hegemonic initiatives (Flinn & Alexander, 2015). The literature in its entirety sees the act of creating an autonomous archive as deeply political. Whilst there is much to be gained by community archives taking point from established archival practice in terms of creating protocols and management systems, as well as navigating ownership and GDPR, Ziegler (2014) encourages community archivists to be selective and critical with regards to which aspects of the traditional archiving process are the most appropriate to apply to their projects. Fair (2014) takes this further, suggesting that autonomous archives are presented with the unique opportunity to build archives that are deeply embedded within the ideological foundations of the community they represent. In reference to the Interference Archives (Brooklyn), they discussed how the horizontal organisational structure of contemporary social movements has been mirrored in the archives'

approach to knowledge management – something which would not have been possible within the limitations of top-down institutional archive organisation (Fair, 2014).

A fundamental shift in archival practice which has its origins in the community archiving movement but has since gained traction in institutional archives is the post-custodial method of collecting. A complete departure from traditional archival principles to preserve original materials and the relationships between items, post-custodial archives see that materials are copied (either physically or digitally) and then returned to the donor – centring the community in the archives and the archives in the community (Caswell, 20214). Community participation in generating, collecting, processing, and stewarding materials is universally undertaken to varying degrees across the spectrum of community archiving initiatives. In the Interference Archive, Brooklyn, the involvement of community members in collecting and stewarding materials is seen simply as an extension of their activism (Fair, 2014). Through the creation of independently run archives, community activists have politicised archival work at every stage of the process; the collection of hidden histories; the description of materials using the semantics of alternative ideologies; and the progressive attitudes towards access and interaction with collections (Ernst, 1999).

The two most famous examples of activist archives subverting archival practice to better serve their communities are the methods of the Interference Archives and the Lesbian Herstory Archives – both in New York. As trailblazers of the reorientation of archives from preservation to access (at least in radical circles), the Lesbian Herstory Archives developed what is commonly referred to as the “good enough” standard of digitisation. McKinney’s research (2020) emphasises that whilst activist archivists at the LHA understand the merit of adhering to archival best practice – scanning materials perfectly and writing meticulous metadata – their priorities lie with making materials accessible to the queer community as quickly as possible. In the case of the Interference Archives (Brooklyn) an open-stacks model has been adopted, and they invite users to browse unchaperoned through the archives dismantling barriers between communities and collections as well as aiding the discovery of marginalised stories (Fair, 2014; Sellie et al., 2015). Coupled with community access as a core value, the Interference Archives ascribes to the concept of “preservation through use”, and places greater importance on preserving the message over the material (Sellie et al., 2015). Both projects demonstrate how the ethos behind radical archiving presents a fundamental shift in archival practice; the value of an archive can only be found when its materials are activated by encounters with users and not as they argue by “preserving documents in boxes ‘safe’ from use” (McKinney, 2020: 13). Speaking of the African and Asian Visual Artists’ Archive, cultural theorist, activist, and founder of the New Left Review, Stuart Hall emphasises that “Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions

which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another.” (Hall, 2001: 92).

2.9 Summary of the literature

Social movement studies literature discusses at length the ways in which activists have embraced digital media technologies and integrated them within the life cycle of social movements, what is missing however, is consideration around how these web-hosted activist materials are preserved and shared to strengthen present and future fights for social justice.

Critiques of national web archiving literature are beginning to emerge as the field of study matures, and there are well-intentioned efforts to ensure that our documentary heritage is representative and inclusive of our diverse communities. That said, there is little exploration into the use of web archiving technologies by grassroots organisations or the barriers they face in terms of their involvement in participatory web archiving initiatives.

The archival turn in activism has received much attention in recent years, with a lot of scholarship dedicated to the challenges facing community-based archives creating and caring for physical and more recently, digital collections. There is however little understanding of the challenges facing community-based archives when it comes to archiving web content. In the following chapter I will outline my research design as I attempt to bridge these gaps in our knowledge.

3. Research Method

3.1. Introduction

In the following chapter I will discuss the research methods I used, beginning by outlining my methodological position and how this informed the decisions made regarding the research design. In section 3.2 I will present my ontological and epistemological stances which together underpin the research design, here I will also expand on my positioning within the research outlined in the introduction to this thesis. I planned my research design in the spring of 2019 before taking parental leave for a year. When I returned from parental leave in April 2020 it was the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and though it was the least of anyone's concerns, my research was not able to go ahead as planned. In light of these conditions, section 3.3 will outline my intended design in line with my worldview and how this was disrupted by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here I detail the process of adapting the design to the carry out data collection amid periods of lockdown and social distancing. My resultant research design, including a timeline of the phases of research will be detailed in section 3.4. In section 3.5 I will detail my approach to sampling and recruitment of participants, including tables of participants and the archive projects or organisation to which they belong. Data collection methods are outlined in section 3.6, alongside interview scripts and theme prompts, then the approach to analysis of collected data is presented in section 3.7. The ethical implications of this research project will be considered in section 3.8 and finally, section 3.9 provides a brief summary of the research design.

Leaving behind the criteria connected with positivist research – generalisability, objectivity, and reliability – I will use Tracy's eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent research (2010) to demonstrate the quality of this doctoral research. Tracy's 2010 article proposes that excellent qualitative research must be: worthy, rigorous, sincere, credible, resonant, ethical, coherent, and provide significant contributions to the field(s) of study. One of the ways that the worthiness of a piece of research can be determined is its timeliness; I would argue that considering the increasing use of digital media by social movement actors coupled with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in exposing social inequalities and our everyday use of the internet, research into the engagement of activists with web archiving technologies is imperative (Tracy, 2010). Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I will draw attention to how my research meets each of these criteria as evidence of the integrity of this research project.

3.2. Research philosophy and paradigms

Here I will detail the philosophical perspectives that have underpinned my methodological approaches to this project – a combination of reflexive thematic analysis with elements of postmodern feminist ethnographic research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Campbell & Wasco, 2000;

Manning, 2018). With human-centred research the extent to which the conditions can be manipulated are limited; even before considering ethical issues, people and their environments are inextricably linked, therefore their extraction from natural settings for controlled investigation deeply alters their behaviours (Gillingham, 2000). I reject the positivist concept of truth as singular, fixed, objective and independent from human experience, subscribing instead to an interpretivist worldview that multiple truths can be understood through individual and collective experience of and interaction with our environment and each other across time and space (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016; Moon & Blackman, 2014).

The acknowledgement of multiple simultaneous explanations of reality underpins postmodern feminist epistemology (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016), which views the human experience as variable depending on an individual's gender, race, sexuality, status, location, and education (Watson et al., 2018; Wuest, 1995). I am of the belief that our ontological and epistemological positions are not entirely consciously decided, our worldviews and perceptions of knowledge are not fixed and are shaped by our environment and experiences and are therefore at least partially predetermined. Similarly, I maintain that this is also true of "choosing" a research method. Researchers are predisposed to favour one method over another, and this preference influences the posing of research questions prior to the consideration of research design which ultimately determines the course of projects before they even begin (Swanburn, 2010). Therefore, having recognised my inclination towards working within a feminist, social-constructivist research paradigm, I employed qualitative research methods whereby I engaged in an extended period of field work collecting interviews and elicited diaries. Through these diaries I aimed to ascertain the ways in which my research communities construct the meaning that they attach to their archival work.

3.2.1. Postmodern feminist standpoint

To clarify what I mean when I talk about feminism. I am white, I am middle-class, and I am a feminist, but I am not a white feminist (Ortega, 2006) – otherwise known as liberal feminism, this strand is associated with first-wave feminism for suffrage and the second wave for gender equality across private and public spheres. I do not see the aims of feminism as the quiet elevation of women to equal status in a society created for and by men (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). It is not enough to simply carve space for women within the existing structure, because what remains would be the basic social institutions of capitalism, nuclear families, and biological motherhood that reinforce the power of white, moneyed, able-bodied men (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). There would still be the perpetuation of seemingly harmless stereotypes forced upon us from birth; the way we play, learn, and behave. White feminists are somewhat blind to the intersection of race and class on the

experiences of women of colour, presenting the female experience as homogeneous through the bonds of “universal sisterhood”, consequently Black women have had to fight for visibility within the women’s movement (Lorde, 1978a; Ortega, 2006: 62). bell hooks (1981) went as far as to assert that white women are so preoccupied battling sexism that they fail to realise their implication in racist imperialism (hooks, 1980, cited in Lorde, 1978b). I cannot express my position any better than Eddo-Lodge (2018: 184) who wrote “Feminism at its best, is a movement that works to liberate all people who have been economically, socially, and culturally marginalised by an ideological system that has been designed for them to fail. That means disabled people, black people, trans people, women, and non-binary people, LGB people and working-class people.”

I do not feel that it is an absolute necessity of conducting feminist research to solely seek out female voices or limit the scope of my research to themes classically labelled as women’s issues (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). By engaging with activists, I anticipate encountering feminists, queer activists, people of global majority heritage; people who are fighting against a world order that either places no value on their narratives or appropriates them under the guise of allyship and enlightenment (Ortega, 2006) – to me this is feminist research. It is not the substantive topic that defines a project as feminist but the guiding philosophy of its design and application that sees participants respected, understood, and empowered by the research process (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

In my personal life, including my activist-archival work with the Sheffield Feminist Archive, I practise intersectional feminism and acknowledge that I will never finish learning how to recognise the multiple and often cumulative oppressions experienced by marginalised communities and how to use my position in allyship (Vanner, 2015). As many marginalised communities in Britain are made up of first, second, and third generation immigrants from former colonies and commonwealth nations, early considerations of undertaking research within a postcolonial framework. Furthermore, as Vanner (2015) emphasises, the term postcolonial extends beyond a formerly colonised nation or area to encompass communities, material culture, or even ideologies within a nation that is not postcolonial itself. In situations where my race and privilege could be interpreted as a reinforcement of white domination over people of colour and the appropriation of their histories, I felt it would be inappropriate for me to embark on postcolonial research as a white researcher. When conducting ethnographic research there is always an awareness that the narrative produced is of a reality perceived through the eyes of the researcher. As a white woman I have no right to use my perception of reality to speak on behalf of those subjugated by the imperialism of my country, nor to employ a postcolonial lens for research which still centres a white perspective. I can, however, via feminist research methodologies, have conversations with those involved in social movements

seeking equality for women, people of global majority heritage, LGBTQIA* folk, and working-class communities, and the preservation of their material culture, and employ a postmodernist feminist lens which centres minoritised perspectives, and in doing so de-centre the dominant heteropatriarchal-colonialist-capitalist system from the analysis (Flores Golfín, Rusanaky, & Zantvoort, 2022).

3.3. Preliminary research design: impact of Covid-19

Academic research has not escaped the impact of the pandemic. Whilst many researchers have been struggling with the closing of libraries, archives, and university departments (Spinney, 2020), field researchers experienced the added challenge of being cut off from their research participants and locations (Olsen, 2020). Whether in the middle of their fieldwork, or yet to begin, researchers have had to adapt their methods to adhere to restrictions on movement and social contact; banks of resources have been compiled and published online by researchers in order to help each other navigate the many obstacles of this new reality (<https://covidrealities.org/research/resources/>; <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfrqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit>).

For the reasons expressed in section 3.2, it was my intention that my research into the attitudes and motivations of activist archivists would be located in the activist collections involved. Face to face semi-structured interviews being conducted alongside ethnographic observations recorded via a field journal were my preliminary methods of choice, as in-situ data gathering lends itself to capturing authentic language use and behaviour of participants. With this approach no longer feasible and without a clear end to the pandemic in sight, I made the decision to conduct my interviews online, thereby allowing me to meet with my participants in their natural settings either at home, or in the activist archive they were involved with. The impact of the pandemic on the daily operations of many archives, both institutional and community-based, posed a significant challenge to observing the typical activities involved in activist archival work, consequently, I needed to find alternatives for observational data collection. Elicited diaries were introduced as a substitute for face-to-face forms of prolonged contact due to the circumstances of restricted movement and social distancing (Acker, 2001).

Research shows that the quality of data gathered is not impaired when interviews are conducted online compared with face-to-face data collection (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Some challenges to be aware of, however, lie in the possibility that participants may feel uncomfortable having interviews recorded in their homes, as well as the ways in which technical issues can impede the development of rapport or the fullness of testimonies (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Not everyone, however, has seen the pandemic as detrimental to their work. After their research period was split in two by the outbreak of coronavirus, Howlett (2021) found that there were unanticipated

benefits of carrying out the remainder of their interviews virtually. Their paper talks about the neutralising effect video interviews can have on the researcher-participant power balance (Howlett, 2021). Olsen (2020) writes that the opportunity to reflect during the disruption to fieldwork has brought into stark relief the unbalanced relationship between researchers and participants, especially the researcher's entitlement to take what they need without offering anything in return. Not only do participants hold greater agency in terms of granting the researcher access to information, but the power to observe becomes a two-way street (Howlett, 2021), we have a portal into their home, and they do ours. Furthermore, Howlett (2021) mentions how the last year has had a positive effect on people's digital literacy skills and their ability to behave more naturally in online environments; both our professional and social lives have existed online, and they argue that the gap between our self-presentation online and offline is growing ever smaller.

My initial contact with research communities was planned to be observations, which were to serve two functions: first, as a tool for data collection, in its own right, through the ethnographic observation of research sites; second, the understanding gained through observations was to serve as a methodological tool for shaping the interview phase of research. As Blaikie and Priest detail (2017), emergent themes from the records of ethnographic observations can be revisited during the interview process and using abductive logic be transformed into theory and scientific explanations. The question remained; how should I attempt to engage in ethnographic research remotely? I chose to incorporate elicited diaries into my design as they could be completed virtually and in compliance with public health measures in place to minimise the spreading of Covid-19 at the time of data collection (Thille, Chartrand & Brown, 2022). The diary method, developed out of the life-history method, was first described by Zimmerman and Wieder in relation to their research on the counterculture (1977: 481) as "an observational log maintained by subjects which can then be used as a basis for intensive interviewing". They advocated for the diary-interview method's use as a substitute for participant observation where such an approach was unworkable for whatever reason (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977).

3.4. The Research Design

"Rather than referring to a particular set of methods, we understand feminist methodology as a way of relating to our research; not as detached, objective researchers... but instead understanding ourselves as entangled in the co-creation of knowledge." (Flores Golfín, Rusanaky, & Zantvoort, 2022: 214)

There is no single feminist methodology; feminist research is pluralist in nature but shares a distinct methodological process which reflects an ethic of respect, cooperation, and compassion, which in turn have epistemological implications (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Flores Golfín, Rusanaky, &

Zantvoort, 2022; Harding, 1987 in Wuest, 1995). Before I provide an explanation of the research design, I wish to outline these methodological features of feminist research as I believe they were adhered to through my decisions to combine ethnographic elements with reflexive thematic analysis. First, the outcomes of feminist research should be useful to their research population (Wuest, 1995). I aimed to deepen the understanding, for myself and my participants, of the meaning of activist archival work and the benefits of building a web archiving network of adjacent activist groups in order to secure a more sustainable future for community archives in an increasingly digital society. Second, the researcher's interaction with the research participants should not be oppressive (Wuest, 1995). When the participants of a research project belong to historically marginalised groups there is a danger of "Othering" and exploiting their experiences in research that demonstrates performative allyship as opposed to producing responsible community-centred narratives. Reflexive thematic analysis and feminist ethnographic research are both highly reflexive strategies, in which the positionality of the researcher is constantly considered, and the representation of community members is respectfully written and presented as valid (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Third, the researcher's commitment to challenging systemic bias through constant reflection on the traditions of scientific inquiry and knowledge discovery (Akman et al., 2010; Wuest, 1995).

Feminist research has a strong tradition of using ethnography as a mode of inquiry as it enables the researcher to break free from the androcentrism of traditional inquiry (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2015; Wuest, 1995). This negative association is rooted in the natural sciences where objectivity, the rational, and universal truth come together as the core principles of a mechanistic worldview which is deeply interconnected with masculine (and western) domination in modern sciences (Harding, 1986). Millman and Kanter (1975) had previously identified five manifestations of androcentrism in social science research which perpetuate gender bias in social inquiry and forty-five years later there are still discussions addressing the androcentrism of social sciences research (Kirschner, 2020). Furthermore, the following list demonstrates that gender disparities characterise both science as a social activity and the methods, models, practices, theories, and identities of scientific research (Rutherford, 2020). First, the propensity to disregard the social role of conscious emotion, worsened by pervasive stereotypes surrounding gender, emotion, and logic (Campbell & Wasco, 2001; Millman & Kanter, 1975). Second, the tendency for research to focus on public and official spheres dominated by male figures and the resulting neglect of domestic settings which remain to a large extent the burden of women – such rigid categorisation has led to a distortion of our conceptualisation of social life (Millman & Kanter, 1975). Third, an assumed single society between men and women that neglects to account for the different ways that professional and

domestic environments are experienced across gender (Millman & Kanter, 1975). Fourth, often, the impact of sex on the behaviours of social actors is not considered; for instance, a male dominated workplace will be viewed as sexless or genderless by a man but patriarchal by a woman (Millman & Kanter, 1975). Fifth, the use of particular research methodologies – especially quantitative – contribute to the systematic silencing of alternative perspectives through the analysis of women’s experience into predetermined categories (Campbell & Wasco, 2001; Millman & Kanter, 1975).

Reciprocal methodologies and methods such as ethnography and reflexive thematic analysis that emphasise interaction between researchers and participants and the responsible representation of complex social phenomena can contribute to dismantling the traditions of impersonal and objective research so steeped in masculine bias (Millman & Kanter, 1975). The above suggests that this problem is situated only in the twentieth century, quantitative research and the dichotomy of gender. This is not the case, as Charmaz (2017: 36) wrote, qualitative inquiry is “infused with and dominated by white Anglo-North American worldviews, methodological assumptions, and concrete methodological strategies”, a reality being challenged by indigenous and international scholars attempting to shift focus away from individualism towards collective and networked societies.

Furthermore, the coupling of reflexive thematic analysis with elements of ethnographic research, will complement and strengthen both research strategies. When conducting ethnographic research, a common challenge arises in the seeing of pertinent data everywhere or nowhere and therefore gathering everything or nothing; reflexive thematic analysis provides a framework for analysis which helps to reinforce the theoretical aspect of ethnographic research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Coming from the other side, an ethnographic approach to data collection encourages continuous reflective practice and situates the researcher within the narratives of their participants (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

In line with interpretivist frameworks, I have used a combination of interviews and elicited diaries to gain insights into the connection between activism and archival work and the impact of digital media on that connection. I used the definitions of community archiving (Caswell, 2014) and activist archivists (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015) detailed in my introduction as criteria for scoping participants with the result that all involved were doing activist archival work in either partially or wholly independent archives. I have indicated that community archives are failing to engage in web archiving at present, in this case however, reaching a definitive solution was not the ultimate aim of my research as much as the exploration of the relationship between activism and archival work in a digital context. I also hoped to gauge the potential for the creation of a local network to share knowledge and skills. The emphasis on examining relationships between different

elements of society such as social movements and memory work is, as Murchison (2010) writes, especially compatible with ethnographic research.

I was drawn towards ethnographic research over other models of data collection because of its elevation of those being researched within the research power structure; feminist ethnography views the community members as the experts, they hold the power and the knowledge, not the academics (Murchison, 2010). Whilst I may have initially been in a position of social power or privilege relative to my research participants, I tried to cultivate a sense of bilateral flow of power and knowledge to create mutually beneficial relationships (Murchison, 2010). To be embraced by a community and trusted to represent their voices authentically should be treated as an honour and this type of relationship between the researcher and the research is one that I hope to cultivate through my field work.

There is no such thing as neutral or apolitical research and by placing myself as the primary tool of research, I have had influence over my findings, as well as over the world I was researching (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016; Vanner, 2015). Not only does our personal ideology shape the way we interpret the world, but it also determines our use of language, which can influence the interview process and how findings are presented in writing (Wuest, 1995). Here lies a major factor in my decision to use reflexive thematic analysis; Braun and Clarke's most recent work (*Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, 2022) deeply embeds the impact the research and the research process will have on the construction of knowledge into the research design, as well as recognising and embracing the subjectivity of positioning an inquiry within its historical, cultural, situational, and interactional location. In addition to ensuring reflexivity with regards to my background, principles, and behaviour, I must also consider the degree of my participation in my research settings (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). As it happened, the degree of my immersion varied across research sites; in one case, I had an active role in the organisation, yet a strictly observational role in the others. Furthermore, my involvement in each setting may have changed over time. It is vital that the discrepancies across time and location, and how they potentially affected my representation of different contributors, are considered throughout the research process. I have gone into detail about my positionality and potential biases as a researcher and how these can impact both my relationships with my participants and my interpretation of my findings, which stands as evidence for the sincerity of this research (Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, its rigorousness is demonstrated through a clear and detailed justification for my research design and how it aligns with my philosophical worldview (Tracy, 2010).

Consistent with the principles of feminist research I was careful to produce research where there are benefits for the participating communities as well as myself; research that is *for* activist

archivists as opposed to *on* activist archivists (Wuest, 1995). I have worked within a framework which emphasises and develops participants' perspectives with the explicit aim of empowering my research population (Akman et al., 2001; Le Compte & Schensul, 2010). Empowerment in this context does not refer to the liberation of participants via the research process but a more subtle centring of marginalised voices within oppressive social structures by facilitating self-reflection and developing knowledge seeking (Reid, 2004, in Vanner, 2015). By locating myself as a participant observer I hoped to enable a dialogue to occur between me and my research population and foster an environment where my participants can consider their conversations with me and reflect on the information they provided in interviews and diaries to better understand their involvement – the motivations and priorities – in activist archival work and the barriers they face. Furthermore, by doing research across multiple sites, there was the potential for me to forge links between parallel collections and provide opportunities for knowledge and skills sharing among activist archivists.

3.4.1. Considering coproduction

Over the course of my research, I entered (virtually) into the spaces of marginalised communities that face oppression on the basis of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Whilst, as a woman, I shared common experiences with some of my participants, I remain an outsider to the remainder. When a person conducts research with communities different from themselves there is always the possibility of “othering” the participants, and the innocent act of “giving voice” can be interpreted as extractive and still silencing through the centring of the researcher in the narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Ortega, 2006). Therefore, one of the most significant challenges I was faced with was how to ensure that my research was not exploitative; this principle is central to ethnographic methods and reflexive thematic analysis alike. Both strategies promote the constant reflexivity of the researcher throughout the research process, especially during data analysis; a tenet of reflexive thematic analysis is the development of constant methodological self-consciousness, which entails the dissection of our worldviews, language, and meanings and how they permeate the research process (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, the long-term embedding of the ethnographer in the field, and use of diaries to allow my participants the agency over their contribution to the research process I hope served to elicit authentic responses as well as help to dismantle preconceived attitudes of the researcher towards their participants, and vice versa (Bamkin, Maynard & Goulding, 2016).

Working as I did with minoritised communities and working within an ethnographic research paradigm, there was a strong argument for the use of a coproduction approach (Mason, 2015). The merits of coproduction are as follows: the radical dismantling of power imbalances inherent in traditional research approaches; validation of the knowledge of people who have been excluded –

historically and currently; and communities' familiarity with the research context enables deeper interpretation of the data and brings to light knowledge that would otherwise remain undiscovered (Beebeejaun et al., 2015; Hacker, 2013; Mason, 2015). Whilst participatory research is aligned with my epistemological and methodological perspective, a significant barrier to my undertaking such a project was the time commitment involved. Stanton (2014) and Hacker (2013) emphasise that even prior to field work, a substantial amount of time must be dedicated to building trusting relationships with community partners. Presumably, the research process would also be drawn out due to the need for discussions between researchers and community members about the direction of the project at each stage. This leads to another potential challenge, diverging philosophical positions between partners (Suyeon & Nabatchi, 2016), which could be particularly difficult when conducting multi-sited research, such as I did. A circumstantial factor in my choosing not to use a coproduction approach is the fact that I would have had to make this decision before beginning my PhD; I would have had to already nurtured relationships with all participating activist archives and designed the research method in collaboration with them (Mitlin, 2020). I am not against coproductive research, in principle I advocate its use and over the course of this project I endeavoured to include elements of participatory research in the community guidance of the direction and focus of inquiry. However, the adoption of a purely coproduction approach would not have been possible at this stage in my academic career.

3.4.2. Research Timetable

I have drawn up a Gantt chart (see Appendix 1) to clearly demonstrate how I approached the different phases of this research project. The first phase – January 2019 to February 2021 – entailed researching methods and research paradigms, using activist archives' internet presences to scope prospective archives for participation, and developing scripts for interviews. During the second phase I conducted semi-structured interviews with multiple participants from my three key research sites: Sheffield Feminist Archive; The Sparrow's Nest (Nottingham); and the 1 in 12 Club (Bradford) – March to September 2021. These initial interviews informed the theoretical sampling of heritage and memory sector professionals and activist archivists outside my initial geographical focus with a second wave of data collection taking place between August 2021 and January 2022. All interviews were conducted via video on the Google Meet platform.

Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis it was important that I carried out iterative collection and analysis of data employing abductive logic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My data collection took place between March 2021 and January 2022 during which time I conducted twenty interviews and collected diaries from seven participants. I synthesised my findings between June and October 2022 allowing ample time for writing up the final draft of my thesis.

3.5. Sampling and Recruitment

Recruiting participants for qualitative research is commonly considered a challenging task. I, naively perhaps, entered the recruitment phase of my research with confidence; I was going into places that I would have visited regardless of their connection with my research. As far as I was concerned, I was going to my people; we shared ideas, principles, histories. Unfortunately, however, I was due to begin my field work in the midst of the pandemic. The outbreak of and continued disruption by Covid-19 alone cannot be blamed for the difficulties I faced recruiting participants or maintaining their interest; I was optimistic in believing that our common ground was enough to spark enthusiasm and fuel participants' long-term commitment. Nevertheless, the physical restrictions imposed to minimise the spread of the virus did impact my ability to scope and approach, in person, activist organisations, as well as disrupting their usual manner of operating leading to some places feeling unable to be involved due to staffing shortages, building closures, etc.

I began planning my field work in the autumn of 2020 in the face of fluctuating tier systems, fire-breakers, lockdowns, and other vocabulary pushed into the public vernacular by these unprecedented times. As such, I widened my original research area to include not just South Yorkshire but The North of England and Scotland, the justification being that if I were to cast my net further, I would have a better chance of securing a rich pool of research sites despite the pandemic. This decision was further justified by the character of the cities involved in this research. Sheffield, Bradford, Nottingham, Manchester, and Glasgow are all post-industrial cities that share a culture and history of being under-resourced by local government and being home to large migrant communities.

In line with conducting interpretivist research, I undertook a non-probability approach to sampling (Wilson, 2014). My aim was to provide insights into the individual experiences and attitudes of activist-archivists with regards to web archiving through the selection of information-rich research sites best suited for addressing the central themes of the research, as opposed to producing findings generalisable to a homogenous population (Patton, 1990; Williamson, 2006)).

Initially my sampling technique was purposive (Williamson, 2006; Wilson, 2014). Having selected a definition for community and activist archiving (Caswell, 2014; Sellie et al., 2015), I then used the common features and essential qualities of activist community archives to develop criteria against which potential research sites could be considered. To qualify for inclusion in the project participants needed to: a) belong to an organisation collecting activist materials; b) identify as an activist participating in the movement being archived; c) encourage a community-centred and participatory approach to archiving; and d) committed to amplifying marginalised voices and counter-narratives. In this phase I identified my main research sites: Sheffield Feminist Archive; 1 in 12 Club (Bradford); and Sparrow's Nest (Nottingham). Through initial scoping of potential research

sites, I identified twelve activist groups that I either knew for certain were engaging in archival work or that I believed likely to be collecting materials in some fashion. I by no means expected that every group I approached would be able or willing to take part in my research, with that in mind I aimed to secure the participation of at least three activist archives if I was to provide a rich and responsible representation of local participation in New Social Movements. I had hoped to include at least one archive centred around each of the major actors in New Social Movements: gender equality, racial equality, and queer rights. With these criteria in mind, along with the awareness that the participating groups were likely to be small in active membership, my baseline number of interviews was twelve, a minimum of four interviews at each research location.

Table 1 outlines the involvement of all the participants of this research, as well as the archive or organisation they are involved with, their status as volunteer or paid member of staff, and their experience level in terms of archival practice.

Table 1: The participants

Archive or organisation	Participant	Collection method		Status		Experience	
		Interview	Diary	Employed	Volunteer	Qualified	Amateur
Sheffield Feminist Archive	Cora		X		X		X
	Jenny		X		X		X
	Lucy B	X	X		X	X	
	Lucy W		X		X		X
	Sophie	X	X		X		X
	Rosa	X			X		X
1 in 12 Club (Anarchist, Bradford)	Andy	X			X		X
	Duncan	X			X		X
	Ellie	X	X		X		X
	Jed	X			X		X
	Jon	X	X		X		X
The Sparrow's Nest (Anarchist, Nottingham)	Luminescent Flamingo ¹	X	X	X			X
	Mike	X			X		X

¹ All the participants in this study agreed to remain identifiable with one exception, a member of The Sparrow's Nest who will be referred to as 'Luminescent Flamingo' - a pseudonym of their choosing and a reference to the Christmas Pterodactyl Benevolent Society.

Steel City Queer History (Sheffield)	Suzie	X			X	X	
Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Resource Centre (Manchester)	Lianne	X		X		X	
Govanhill Baths Community Trust, Spirit of Revolt: Archives of Dissent, Political Songs Collection (Glasgow)	Paula	X		X		X	
Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive	Joey	X		X			X
Glasgow Women's Library	Lucy	X			X	X	
Marx Memorial Library & Horse Hospital	Adam	X			X	X	
UK Web Archive (Boston Spa)	Nicola	X		X		X	
Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) Scotland	Audrey	X		X		X	
Internet Archive (USA)	Jason	X		X		X	
Documenting the Now (USA)	Ed	X		X		X	

Reflecting on early interview data and noticing a common concern regarding the technical aspects of web archiving, I widened my sample by approaching organisations that support community archiving efforts in the hope of including their perspectives on the needs of activist archivists and how these are being addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Recruitment in this phase was also undertaken via purposive sampling – my knowledge of the field allowed me to select organisations I knew to be providing support to community archives including the Community Archives and Heritage Group (UK); UK Web Archive; and Documenting the Now (US), I also established contact with the Internet Archive (US) via snowball sampling (Wilson, 2014) – I was referred by Luminescent Flamingo from The Sparrow's Nest to Jason Scott from IA who mirrored the digitised collections held at The Sparrow's Nest.

With its origins in Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory method (1968), saturation has become widely considered the gold standard for demonstrating validity in qualitative research (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017; Mason, 2010, both cited in Braun & Clarke, 2021; Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs, & Jinks, 2018). There is, however, some contestation over what saturation actually entails and at which stage of the research process it should occur. Saunders et al., propose four distinct categories of saturation including, theoretical saturation, inductive thematic saturation, a priori thematic saturation, and data saturation. My iterative approach to data collection and purposive sampling whereby I sought out perspectives to further explore themes from initial analysis aligns most strongly with the first category, *theoretical saturation* (Saunders, et al., 2018: 1895). This alignment is further solidified by my decision not to enter data collection with a codebook populated with pre-established categories to be verified by my participants. This framing of saturation corresponds with reflexive thematic analysis, the authors of which argue that the imposition of predetermined criteria for saturation diminishes the potential for the research to present varied and numerous interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke also concede that decisions around sample sizes are often pragmatic in nature, adhering to what is widely deemed acceptable or usual by journal reviewers, funding bodies, external examiners for theses, etc., in combination with many other factors such as the time and resource constraints of a project (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Riley, 1996). Bearing the above in mind I took Braun and Clarke's advice of approximating the lower and upper limits of a sample size with which I imagined it was possible to generate adequate data to tell a nuanced and multi-faceted story regarding the phenomenon under inquiry (Sim et al., 2018, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2021), namely, ensuring the recruitment of multiple participants from my three main research sites (Sheffield Feminist Archive, The Sparrow's Nest (Nottingham), and the 1 in 12 Club (Bradford)). I then made in-situ decisions about the final sample size on the basis of the quality of the data already collected, in my case widening my sample to include activist archivists outside the Yorkshire area and professionals from the archive and heritage sector (Braun & Clarke, 2021). My transparency regarding my research methods and the challenges I encountered throughout the course of this project stands as evidence of the sincerity of this research (Tracy, 2010).

3.6. Data collection

I feel unable to describe my methods as classical ethnography. Intermittent lockdowns and social distancing, in tandem with the time constraints of doctoral research, have made it difficult to commit to long-term contact with my research communities, however, both the nature of this project and my chosen approaches do share features with ethnography. In a study that seeks to explore the motivations and aspirations of marginalised communities involved in activism and

archival work, an appropriate approach to data collection would be to incorporate elements of ethnographic research.

Diaries offer longitudinal insight and by combining them with interviews, I was able to return to aspects of the diary and explore them further at interview or alternatively, set a diary theme based on something revealed in an interview (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). In this way diaries are seen to reinforce potential weaknesses in the use of interviews alone (Herrington, 2014). Diaries capture the “thought world” of the participant and provide data that is more detailed, personal, and situated than single interviews (Herrington, 2014: n.p.). Furthermore, they enable the participant greater agency over their contribution to the research, aligning their use strongly with my epistemological and ontological positions (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). There are, of course, practical issues with the diary method; they can be time-consuming for the participant and the researcher, and the former can result in the non-completion of diaries or waning of enthusiasm (Herrington, 2014).

Over the twelve-month period, seven of my participants from my three main research sites (Sheffield Feminist Archive, 1 in 12 Club, and The Sparrow’s Nest) agreed to submit monthly diary entries, either typed or audio-recorded; a total of twenty-three diaries were collected by the end of the project. The diaries are referred to as ‘elicited’ because participants were asked to write on specific themes as opposed to being collected from existing personal journals kept by participants. The themes were set on a monthly basis and included: the impact of the pandemic on their archive; how they came to be involved in activist archiving; the relationship between activism and archives; activism using digital media; archives as a place; recording ‘a day in the life’. My participants were prompted to submit their diary entries towards the close of each month; some participant’s needed multiple reminders and there was, as Herrington predicted, some non-completion of diaries with only one participant completing diaries on all six themes, some submitting multiple diaries and two writing only one entry each (Herrington, 2014). Their writings, along with interview transcripts were coded in line with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This iterative approach to analysis informed, in part, the decision to set themes throughout the project instead of at the beginning, allowing more flexibility to return to themes for deeper exploration and include themes that emerge organically. Table 2 details my participants’ involvement in the elicited diary phase of data collection.

Table 2: Participation in data collection via elicited diaries

Participant	Archive	Diary 1 Impact of Covid	Diary 2 Activist archivist origins	Diary 3 Activism and Archives	Diary 4	Diary 5	Diary 6 “A day in the life”

					Digital activis m	Archive as a place	
Cora	SFA	X	X	X	X		
Jenny	SFA	X					
Lucy B	SFA	X	X	X			
Lucy W	SFA	X					
Sophie	SFA	X	X	X			
Ellie	1 in 12 Club	X	X				
Jon	1 in 12 Club	X	X				
Luminescent Flamingo	Sparrow's Nest	X	X	X	X	X	X

I conducted semi-structured interviews using two scripts – one for activist archivists and one for sector professionals – compiled ahead of the interview phase with a basic structure and points to cover, yet there remained space for the interviewee to make valuable contributions outside of my predetermined areas of interest. Examples of the two different interview scripts used are detailed below in Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3: Activist archivists' interview script

Themes	Questions	Follow up questions
Archival turn in activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me a bit about your archive? • Can you tell me about the collection? • Do you think of yourself as an activist? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does that identity fit with your work at the archive? • Why is it an important endeavour? • How do you build your collection?
The effect of Social Movements' use of digital media on the way activist archives are documenting them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me about the archive's online presence? • How do you use digital media as an activist? • What do you think the relationship is between online activism and traditional activism? 	

<p>Current engagement with web archiving technologies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has your archive ever talked about web archiving? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Y – Can you tell me about those conversations? ● N – Are you personally aware of what it is and what it entails?
<p>Benefits and/or barriers to archiving the web.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why do you think so many activist collections are not archiving the web? ● What would be the point of doing it? 	
<p>Potential materials to include in a web archive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you had a web archive, what do you think it would include? ● If your archive didn't archive the web, where would that content go? 	
<p>Anticipated access and use of an activist web archive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can you tell me about the people that use your archive? ● What kind of items do people come to you for? ● How do you think this will change with the addition of a web archive? 	

Table 4: Sector professionals' interview script

Themes	Questions	Follow up questions
Overview of the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me a bit about your role at the organisation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see as the purpose of the organisation? • How do you come to work with grassroots community archiving projects?
Understanding of community archiving movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your understanding of the reasons for communities to create their own archives? • As far as you are aware is there currently much engagement with web archiving technologies by grassroots projects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you consider to be the barriers these groups are facing in capturing web hosted material? • Despite the barriers they may face, do you see benefits in grassroots projects including web archives in the collections? • What sort of web material are grassroots projects seeking to preserve?
The effect of people's use of digital media on archiving contemporary events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you say the use of digital media has impacted contemporary archival practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the pandemic has had much bearing on this?
Imagining possible futures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything that you would like to see happen within the organisation to ensure that grassroots projects are able to continue their work in an increasingly digital society? 	

1. What sort of web material are grassroots projects seeking to preserve?
2. Is there anything that you would like to see happen within the organisation to ensure that grassroots projects are able to continue their work in an increasingly digital society?

Semi-structured interviews are commonly asserted to be the most suitable method of capturing the nuanced perspectives of participants, and encouraging deep reflections from participants (King, 2004; Neergaard et al., 2009, cited in Kahlke, 2014). Interviews were then combined with collected diary entries which together contributed to the presentation of thick description and the understanding of emerging themes. Furthermore, by undertaking less formally structured methods

of investigation I was able to interact more closely with my research population and act with greater sensitivity, considering participants as individuals as opposed to objects of study (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

Recent social movement research has seen a marked reorientation away from the macro-level of exploring collective behaviour towards micro-level investigations of the actions and interactions of individual actors (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014; Castells, 2012). A common trap for inexperienced researchers doing ethnographic research is the assumption that such open-ended research does not require rigorous preparation; however, the absence of a plan can lead to loss of focus, oversaturation of data, and complete deterioration of structure (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Reflexive thematic analysis provides a framework for data analysis which simultaneously maintains the focus of the research questions whilst affording the flexibility to incorporate new directions and source of data as the project progresses (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

With regards to ethnographic research, the relationship of the researcher with their research population, which hinges on the researcher's level of involvement in group activities and their personal commitment to participants' ideologies, is frequently discussed (Bucerius, 2013). Whilst terminology differs ethnographer to ethnographer the categories remain consistent. At one end of the continuum are the researchers who remain fully detached from their research population and do not participate; then there are those who observe for limited periods of time so as to contextualise interviews and other data collection methods; some will build relationships with their participants but still aim to maintain a degree of neutrality; and at the other end are researchers who fully immerse themselves in their research location (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014).

There are advantages and disadvantages to being an insider or an outsider and it is not uncommon for the position of the researcher to fluctuate between the two poles over the course of a project (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). An insider may not only share worldviews and social identifiers with their research population but may be observing a community of which they have been a member for some time. Whilst this may remove any potential tension between both parties and allow the researcher to capture a more authentic representation, it may also hinder the researcher's ability to think critically (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). An outsider on the other hand may find it difficult, as well as time-consuming, to overcome any barriers between them and their research population (Bucerius, 2013; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010), and participants may be wary and less forthcoming in their presence. When conducting ethnographic research as an outsider, Bucerius (2013) found that the use of interview prompts as opposed to a rigid script enabled her participants to have greater control over what they wished to emphasise in their conversations. She

felt that this approach helped to minimise any tension felt between her participants and herself compared with a more formal interview process (Bucerius, 2013).

3.7. Data analysis

I analysed my data, collected both from interviews and diaries, in line with Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis (2006). In the first phase, I familiarised myself with the data by transcribing, reading, re-reading, and listening back to audio files of the data and making notes of initial ideas. Second, I generated initial codes of interesting features across the entire data set in a systematic fashion, collating relevant data to each code. I did this using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Third, I began searching for themes, collating codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data under those themes. Fourth, I reviewed the themes by checking whether they corresponded to the coded extracts as well as the data set as a whole and created a thematic map of the analysis. Fifth, the themes were defined and named, thereby refining each theme and piecing together an overall story. Finally, I produced a report of my findings (see chapter 5) relating back to my original research questions and existing literature in the fields of community archive, web archiving, and social movement studies. Table 5 contains my defined themes for the entire data set in the left-hand column, in the right-hand column are lists of top-level codes and sub-codes which were collated around a single theme.

Table 5: Analysing the data

Themes	Codes
Archives as a resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Archiving is activism ● Evidence ● Empowering communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agency ● Informing activism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Movement building ● Confronting the past <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reclaiming narratives ● Disrupting cyclic time
Community building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Archive as a space ● Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Radical networks ● Community-led <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ownership ● Inclusivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Digital gap ● Memories ● Representation ● Tools for sustainability
Ethos/Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Custodians

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long-term solutions ● Preserve heritage
Personal politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Everything is political ● Fractured Left ● Political awakening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experiencing oppression ○ Literature ○ Music ○ Thatcher's Britain ○ University
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Good enough' standard ● Community engagement ● Contemporary collecting ● WA low on list ● Physical materials ● Preservation ● Social club <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nostalgia ● Survival
Regular operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Altering archival practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Post custodial model ● Digitising ● Historical focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Forgetting present ● Immediate use ● Limitations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Volunteer-run <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Harder to stay on dole ● Untrained ● Organisation structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Responsibility ● Paid staff ● Rely on donations/grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Competitive
Covid activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digitisation ● Embracing online ● Playing catch up ● Rapid collecting ● Taking stock of situation
Covid uncertainties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economic impact
Digital activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alternative news ● Connecting people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Building networks ● Democratising ● Evil social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ State surveillance ● Global reach ● Internet as a record ● Internet dynamic

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Losing access ● Not engaging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Older generation ● Organising ● Performative ● Promoting archive ● Shaping debates ● Slacktivism ● Witnessing history
Dangerous documenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implicating individuals ● Negative attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alt-right ● Privacy ● Reliving trauma
Traditional archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate-less materials ● Archival silences ● Barriers ● Bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elitism ○ Perpetuating hierarchies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colonial legacy ● Claim neutrality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Big picture ○ Multivocality ● Learning from grassroots ● Lack of agility ● Mistrust ● Partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loss of control ● Physically restrictive ● Ways of organising ● Web archiving projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Curated collections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capturing activism
Professional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Best practice ● Building tools ● Community of practice ● Consulting grassroots ● Digital skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GDPR ○ Outreach ○ Social media
Web archiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capacity ○ Cataloguing issues ○ Consent ○ Horizontal organising ○ Lack of funds ○ Lack of infrastructure ○ Lack of resources ○ Lack of technical proficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not on archival curriculum

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No intention ○ Time consuming ○ Understanding the need ● Imagined content ● Failure ● Free tools ● Intuitive tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No perfect tool ● Increasing access ● Inherent bias ● Outsource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internet Archive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mirroring digitised materials ▪ Pros ● Personal interest ● Physical vs digital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Passing knowledge ● Preconceptions ● Sites not prominent
Self-archiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internet Archive ● Organisation's material culture
Skills and knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoids dependency ● Peer-to-peer networks ● Supportive infrastructure

Extracts from the data set exemplifying the assignation to Theme: Archive as a resource, Code: Confronting the past, and Sub-code: Reclaiming narratives:

1. *"I think also it is trying to make clear that the LGBT community has always been around. We go back to Ancient Greece. We've always been here; it's just been masked or hidden or sort of tucked away. So, I think it needs to come to the fore."* (Suzie, Steel City Queer History, interview)
2. *"We are actively going out there and recording women's stories and making sure that the record isn't predominantly male."* (Sophie, Sheffield Feminist Archive, interview)

The above clearly shows how, in line with reflexive thematic analysis, I have understood the different levels of complexity that codes and themes denote. For instance, the code 'reclaiming narratives' captures a single manifestation, or component of a manifestation, of the overarching theme of 'Archive as a resource' and is related to yet distinct from a code under the same theme, for example, 'empowering communities' (Braun & Clarke, 2021). *I would also like to use the above list to make a case for not using data saturation as a measurement of my research's validity. Braun and Clarke (2021) point out that data saturation ordinarily relies on the use of a structured codebook the contents of which are established at the outset of a project.* There are a number of themes and related codes in my data analysis which I would not have anticipated occurring in interviews or

diaries, for example, the theme of 'dangerous documenting' was seldom referred to in the existing literature but was discussed on two separate occasions by participants from different activist archives. Consequently, I prefer the term 'conceptual depth' offered by Nelson (2016) to more faithfully capture the notion that, with regards to the development of theory, a substantial depth of understanding has been attained by the researcher. This reframing of saturation de-emphasises the implication that a data set can reach a state of definitive completeness (Saunders, et al., 2018). This was earlier challenged by Corbin and Strauss (1998), who reasoned that the emergence of new information and therefore theoretical insight can remain a possibility indefinitely. They suggest that more reasonable framing of the point of saturation occurs when data collection no longer feels productive and what is "new" does not enrich the development of the narrative or theory as a whole.

3.8. Research Ethics

Ethics approval was applied for and granted by the University of Sheffield and all interviewees were asked for their consent to having their contributions collected, analysed and presented in a written report, including the audio and video recording of interviews – an ethical consent and participant information sheet is attached as Appendix 2. Participants were made aware that they were within their rights to withdraw their consent in the period between data collection and analysis, any request after this point would not be able to be honoured as the extraction of individual contributions from the data set would be logistically difficult. As those participating in the research conducted were neither children nor considered vulnerable adults, this project was deemed as low risk. Additionally, the content and nature of the questions are such that there was no risk involved for participants above that experienced in their everyday lives. All participants bar one chose to remain identifiable within the data set and the presentation of the findings of this research. One activist-archivist from the Sparrow's Nest (Nottingham) requested to be pseudonymised with an alias of their own choosing. All of the above, as well as a thorough examination of my positionality as a researcher earlier in this chapter, demonstrate my commitment to conducting ethical research (Tracy, 2010).

3.9. The research design in summary

Tying all the above together, I approached this research from an interpretivist postmodern feminist standpoint, and I conducted qualitative research over a period of eleven months which consisted of twenty semi-structured interviews (sixteen with activist archivists and 4 with archive and heritage sector professionals) and elicited diaries collected from seven participants from my three main research sites. I then used NVivo data analysis software to analyse all the data in line with Braun & Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2022). The following chapter introduces my participants as well

as provides contextual information on the archives and organisations they are involved with so as not to divorce their perspectives from the unique character of the projects they are involved with thereby enriching their contributions to this research.

4. The Participants

Over the course of this research twenty individuals from twelve organisations, eight of which were activist community archives in the North of England and Scotland, shared their perspectives via interview, diaries, or both. I also interviewed four practitioners from the archives and heritage sector either involved in web archiving or supporting grassroots archiving projects. I will dedicate some space here to introduce those involved, the organisations they represent, the former's activism and the nature of their archival work, and the latter's relationship with community activist archivists, thereby showcasing the richness and diversity of my research population as well as providing contexts for the findings of this research both of which demonstrate my commitment to rigorous research (Tracy, 2010).

4.1. Activist Archives

4.1.1. Sheffield Feminist Archive

The women of second wave feminism are now either elderly or gone, that their stories are now on the brink of vanishing gave a sense of urgency to the creation of the Sheffield Feminist Archive (SFA). The archive was established in 2015 by a group of women that met through the Sheffield Feminist Network in partnership with the local authority archives "to ensure that Sheffield's feminist past and present is documented, preserved and made accessible to all." (Sheffield Feminist Archive, 2022). Six of my participants were from the Sheffield Feminist Archive, contributing either interviews or diaries and in two cases, both.

Since its formation the SFA has evolved from being an archive dedicated to collecting histories from the women's liberation movement era of the 1970s and 80s to one that has a greater focus on contemporary collecting and participation in active feminist communities in and around the city. This is due, in part, to the shifting character of the organising committee to include more younger feminists that came to the archive through postgraduate placement schemes, this also means that the organising committee has a high membership turnover as many volunteers come to the city temporarily for their studies and move on after graduating. That said, the SFA still retains its intergenerational quality and learning from each other's experiences is a crucial element of the archive's work in celebrating neglected narratives and practising an intersectional and inclusive feminism.

I became a member of the organising committee in 2018, therefore with regards to this research site I am a participant-observer, though I was less active in my involvement during the course of my field work in an attempt not to influence the direction of the archive during data collection. The project is completely volunteer-run and has no premises, consequently everything they collect is deposited with and cared for by Sheffield City Archives. In this sense they are more like a conduit between the archives and their community, encouraging donations to and interaction

with the archives and generating reflective materials on contemporary feminisms. The decision to house their archive with a local authority archive was partly out of necessity – without steady income the project is unable to afford a space for their collection, certainly not one that enables them to adequately preserve materials in a controlled environment. There was also the argument that a partnership with the city archives was preferable over one with an academic institution, as they wanted the archive to be accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

The main thrust of their work goes into collecting oral histories of local women and feminists, a project that received council funding which was put towards training from the Oral History Society on the practicalities and ethics of conducting interviews. More recently they launched their digital archive 'Women in Lockdown' with the aid of Heritage Lottery funding, which seeks to collect the experiences of self-identifying women living in the Sheffield area during the Covid-19 pandemic through audio, visual and written submissions. 'Women in Lockdown' was born out of the realisation that the pandemic was disproportionately impacting women's lives and the SFA wanted the stories they captured to be accessible remotely during and after times of social distancing and isolation.

Pre-pandemic the SFA held regular events including talks drawing on materials from the archive and collecting people's experiences and feminist visions of the future with the aim of involving their community in the generation of content to be archived. These activities align strongly with Caswell's community archiving principles of participatory approaches to archive building, embedding the archive within the community it represents, and what I have identified as a feature of activist archival work, the democratising of access to documentary heritage and encouraging public interaction with existing materials (Caswell, 2014). Considering SFA meetings pre- and post-pandemic there is a marked difference in the character of their collective feminism. The pandemic seems to have been a crystallising moment for many to see the interconnectedness of society's injustices, and SFA members came out of lockdown with greater enthusiasm for their cause and commitment to intersectional feminism.

The SFA are not just documenting feminist activism they are feminist activists and therefore activist archivists (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015): when speaking about their activist origins, most members pinpointed experiencing sexism, especially in the workplace, as a moment of political awakening. A couple of members are also qualified as a librarian and archivist and feel that documenting the movement is a very tangible and valuable way for them to contribute to contemporary feminist causes. They are unequivocal about the political nature of community archiving; collecting women's narratives is fundamentally an act of resistance against the sexist erasure of women throughout history. For the SFA, depositing feminist materials in the Sheffield City

Archives is hugely symbolic of the progress women have made in the fight for equality and confronts the structural oppression still experienced by women in the present. They hope that their collection will inspire current and future feminist activists and be discovered by people outside of their community, encouraging self-learning around gender inequality.

4.1.2. The 1 in 12 Club (Bradford)

The 1 in 12 Club in Bradford is an anarchist social club that has existed for 42 years, acquiring a building in 1987, and developing a library collection and archives from the 90s to the present. As the name suggests, it differs from the Sheffield Feminist Archive in that the 1 in 12 Club's archive is just a small piece of their organisation. First and foremost, the 1 in 12 Club is a community of people who share the principles of cooperative living and mutual aid, and "promoting political ideals and social change" (1 in 12 Club, 2006); within the building they own and set across four floors there is a bar, a gig venue, and a café, as well as a library and archive. They do, however, share the multigenerational character of the SFA, of the five 1 in 12 Club members I spoke with, three (Jon, Ellie, and Andy) were very active in anarchist protest culture and heavily involved in the running of the Club in the 1990s. The other two (Duncan and Jed) were younger and had not been involved for as long - though Jed has memories of the Club as a teenage counterculture hang out and Duncan was involved in similar organisations in Scotland before ending up in Bradford.

The multigenerational nature of the Club also reflects its importance to its members as the heart of the Bradford anarchist community. On visiting the Club for its 40th anniversary celebration it was clear that this place was a refuge from capitalist society where people had met their partners, raised their children, and formed life-long friendships. This is a strong feature of anarchist archives where self-education is a key element as is the provision of space to enable collective identities and community solidarity to flourish; Moore and Pell (2010) call these spaces "counter-publics". The Club is the site of Bradford's annual anarchist bookfair; the library is used to host talks on social and environmental issues and anti-establishment direct action; and when asked "why archive?" the answer is always the same – to inspire activism.

Similarly with the Sheffield Feminist Archive, members of the 1 in 12 Club are involved in the running of the Club on an ad hoc, voluntary basis, apart from the bar staff who are salaried. Consequently, they also experience a number of challenges in the running and advancing of their project. As with many archives up and down the country, the outbreak of Covid-19 forced the 1 in 12 Club to close its doors and they remained closed for over a year until the Club's 40th anniversary party in September 2021. During this time, though, they used various social media platforms to encourage community participation in creating a photo archive of materials of the Club's history to

mark their 40th anniversary celebrations (Caswell, 2014), and to stay connected with their community.

None of the people I interviewed at the 1 in 12 Club were qualified archivists, though two are trained librarians, and it was evident that the collecting and sharing of literature was central to their existence as an anarchist group (Moran, 2014). The Club's merging of archival and library holdings and functions is typical of radical collecting projects (Ziegler, 2014), with the documentary heritage of the movement seen as a jumping off point for participation in ongoing struggles. The Club has intermittently run a library collective to organise and catalogue their collections, but since the outbreak of Covid it has been on hiatus and to my knowledge remains inactive since their reopening. Though I was never able to view their archives, conversations with the Club members suggest that it largely contains documents relating to the 1 in 12 Club's activities as well as hundreds of posters from decades' worth of punk and hardcore gigs hosted at the Club.

4.1.3. The Sparrow's Nest (Nottingham)

The Sparrow's Nest is an anarchist library and archive based in Nottingham which was established in 2008 by members of the Anarchist Federation, with its roots firmly planted in the anarchist movement, the essence of the Nest is captured by Sellie et al.'s understanding of activist archives (2015). Again, The Sparrow's Nest serves as both a library and archive of radical material, creating in effect a one stop shop for local anarchists (Ziegler, 2014). In their own words they work to find, process and care collections of documents related to anarchism and the radical left with the primary aim of ensuring those materials are freely accessible to interested audiences. Their remit includes radical anti-authoritarian politics in Nottingham and the surrounding area, including South Yorkshire, because they see the term anarchism as being very open to interpretation and used by a variety of different organisations with loosely the same mission at their core. The Sparrow's Nest describes itself as being part of an international network of radical libraries and archives (and a national network once upon a time, though that appears to have eroded in recent years), as well as part of the local Nottingham radical community. Prior to the pandemic The Sparrow's Nest frequently collaborated with other projects, such as the radical history group, 'People's Histreh', and Nottingham Zine Library, hosting talks, exhibitions, and book launches.

Unlike the 1 in 12 Club, their archives are the very heart of The Sparrow's Nest – ideologically speaking the two projects are very similar, however, in every other aspect they are completely different. The Sparrow's Nest is much more professional in its approach to collecting, preserving, and making accessible its materials, and this is reflected by its usership which includes many academics using their archives for research purposes. Neither of the participants from The Sparrow's Nest are qualified archivists and most of their members are volunteers; Luminescent

Flamingo is their only member of paid staff, working on a part-time basis and taking on the majority of the workload processing and preserving materials. Although The Sparrow's Nest do not undertake any web archiving themselves, their digitised collection is periodically mirrored by the Internet Archive.

It also differs significantly from the Sheffield Feminist Archive in that its primary focus is historical materials, whereas the SFA generates contemporary reflections on feminism with their community, as well as encouraging donations of historical materials. As with the Sheffield Feminist Archive and the 1 in 12 Club, the members of the Sparrow's Nest view their archival work as an activist endeavour. It is their hope that people will use their collection as a resource for understanding struggles of the past, particularly the failures of the movement, and apply their learning to current and future activism.

4.1.4. Glasgow Women's Library

The Glasgow Women's Library was founded in 1991 by a collective of women artists and activists as a place for enabling the exchange of knowledge and documenting the work they were doing within their communities. It has grown from a volunteer run organisation into one that employs trained archival staff and has become the home to the UK's largest Lesbian archive. Whilst the Glasgow Women's Library in contrast to other archives involved in this research enjoys an accredited status, their vision – “a world where every woman can fulfil their potential and the historical, cultural and political contributions of women are not only recognised but celebrated” – aligns strongly with the core principles of the community archiving movement, celebrating marginalised narratives and embedding their archives within the community it serves (Caswell, 2014; Glasgow Women's Library, 2022). As well as their extensive archives and library, they offer a number of services for the local community including lifelong learning projects, numeracy and literacy tutorials, and personal development workshops for women of colour.

I spoke with Lucy, a qualified archivist, who was undertaking a three-month long placement at the GWL over the summer of 2021. Whilst the GWL have a core team of long-serving professional staff, they also take on several volunteers on both a rolling and short fixed-term basis. Though this makes for a more transient and sporadic staffing model, talking to Lucy, it was clear that the GWL use their volunteers very effectively and provide a great deal of guidance on how to complete tasks and represent the organisation on its various social media accounts. In a similar way to the anarchist projects mentioned above and radical archives more generally, the GWL has brought together woman-centred library and archive materials under one roof (Ziegler, 2014). They are also, in the same vein as other activist archives involved in this research, primarily focused on the processing,

preservation, and dissemination of the physical holdings and web archiving was not on their agenda at the time of data collection.

4.1.5. Govanhill Baths Community Trust, Spirit of Revolt: Archives of dissent, and The Political Songs Collection (Glasgow)

Paula is the project archivist for three community archives in the city of Glasgow: Govanhill Baths Community Trust, Spirit of Revolt: Archives of Dissent, and the Political Songs Collection. The Spirit of Revolt based at the Mitchell Library holds collections around the area's anarchist and libertarian-socialist past and all their digitised materials have been uploaded to the Internet Archive. The Political Songs Collection is one of the special collections held at the University of Glasgow and Govanhill Baths Community Trust have extensive archives of the site's history of occupation in the 2000s and related community organising efforts.

Paula is a trained archivist and is employed by each of the archives through project funding packages and they also sit on the committee of the Community Archives and Heritage Group Scotland, helping to steer the group's support and guidance for grassroots archiving projects. Paula believes in the politicism of archival work and sees the archives they work in as significant resources for Glasgow's activists (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015). They are also committed to the democratisation of access to information, and this ethos guides their approach in each of their archives, aiming to have collections digitised and remotely accessible as quickly as possible. Despite using the Internet Archive to mirror their physical holdings, none of the projects Paula is involved in are actively capturing content hosted on the web for inclusion within their own collections.

4.1.6. Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive

The Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive, founded during the pandemic, aims "to record, share and discuss the past and present of working-class organising for decent housing in our city." (Glasgow Housing Struggle Archive, 2022). The project was awarded funding from the Lipman-Miliband Trust and is supported in its endeavours by the Worker's Education Association, it also has strong ties with Living Rent, Scotland's tenants' union. I spoke with Joey Simons, one of the founding members of the GHSA who was unequivocal about the politicism of archival work and how they see their archives as a vital contribution to working-class people's fight for secure and well-maintained housing (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015). The GHSA's archival activism can be seen through its aims to build a bank of resources capturing the city's rich past (and present) of organising around housing and tenant's issues. They also hold a strong ethos of knowledge sharing and network building and are committed to cultivating a space for education and sharing skills and knowledge amongst activists and archivists alike. The initial thrust of their activities was a series of workshops around activist archiving, preservation, digitisation, and hosting archives on digital media. A priority for the

GHSA is that the participants of tenants' movements have access to the information they need to affect change, and they are explicit about the need for their archives to be both located within and constantly evolving to reflect the community it represents (Caswell, 2014; Glasgow Housing Struggle Archive, 2022).

Joey is new to archival work, though they have used archives extensively for activist purposes and has been involved in left-wing political organising their entire adult life. They also emphasised Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive's reliance on the support and guidance of ideologically parallel archiving projects both within Glasgow and the rest of the UK. With the GHSA in its infancy, there are no plans at the present to include a web archive within its remit.

4.1.7. Steel City Queer History (Sheffield)

Steel City Queer History is a Sheffield-based memory-work project that was launched in 2018 with the aim of collecting around LGBTQIA* experience, largely in the medium of oral histories. I spoke with one of the founding members, Suzie, who is also a trained archivist working at Sheffield City Archives, which informs both their activism and their understanding of capturing contemporary narratives. Being involved in the city archives' web archiving efforts using Preservica, Suzie has the expertise to create a queer web archive for the Sheffield area and it is something that they hope will be part of SCQH's remit in the future.

The central tenet of the project's archival work is to draw attention to the city's rich history of queer culture and experiences that has hitherto been underrepresented in official narratives. Of particular importance is enriching the existing history of the queer community with personal accounts and the emotions attached to experiences of queerness. Their commitment to amplifying marginalised voices within the documentary heritage of Sheffield aligns strongly with Caswell's definition of community archiving (2014), they also encourage community participation in generating contemporary materials for their archives which they use to map the historical and contemporary landscapes of the LGBTQIA* community in the city.

4.1.8. Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Centre (Manchester)

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Centre, housed at Manchester University Library, was created in the memory of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah a thirteen-year-old schoolboy who was killed in a racially motivated attack. The AIU Race Centre's vision of a society which is inclusive, truly representative, and free of racial injustice, encapsulates the community archiving principles of diversifying history and celebrating marginalised voices, the centre also has a strong ethos of being community-led in its collecting and representation of its materials. (Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE, 2022; Caswell, 2014). As well as collecting oral histories, photographs and documents from the local community they are

committed to using their archive to develop anti-racist school curricula and develop the delivery of education around global majority histories (Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE, 2022).

My point of contact was Lianne Smith, the AIU's Archivist and Library Manager. Having only recently moved to the city, they do not hold a strong sense of belonging to the Black community in Manchester, though, as a person with global majority heritage, they are deeply committed to the representation of people of colour in the documentary heritage of the UK. Their status as a qualified archivist and their employment by an academic institution gives a slightly different flavour to their archival activism. In contrast to many other participants in this research who identify as activists, Lianne is more aligned with the concept of an active archivist; a professional who confronts the archival tradition of passive and neutral record-keeping, advocating instead for absolute transparency regarding their influence on each stage of the archival process (Flinn & Alexander, 2015).

4.1.9. Marx Memorial Library, and Horse Hospital Arts Centre (London)

At the time of interview, Adam was doing a qualification in archives and records management at the University of Dundee alongside volunteering as an archivist at two radical archives in London – Marx Memorial Library and Horse Hospital Arts Centre. The Marx Memorial Library opened in 1933 as a library and workers' education centre with strong ties to the labour and trade union movements. Their collection is largely historical, but they offer a rich programme of events geared towards the use of archive materials in the ongoing fight for a better future. The MML is staffed largely by volunteers under the guidance of a single professional archivist. Adam sees his archival work as explicitly political and views the MML, in particular, as a vital resource for participants in contemporary working-class movements (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015). The Horse Hospital is an art centre with a strong political underpinning, and Adam is their sole archivist tasked with the processing and digitising of their physical materials.

Whilst geographically Adam's archival work falls outside the scope of this research, his perspective as a current student of the field provided insights into what is prioritised in the curriculum in terms of contemporary collecting, and what they feel are important skills with which present and future archivists should be equipped.

4.2. Incorporating perspectives from bodies supporting the community archiving movement

When early interviews revealed that activist archivists considered technical proficiency and digital skills as prominent obstacles regarding their web archiving capabilities and awareness of supportive bodies was by no means ubiquitous, I decided to seek the perspective of members of organisations

that provide support to amateur archivists to see whether they were aware of and responding to these needs.

As I had been informed by The Sparrow's Nest that all of their digitised holdings had been mirrored by Jason Scott from the Internet Archive (IA), I sought to interview them about how they came to be involved with the Sparrow's Nest and the reasons behind this case as well as their work more broadly. I also interviewed Nicola Bingham, the lead curator for the UK Web Archive (UKWA) at Boston Spa, about her experiences dealing with community archives and the initiative's efforts to include minoritized narratives. The Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) is the foremost organisation supporting grassroots archiving projects in the UK. I contacted them hoping to learn about their relationship with community archives and how needs were identified and responded to – I was directed to Audrey Wilson from CAHG Scotland. Finally, I reached out to US-based Documenting the Now (DocNow) who are – unlike CAHG – focused specifically on supporting a) activist groups, and b) the capturing of web and social media content.

4.2.1. The Internet Archive (US)

The Internet Archive, a not-for-profit organisation established in San Francisco in 1996, aims to “provide universal access to all knowledge” by archiving the entirety of the web for its social and cultural significance (Internet Archive, 2022). The most well-known aspect of the IA is its Wayback Machine which gives the user access to historical websites and other digital materials such as audio and video files. They also run Archive It, a free service, where anyone can upload a website to the archive and are affiliated with an organisation called Archive Team who specialise in archiving websites that are deemed as being acutely at risk of being lost. Talking with Jason, though he was very clear that the IA operates without a political agenda – their mission is simply to make all information publicly available and what people do with that information is beyond their concern – the ethos of the organisation struck me as quite anti-authoritarian, and they have even described themselves as “rogue archivists”. Not only do they not require permission for people to donate materials, they also do not seek permission from the owners and authors of websites they archive.

4.2.2. Documenting the Now (US)

Also based in the US, Documenting the Now is an organisation which has created a community of practice of archivists and activists for sharing tools and knowledge surrounding the capture and preservation of public social media and web content. They host online communities on Slack and Twitter and prior to the outbreak of Coronavirus, ran regular workshops across the US; they also run a scheme called archivists supporting activists which matches up those in need with those with skills (Documenting the Now, 2022). The catalyst for DocNow's existence was Michael Brown's killing by police in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Use of social media to record and share the event and its

repercussions in real time and the propulsion of Black Lives Matter from a localised campaign to a global movement, sparked a realisation that social media content, especially digital activism, are valuable pieces of our cultural heritage, and therefore worth archiving. I interviewed Ed Summer, the project's technical lead and co-principal investigator, among many other roles.

4.2.3. UK Web Archive (Boston Spa)

The UK Web Archive initiative run through the British Library began with the organisation's recognition of the need to extend its activities to include the preservation of web content as a significant piece of the UK's cultural heritage. The project aims to capture a complete picture of UK-based web content and thereby a representative narrative of our national digital heritage. As well as deploying automatic crawlers of UK domains, they acknowledge that smaller organisations and individuals are likely to use proprietary platforms, such as blogging sites, to host their content, so there are ways to donate material to the archive as well as curators sourcing content on a case-by-case basis. Governed by legal deposit legislation, access to the archived materials is predominantly on site at the British Library either in London or at Boston Spa. My contact at the UK Web Archive was Nicola Bingham who is the lead curator of web archiving at the Boston Spa site; before joining the British Library in 2002, they worked in the Tyne and Wear archival services (British Library, 2022).

4.2.4. Community Archives and Heritage Group Scotland

The Community Archives and Heritage Group, and the more recently formed CAHG Scotland, is a national group initially set up as an informal voluntary group interested in supporting and promoting the activities of community archives. As of 2009 CAHG has been a special interest group of the Archives and Record Association (ARA) (Community Archives and Heritage Group, 2022). Their activities include a resource bank of information and webinars on archival processes, community engagement, and funding streams. Made up of mainly archive professionals and experienced community archivists, CAHG identifies community archives and hopes to provide them with the knowledge and skills to continue their work long-term and embedded within their communities. I spoke with Audrey Wilson who is the project lead on creating a Scotland community archive and heritage network, they are also the Partnerships and Engagement Manager at the Scottish Council on Archives (CAHG Scotland, 2022).

5. Findings

I will now present my findings, which I have endeavoured to communicate in an engaging manner by avoiding reportage in favour of telling the stories of my participants. As Tracy (2010) recommends, for a piece of research to resonate with its intended audiences it needs to have aesthetic merit and demonstrate a transferability or naturalistic generalisability. My decision to seek contributions from activist archivists, belonging to a variety of social movements, allowed me to explore the common and divergent drivers behind archiving activism, as well as their experiences of doing activist memory work, and their attitudes towards preserving the web. Furthermore, the credibility of this research project is demonstrated through the presentation of my participants' contributions in their own words, thick descriptions, and multivocality presented in the following chapter (Tracy, 2010).

My findings show that in the post-industrial cities in Northern England and Scotland there are a number of activist archiving projects taking place. The ideology behind the convergence of activism and archival work is considered in section 5.1, 'Archival turn in Activism'. I then use the following subsections – 'Resistance through reclamation'; 'Democratising access'; 'Building archives/building movements'; and 'Archiving for accountability' - to examine the four principal ways that activists are using and adapting archival practices to further their causes. Section 5.2, 'Attitudes towards digital activism', follows my line of inquiry into the imagined benefits of archiving the activist web and concerns regarding the fate of web-hosted activism without their intervention. With these sections working together to lay a foundational understanding of what activist archiving is and why it is happening, section 5.3, 'The many challenges of archiving the web', will attend to the research questions: are activist archivists doing web archiving, and what are the barriers they face? Subsection 5.3.1 deals with practical barriers, such as lack of resources and knowledge, leading into a section considering the need for more robust networks of support, 'Communities of practice'. Ethical issues around consent and safeguarding, and conceptual barriers concerning archival practice and reverence for traditional activist methods are then presented in subsections 5.3.3-5.3.4. Finally, I will provide a summary of the key themes presented in this chapter - section 5.4 - before moving on to the discussion.

5.1. Archival turn in activism

To better understand the findings of this research, they must be situated in the landscape of activist archiving in the post-industrial cities of the North of England and Scotland. Drawing on the testimonies of activist archivists from a wide range of projects (for participant biographies refer to section 3.5), this section will attempt to build a narrative of the intersection of archival work and social justice movements. Through these testimonies light will be shed on the role of archives in the following areas: reclaiming absent or obscured histories as an act of resistance; ‘opening up’ and democratising access to archives; activating records for immediate use in ongoing struggles; and utilising archives to hold authorities to account.

The following statements demonstrate the existence of an archival turn in activism; from the perspective of those interviewed for this research, their archival work and their activism are inextricably linked – the term ‘archival turn in feminism’ was coined by Kate Eichhorn in 2013 and the phenomena, including but not limited to feminist activism, has been discussed widely over the last decade (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Pell, 2015; and Vukliš & Gilliland, 2022). For archive student, Adam, who came to their studies with a strong background in working-class movement archiving (Marx Memorial Library and Worker’s School), the idea that a person can separate their political ideas from their day-to-day life is unfathomable:

“I’m not just separately an archivist, and I just go to this place and look at archive material which is not connected to my world view, my politics, and my ideas about things ‘cos they’re both completely joined together for me.” (Adam, MML & HH, interview)

They are not alone; Luminescent Flamingo (Sparrow’s Nest) also firmly stated a belief that every act is guided by politics. Consequently, the creation of an independent archive and the collection of materials pertaining to communities whose stories are largely absent from accepted historical narratives is overtly political:

“Given that I think all actions are political, collecting and processing historical artefacts is in itself a political act, one that can contribute to our understanding of the world.”
(Luminescent Flamingo, The Sparrow’s Nest, diary)

In contrast to Luminescent Flamingo’s focus on the preservation of alternative histories, Suzie (Steel City Queer History) emphasised the importance of archiving the contemporary debates and campaigns around LGBTQIA* rights and how their archive can be a vehicle for effecting change:

“In the past ten years, which I think is directly related to this government and Brexit, it seems like suddenly we’re having to fight again to be allowed to just exist. We’re having to justify trans rights. We’re having to justify that – “Well, we don’t have a straight Pride Day, why do you need a gay Pride Day?”... there’s been a bit of a backlash... that annoys me, and I want to

be political about that. I want to keep bringing that agenda forwards of, you know, "We're here, we're queer, we're not going away." (Suzie, SCQH, interview)

Member of the 1 in 12 Club (Bradford) and former school librarian, Andy, noted that in their decades of participating in the anarchist movement they encountered many anarchist librarians. Whilst there is a very clear distinction between roles in professional libraries and archives, in radical circles the two are much more closely connected with the interchanging of terms and overlapping of collection remits and access models.

"I became a librarian... quite a lot of anarchists are librarians, you know. More than you would expect have been librarians." (Andy, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

When asked why they thought there was such an affinity between anarchism and library work, Andy replied:

"Giving out information, helping people, I mean, all those things that I did when I worked at the college library, I was writing CVs for poor kids, basically, getting them jobs... You know, you actually feel that you're contributing in a way." (Andy, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Duncan, also from the 1 in 12 Club, offered their thoughts on what draws activists to information work and archiving more specifically. They suggested that archival work is a way for activists to ensure that the momentum of a movement is sustained beyond single acts and that those efforts are just as integral a part of a movement's success as direct action.

"That would be somebody's calling within a movement – to be like, okay, I'm not going to go out there and firebomb a cop car but what I can do is I can write about it. And I can put the effort into getting it clearly documented." (Duncan, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Founding member of the Sheffield Feminist Archive, Rosa, shared this opinion. As a trained librarian and history graduate, they felt that their knowledge of recording and sharing narratives meant that archival work would be a more impactful way for them to contribute to local feminist activism than joining the crowds in the streets.

"This felt like something that really chimed with me... I felt like I had something to contribute, practically. Whereas, maybe in other kinds of activism – maybe I'd gone to demos, or I'd done bits and pieces, but I guess this is where I felt like my skill set could actually be – and my perspective – I could put it into good use to make a practical difference." (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Similarly, Lianne from the AIU Race Centre did not identify as an activist in terms of participating in direct action, again seeing their role as an archivist as an alternative way to challenge social

inequalities. When posed with the question of whether they would call themselves an activist archivist, they responded:

"I would yeah, or certainly tendencies toward activism within archives. Although I wouldn't describe myself as a full on activist, but I do think that my approach and the way I see archives as a tool for social good, and a tool for social justice, and my belief that as a profession, we have tried to occupy this sort of neutral space of "Oh, we just look after the stuff but what is then done with it, is not really anything to do with us." I don't buy that at all. I don't believe that." (Lianne, AIU Race Centre, interview)

The participants of this research hold diverse understandings of what it is to be an activist archivist, yet whether they see archival work as supplementary to their activism or as their primary method for enacting social change, they are united in their belief that archives have the potential to empower individuals, coordinate communities, and hold authorities to account. The four key activist archival activities – reclaiming narratives, democratising access, informing activism, and gathering evidence – will be explored in turn below.

5.1.1. Resistance through reclamation

Many participants involved in this research stated that the mission of their archival work was to reclaim narratives and counteract the hegemony of the white, cis-gendered, straight, moneyed man in the archive. Michel-Rouch Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) opened up discussions around the role of archives in the silencing of groups of peoples deemed inconsequential to the recording of history. Trouillot's conceptualisation places the creation of "archival silences" as the second stage in the production of history preceded by the making of records and followed by the forming of narratives and finally the writing of history. More recently Caswell developed the concept of archival silences in relation to marginalised communities, highlighting the trauma of experiencing archival silence and the need to combat a phenomenon they entitle "symbolic annihilation" (2014). An alertness to archival silences and obligation to use their work to confront symbolic annihilation can be seen clearly in interviews with members of the Sheffield Feminist Archive:

"I would see that conscious decision to collect and collate stories of women's experience as seeking to rebalance the historic gap that there's been in the historical record and the archival record of women's lives. And I would see that gap as a reflection of the devaluing of women's experience in society as a whole." (Rosa, SFA, interview)

"The activism that feminist archives take part in becomes a necessary step to achieving equality, particularly if such archives are compensating for the gaps in the historical record and are bringing marginalised women's narratives to the forefront." (Sophie, SFA, diary)

These sentiments are echoed by activist archivists whose collections are created for and with communities that experience marginalisation in terms of race and sexuality, such as the AIU Race Centre (Manchester) and Steel City Queer History (Sheffield):

“An archive and library and a space in which the stories and histories of migrant communities, what we term global majority heritage communities, refugee communities, things like that, are at the heart of what we do.” (Lianne, AIU, interview)

“... to make clear that the LGBT community has always been around. We go back to Ancient Greece... We’ve always been here; it’s just been masked or hidden or tucked away. So, I think it needs to come to the fore, and people need to realise a bit more how people are affected by traditional society and what a big deal it can be to come out or come to terms with your sexuality or your gender identity.” (Suzie, SCQH, interview)

Suzie continued by outlining how important the capture of personal stories and experiences of queerness is for creating a narrative of LGBTQIA* history that is not limited to legislation around gay rights. Their position on this goes towards explaining Steel City Queer History’s decision to focus on collecting oral histories and testimonies from their community:

“I think that’s something that can’t be captured in a leaflet about HIV awareness. You can’t capture somebody’s fear about going to a test centre. You can’t capture somebody’s joy at coming out and going to their first Pride event. It’s sort of capturing the emotion and the experience of people, and sort of letting them share it with you from their point of view.” (Suzie, SCQH, interview)

The participants of this research were united in their understanding of the power of archives to elevate or bury narratives at the discretion of those doing the collecting and therefore the inherent politicisation of archival work:

“Wherever there are choices being made about what is and is not important to our shared cultural memory, a political act is taking place.” (Cora, SFA, diary)

“Archives are always going to be these sites of struggle and power, and they’re going to be contested... what gets to be kept and what doesn’t, what lives” (Adam, MML & HH, interview)

Lianne at AIU spoke of their personal experience of symbolic annihilation. As a Black woman unable to see themselves in the archives, or depicted in archive material but only through the white gaze, they stressed the importance of having agency over your own narrative:

“My entire career has been spent in places where a fairly big chunk of my heritage is not very well represented. And when it is, it tends to be represented from the perspective of others

really... it's not driven by black people, basically." (Lianne, AIU, interview)

They then continued by outlining how damaging that archival erasure can be; devaluing people's existence and their contributions to society as a whole:

"It matters because everyone should be able to see themselves reflected in the documentary heritage of this country. Everyone who is here, everyone who has contributed, everyone who has participated, should be able to see that value reflected back at them, and many people don't." (Lianne, AIU, interview)

Connected with the absence of people of colour in the archive is the representation of British imperialism and a failure, until very recently, to confront our colonialist past and the impact that it had and continues to have on people's lives. Lianne suggests that the white-washing of history – in which archives are complicit – is responsible for the negative backlash towards activists' and institutions' attempts to dismantle our legacy of slavery:

"When you're looking at popular discourse around things like Black Lives Matter last year, and the Colston statue being pulled down, and the backlash around places like the National Trust daring to look at the colonial impact on the properties that they are custodians of, and the complete ignorance around the connection between Britain and the rest of the world, and how those things intersect, and the reason why there is large groups of people from all over the world here, is because of that." (Lianne, AIU, interview)

In efforts to address archival silences, diversify their collecting, and involve the public in identifying materials for preservation, the UK Web Archive run a Save a Site initiative whereby websites can be nominated by their creators or users for inclusion in their archives. This is a potential avenue for activist archivists to ensure that materials they are unable to archive themselves (due to issues outlined in section 5.3) are captured and preserved to a professional standard. However, this would involve a compromise in terms of relinquishing community control over how those materials are described and made available. Nicola (UK Web Archive) recognised this tension:

"Sometimes community groups have felt that when a collection comes to the British Library it's not then made accessible in a way that they would want that material to be made available." (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

Archival silence is not a phenomenon limited to communities of colour, queerness or marginalised gender, but also affects groups organising in opposition to neoliberalism. The history of working-class activism – at least written from the perspective of the activists – has long been documented in archives outside of state control; the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School (London) was founded in 1933 and has been collecting trade unionist, pacifist, and labour movement

ephemera ever since. Speaking with members from working-class movement and anarchist archives it was clear that they don't see their struggles documented in traditional archives. Referring to the collections at Govanhill Baths Community Trust and the occupation that took place at the baths in 2001, Paula was explicit in the belief that without community archiving efforts, significant events in the Glasgow's history would be lost:

"It should be recognised that this material is important and the reason why people are collecting these materials in independent community archives is because the National Archives, or the city archives aren't doing it, or don't have the resources to do it, or don't want to do it." (Paula, Govanhill Baths Community Trust (GBCT); Spirit of Revolt: Archives of Dissent (SoR); Political Songs Collection, interview)

This sentiment is echoed by the Sparrow's Nest's Luminescent Flamingo, who sees their archiving as bringing radical narratives into conversation with the official documentary heritage of the UK:

"As many institutions do not systematically preserve the kinds of materials we focus on, our work seems even more crucial to help people build a more rounded picture of our past and present." (Luminescent Flamingo, The Sparrow's Nest, diary)

Jason Scott at the Internet Archive refers to what is missing in the archives as "advocate-less material". They use their position as a skilled web archivist with access to an almost limitless amount of digital storage space to identify and safeguard content that has no advocate for its long-term preservation. The precarity of these materials is not always necessarily the medium they embody but the circumstances of their creation; Jason explained:

"I believe that ephemeral media - the advocate-less thing I mentioned - the problem that it always suffers, is that it very rarely has an easily reproducible, long-term, archiving plan, it is usually made for the moment - it's a poster that's drawn 10 days before the concert to alert you to a one-time concert and then it's gone. And its purpose is gone." (Jason, Internet Archive, interview)

Jason's concept of advocate-less materials goes some way to answering the question "why do activists archive?"; in some cases; simply wondering where something will end up leads to the creation of an activist archive or an individual's decision to incorporate archiving into their activism.

For Paula, who described their current archival work as a "*natural progression from my work with independent arts organisations*", the concern of losing materials created by marginalised or fringe communities informed their decision to undertake archival training in the first place:

“These organisations had done such an important work but some of them... don’t exist anymore, Document Film Festival still does exist. And it’s like where does that work go, was it archived, so I got really interested in - I think my initial idea was to go do the course at Glasgow Uni, and to get trained so that I could do something with the Document Film Festival archive.” (Paula, GBCT: SoR; Political Songs Collection, interview)

The story is similar with the establishment of the Glasgow Women’s Library which sought to preserve the materials created by a pre-existing community of women activists and artists in the city:

“It was founded in 1991 by a loose collective of feminist artists and activists, and prior to that, they had formed another creative collective called Women in Profile... The Women’s Library I think was a way of solidifying all the knowledge that they were exchanging with each other, and also creating some kind of a record of some of the work that they were doing.” (Lucy, GWL, interview)

Lucy went on to demonstrate how this need to advocate for materials at risk of vanishing into obscurity remained a key part of the GWL’s activist archiving through their decision to house the collections of the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (London) when it closed its doors:

“They have the Lesbian Archive there, which came from the Lesbian Archive & Information Centre. When that closed down, Glasgow Women’s Library went in and basically volunteered to take care of that archive, because otherwise it would have just either been dispersed or destroyed or whatever.” (Lucy, GWL, interview)

This dispersal that Lucy mentioned was also a key motivation for Joey when founding the Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive. Having sought out materials documenting local tenants’ movements for their own research, Joey became aware of how difficult it can be to create a narrative from all the pieces scattered across Glasgow. Consequently, bringing all those pieces together and enabling access to them is central to the GHSA’s mission:

“I think just to make that knowledge a bit more easily accessible, ‘cos that’s another part of it, it’s not necessarily easy to find... to have all this archival material, even just for me doing the research, a lot of that housing history is there but it’s really difficult to find or it’s scattered across loads of different sources, like the stuff housed in Easterhouse, you’d have to spend a lot of time, people don’t have time to do that. So, it’s more just like the stuff that’s already there, [GHSA] is a place where it can be collated and be shared.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)

Reclaiming narratives and amplifying marginalised voices is a key component of activist archival work; for the participants of this research, it is evident that they equate the value society places on an individual or community with the effort taken to preserve their histories. Whilst preservation is a desired outcome of their work, what best serves to make these histories visible, from an activist archivist standpoint, is access and use, which sees activist archivists confronting traditional archiving processes and the institutions in which they take place.

5.1.2. Democratising access

The prioritisation of access, community engagement, and interaction with records is a common stance held by the participants of this research. Even in cases where archival standards are employed independently or community archivists are working in partnership with institutional archives, the orientation of the archival process is, as Lianne (AIU at Manchester University) said, *“quite a radical departure from the way in which other archives I’ve worked in have... it’s flipped on its head”*. For activist archivists the preservation of marginalised history and counternarratives is only the beginning of their archival work; the next step is to activate those records by ensuring access and engagement by communities of activists and marginalised peoples organising for better futures:

“We see our work not only as our historic duty, but also as practical political work that supports contemporary social struggles.” (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, diary)

Fulfilling this role of providing access to archives for marginalised and activist communities is something that concerned participants from the Sheffield Feminist Archive and The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Centre, whose projects are housed at local authority and university archives respectively. Whilst the remainder of activist archivists in this research are involved in independently run projects (Spirit of Revolt, though housed at Glasgow City Archives, maintains organisational autonomy), speaking with SFA members and Lianne (AIU) about their relationship with their parent-archive shone a light on the multifaceted issue of accessible archives.

On a practical level, both Lucy (SFA) and Lianne (AIU) spoke of the restrictive nature of accessing materials held by institutional archives. They viewed the processes involved in requesting materials and the experience of using a reading room as creating barriers for the general public, the majority of whom are not familiar with archives:

“People have to visit Sheffield City Archives, and to do that they have to register as a reader, and there’s all this kind of red tape around that, and it’s not as immediately accessible.”
(Lucy, SFA, interview)

“With the archives, there’s always the additional barrier of having to order stuff and the

search room environment, which I think is a barrier to people, regardless of their backgrounds, who aren't sort of familiar with that process.” (Lianne, AIU, interview)

Lucy went on to describe how her own experiences of having to adhere to strict rules on entering and using institutional archives and the monitoring of their interactions with the materials by archival staff left them feeling uncomfortable:

“You have to surrender your pens when you go in, sometimes you have to hand over your phone, you have to go through a metal detector sometimes, not at the Sheffield City Archives, but at the National Archives for example. They are physically restrictive spaces, they are spaces that make you feel like you are being surveilled, they’re gonna have an effect on you, and they’re not really conducive to feeling really comfortable.” (Lucy, SFA, interview)

In addition to the physical restrictions surrounding archive use, the organising systems employed, and archival arrangement are not designed to aid public interactions with the materials – a first-time user is not likely to know what a fond is:

“The complexity of the archiving process often translates to an alienating and discouraging user experience.” (Cora, SFA, diary)

Suzie from Sheffield’s Steel City Queer History who also works for Sheffield City Archives described their typical interaction with people wanting to use the collections:

“It’s an alien concept... even the history graduates that I see, they don’t understand how archives work. It’s a hidden thing. They’re like, “Can we come and browse?” We’re like, “No, everything’s boxed up and safe. You need to look at the catalogue and decide what you want.” And then they look at the catalogue and they order an entire collection, and I’m like, “That’s about 2,000 documents, you need to bury down and go to the item level, and find what items you need.”” (Suzie, SCQH, interview)

Considering Lucy’s earlier comment about their unease in institutional archival spaces and bearing in mind that Lucy is a white, university-educated woman with a qualification in archives, it is probable that these feelings of discomfort are only exacerbated for people in less privileged positions. Nicola from the UK Web Archive (Boston Spa) corroborated this acknowledging that, historically, archives have been seen as elitist institutions:

“Previously it has been perceived as a bit – maybe a bit exclusive, a person had to have post-doctoral qualifications to come and access records.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

Whilst those types of credentials are no longer necessary to visit institutional archives and much progress has been made in widening the scope of professional documentary heritage

collecting, the experiences detailed by my participants suggest that assumptions surrounding archives and elitism prevail. In the previous section, Lianne (AIU) drew attention to a lack of Black representation in traditional archives and the misrepresentation of Britain's imperial legacy. They spoke about these issues in terms of an abstract sense of belonging to the national story. There are also concrete issues of belonging if the physical spaces of archives are seen to reinforce structural racism and are therefore unwelcoming to people of colour. Members of the Sheffield Feminist Archive were acutely aware that by placing their materials in the Sheffield City Archives they risk making their archive feel inaccessible to communities that experience oppression based on race, class, gender, and sexuality.

"The accessibility of historic materials feeds directly into matters of privilege, classism, racism, sexism and, in an increasingly digital world, ageism." (Cora, SFA, diary)

"Certainly, I can see why people may have looked at what we've done in collaborating with Sheffield archives and chosen not to be part of the project or to donate things because they didn't want stuff to go into a local authority archive." (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Lucy felt that removing the need for users to visit a physical space by hosting parts of the SFA digitally would open up their collections not only to audiences that would likely experience discomfort in institutional spaces for political reasons, but to people excluded from these spaces because of mobility issues:

"A digital archive could be far more accessible to a far wider group of people - not to be critical of our partnership with Sheffield City Archives - you have to factor in the politics of a partnership with an institution, and you have to think about how accessible that is for people. If someone has to visit our physical space in Sheffield and that's an institutional space, in this case it's a local authority archive, would they do that if they felt that this was a space that wasn't going to be welcoming for them? Or on a more practical note, if they're differently abled then getting to the archive might be difficult." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

The 1 in 12 Club were particularly occupied with how to ensure accessibility for differently abled people. Unlike the SFA and the AIU they own their premises and do not have to contend with the politics of institutional partnerships. The Club, however, is far from ideal in terms of physical access. Jed and Duncan shared their concerns:

"I think there's a lot of big talk about making things accessible in activist circles and in the left, but to use the club as an example, it doesn't even have disability access." (Jed, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

“The only downside is accessibility, which is something the club’s struggled with ‘cos it’s up four flights of stairs. But for people that are able, it’s a great space for [groups to meet].”

(Duncan, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Since interviewing members of the 1 in 12 Club, discussions have been tabled about seeking alternative venues to provide a more inclusive and accessible space for their members, though these discussions have been met with some resistance from those that view the building as an artefact in and of itself and losing it would be akin to losing a fundamental piece of Bradford’s radical history. In the meantime, Duncan and Jed have taken steps to disseminate the Club’s wealth of radical literature recording audiobooks for their Library Voices podcast hosted on SoundCloud:

“I think it’s going to work really well in terms of getting some of that material out. And it could be an ongoing project for years ‘cos there’s so much material that’s probably not been recorded that we can share. Hopefully that could be expanded to include talks that happen at the club.” (Duncan, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Certainly, a mainspring for activist archivists embracing digital media has been accessibility for a wider audience, a factor that was reinforced by the outbreak of Covid-19, which resulted in the (mostly) temporary closure of archives nationwide. The interviews and diary writing for this research took place between March 2021 and January 2022 when there was still a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the pandemic. Lucy’s early diaries captured this uncertainty and its translation into a need to find alternative ways of connecting archives and their communities:

“It’s paramount to me that the main output of the project – a digital archive – should be online and accessible to all. This pandemic has exposed how easily our old infrastructures and ways of doing things (for instance, physical archival research) can crumble, starving us of access to the things that represent our collective identities and memories – so instead of waiting for the archive doors to reopen before we can resume recording our experiences, why not try to build something with which people can engage now?” (Lucy, SFA, diary)

The project referred to is the Women in Lockdown digital archive which was launched in the summer of 2022 independently from the Sheffield City Archives – the SFA’s first autonomous collection and something that founding member Rosa had been longing to see realised since the archive was established back in 2015:

“I always had a bit of a hope that we would be able to have some kind of digital online archive that would be accessible, even if it’s just having the interviews able to be listened

to on a website people could access publicly - we still haven't managed that.”² (Rosa, SFA, interview)

The Sparrow’s Nest were digitising their collections long before the outbreak of Covid-19, but talking with their only member of archival staff it was clear that the restricted movement caused by the pandemic was a factor in increasing their efforts:

“In our quest to make materials accessible to interested audiences, we have for some years focussed on expanding our Digital Library in order to facilitate easy access to parts of our collections. During the Covid-19 crisis those efforts have intensified.” (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, diary)

Unfettered and immediate access was viewed as ideologically central to the missions of activist archivists in Glasgow. The Spirit of Revolt, in particular, is geared towards digitising materials and getting them online as soon as possible, so much so that activist archivists from other projects aspire to operate in a similar way:

“The big thing with Spirit of Revolt is they want to have it digitised and put on the web as quickly as possible, that's what they want - to disseminate the information.” (Paula, GBCT; SoR; Political Songs Collection, interview)

Founder of the Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive, Joey, spoke enthusiastically about the Spirit of Revolt’s digitisation efforts. It was clear when discussing plans for their own archive project, still in its infancy, that Joey was heavily influenced by the Spirit of Revolt’s ethos:

“They scan and upload quite a lot of stuff considering the resources they have, because ideologically they want to share that and make that available.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)
“I basically wanted to make our website or create some sort of digital space for sharing this material, a space for these different things we’d done in the courses.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)

Joey also suggested that preservation through use was a common approach for working class movement archives when they referred to the advice they had received from other activist archivists working out of the May Day Rooms (London):

“[An archivist] at the May Day Rooms said that the best way to preserve things is just to share them, to host them in as many places as possible. And I guess yeah, with physical backups.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)

² Rosa’s interview took place in January 2022, six months before the Women in Lockdown digital archive went live.

The SFA's Lucy expressed similar views, emphasising that archival materials are essentially impotent until they are activated through people's engagement with them. Whilst they acknowledged the benefits of archival procedures for long-term preservation, they aired concerns that future use is prioritised at the expense of present user needs:

"It's the use of them that bears out the value they have to other people, they don't have one fixed value, they have plural meanings and values to other people... otherwise what you have is a stack of papers that is not useful to anyone, like those oral histories being burned onto a CD and being locked in an archive, that's useful in terms of keeping them safe for future generations, but what does that mean about the present generation that wants to interact and use them today?" (Lucy, SFA, interview)

This worry is justified. Paula spoke of the situation in Glasgow where the backlog of materials waiting to be processed by institutional archives is such that it would be almost impossible for contemporary collecting to inform contemporary protest culture. They go on to demonstrate, at least in the case of the Spirit of Revolt, that community archives are able to be much more responsive to the specific needs of their users:

"People can deposit things at the Glasgow City Archives, or the National Records of Scotland, and it might not be catalogued for twenty years. Whereas Spirit of Revolt, it's catalogued using ISADg just to fond level and then it's a list. But once that's done it can be digitised and put on the net and can be accessible within months. So, there's a lot to be said about smaller organisations and smaller archives can actually act quicker or get material accessible quicker." (Paula, GBCT; SoR; Political Songs Collection, interview)

Reinforcing the assertion that national archiving bodies are less agile to the needs of their users, Nicola (UK Web Archive) pointed to how adherence to authority guidelines can at times sit in opposition to their obligation as a public resource. Nicola spoke specifically of the limitations they face providing access due to the UK Web Archive's observance of non-print legal deposit legislation which stipulates that material is accessible in reading room environments by default:

"This is a real barrier that we're governed by this non-print legal deposit legislation that has a few caveats attached to it that make the library's job quite difficult. And one of the main things is this default reading room access... We personally think - the web archiving team and other collection areas in the library that ingest legal deposit content - that it jars with our mission of making this content available to all. So, freely available to as wide an audience as possible - that's very much the mandate of the library." (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

The fact that the majority of the UK Web Archive is only accessible on site at the British Library

(London and Boston Spa) and users would need a certain degree of economic freedom to visit does little to dismantle archives reputation as elitist institutions. Nicola admitted that accessing the web archive is difficult, even more so in the wake of Covid-19:

“You have to come to London or Boston Spa; in the current lockdown times you have to make an appointment to come in. So, it’s not easy to access material.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

On site access is challenging in both an abstract and concrete sense for activist archivists. Not only would housing their web archive with the British Library mean that their users must factor the time and cost of travel into their visit, removing activist archives from the community that created them violates a key principle of the community archiving movement.

5.1.3. Building archives/building movements

The immediacy of access that these activist archivists are striving for is so that they can supply their communities with the tools and the knowledge to effect change. Regardless of the flavour of activism being archived by my participants, they all saw their collections as a resource to be used in ongoing struggles. The following anecdote from SFA’s Rosa encapsulates how encounters with archival materials can help people create connections between the past and the present, in this case around violence towards women and people of marginalised genders:

“I was really struck in a recent meeting of the feminist archive organisers when one of the people who just recently got involved described going to Sheffield archives and looking back at some of the stuff that’s in there – it’s not all stuff that we’ve prompted to be collected. And they were struck by the “Reclaim the Night” and stuff from the 90s or even earlier and drawing those parallels between what’s happening now and the kind of post-Sarah Everard vigils and was drawing those kinds of connections and seeing the links.” (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Also in Sheffield, Steel City Queer History’s Suzie reflected on the significance of recording the progress made (and unmade) by the gay community in recent history and using those records as the foundation for contemporary activism. Troubled by the current climate of state sanctioned transphobia, they believed that their archival work can be a platform for advocating for trans rights:

“I think it does tie into what current people’s rights are, you know, sort of saying, “At one point, we couldn’t do this, and now we can do this, but now we need to fight for the fact that people should be able to identify us by the pronouns that we choose to use,” – it’s the next step forward, isn’t it?” (Suzie, SCQH, interview)

Similarly, Ellie from the 1 in 12 Club (Bradford) spoke of the importance of maintaining the history of your movement because those memories are invaluable in the shaping of anarchist activism today.

She suggested that some inter-left factionalism may be at play here, contributing to the lack of history sharing between different groups fighting for the same future:

“In the time of the anti-Rhodes Protest Movement in the mid-1990s, there were loads of lessons that could be learnt from the Women’s Peace Camp Movement in the 1980s. And quite often those two parts of ostensibly the same kind of movement, don’t necessarily talk to each other, or don’t necessarily share that history.” (Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Ellie continued by emphasising that despite the technological advancements in state surveillance and communication technologies that have greatly changed the landscape of coordinating action over the last fifty years, there are still valuable lessons to be found in the documentary heritage of social movements:

“Also, you’ve got to understand the context in which you’re operating is very different. So, when I first started doing all the politics that I’m doing, you didn’t have CCTV on every street corner, you didn’t have social media, the tactics you could employ and the way you have to do things was very different because of the situation that you found yourself in.” (Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

In another anarchist archive in Nottingham, Mike and Luminescent Flamingo (Sparrow’s Nest) lamented anarchism’s tendency to make the same mistakes time and again; their hope was that the materials held at the Nest will help activists identify patterns through history and learn from the failures and successes of previous and parallel campaigns:

“Every generation of activists seems to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.”
(Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, diary)

“When you’re an activist for a long time, you see things come about that are similar, and you want to learn from what went before. So, part of your role as an activist is to try and keep those memories of maybe things that worked or didn’t work, or memories of those struggles alive, partly to make the next ones better, but also as an end in itself, to remember it in a historical sense.” (Mike, Sparrow’s Nest, interview)

Reflecting on the mirroring work the Internet Archive did for the Sparrow’s Nest, Jason emphasised that the role of The Sparrow’s Nest as a resource hub for contemporary regional activism was their sole reason for initially making contact:

“What I saw in the Sparrow’s Nest was passion, consistency, beautifully radical materials that were not just public housing rule meetings, or even kind of straightforward we’re going to have a protest, here’s a poster. It was like, here’s literature, here’s how-tos. And they made all sorts of explanatory statements with them.” (Jason, Internet Archive, interview)

This idea that activist archives contain blueprints for coordinating action was reiterated in an interview with Paula, who also uses the Internet Archive to mirror the various collections they steward in Glasgow. In all of the three projects Paula is involved with, learning from the archives is encouraged through a range of community engagement events:

“These archives that I work with, all of them have the desire for the material to be used now, as kind of toolkits for how to be active, by looking at it in terms of the Political Song Collection, how people have used song in the past to effect social change... we have ‘show and tells’, or discussions, or conferences, or whatever, where people can come together, access the material, and talk about, and make use of it in what they’re – in what people are being active about now.” (Paula, GBCT, SoR, Political Song Collection, interview)

Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive founder Joey also spoke to the importance of activist archives as a place where people can come together, learn from the materials as well as each other, and use the archive as the foundations for building a sustainable movement:

“Whether that’s through education, through training, and through however you decide to use it, I think it’s more in that sense just another space to increase our knowledge, to increase understanding and critical reflection and just to have these materials and if enough people are interested it then we can use that to organise around.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)

My participants shared a vision of an alternative future which is made possible through their archival work to educate and empower activist communities in the present. Central to this vision is the archives as a space, be that physical premises or a digital space, the bringing together of individual actors with each other and with materials is a considerable motivation for activist archivists both within the confines of this research project, and the radical archive movement as a whole.

5.1.4. Archives for accountability

The original function of archives - and an enduring archival concern – was to preserve documentation produced by the state for its evidentiary value. Archives were, and in some cases still are a repository of materials detailing the governance of nations. One hundred and fifty years later, this function is now being harnessed by activist archivists to provide evidence of the oppressions their communities experience and demand justice. Jason shared how they, along with others at the Internet Archive, saw archives as powerful tools for disrupting cycles of structural violence towards marginalised communities:

“My boss likes to say, “without knowledge of the past, we live in an eternal loop... an eternal present.” So basically, we allow people to say, “well it’s always been this way”... If you’re able to produce something from fifty years ago, in the same community, showing the same

problems, and people trying to deal with it you have an instant historical precedent that ends that argument.” (Jason, Internet Archive, interview)

Documenting the Now’s Ed also spoke to the value of building archives of counterevidence in reference to their involvement in the Archivists Supporting Activists initiative. They mentioned the work of Witness, another project involved in ASA, which supports activists in collecting audio-visual materials as evidence of discrimination and violence in the fight for social justice.

Ed: *“[YN of Witness] does a lot of work with media... where online photography and video and thinking about how it's evidence of things that have... for activists to use, but also at the same time, a source for surveillance and things like that.”*

Interviewer: *“Like sousveillance?”*

Ed: *“Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.”*

This idea that archives can be used by citizens to hold their governments to account is, according to members of the public surveyed by the UK Web Archive, a tangible benefit of archiving the web. Considering earlier discussions around common misconceptions regarding archives (section 5.1.2), the fact that the public see accountability as a valuable aspect of web archiving is testament to people’s increased scrutiny of authority and the need for creating, sharing, and preserving counter-narratives. Nicola explained:

“Overwhelmingly, we tend to hear from people – when we talk about web archiving, they’ll say they’re glad that’s a thing and they’re glad that people are doing that, preserving the content. People sort of... understand the public accountability, for example, politicians and governments and that side of it as well as the cultural value of it.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

The numerous ways that archival practices have been shaped by activists to further their movements’ agenda: staking claims for the marginalised in documentary heritage; democratising access to information; informing contemporary activism; and collecting evidence of injustice are not discrete activities. Though interviews with participants reinforced the concept that activist archiving is a spectrum of belonging and each project approaches their work differently, there is a strong, shared ideology behind their choices; the liberatory power of community memory work. In light of the digital advancements in communication technologies and their integration into the life cycle of social movements, collecting activist materials hosted on the web such as campaign promotion, infographics highlighting issues and solutions, and alternative media coverage is arguably a necessary measure for activist archivists. The following section will present the views held by

activist archivists towards the use of web technologies to co-ordinate action and what this means for the preservation of contemporary social movement ephemera.

5.2. Attitudes towards digital activism

Before exploring the myriad of obstacles my participants experience with regards to archiving the web (section 5.3), this subchapter illustrates activist archivist's attitudes towards the hybridisation of social movements and the dilemmas this produces in terms of collecting, preserving, and sharing materials. There was some indication that participants felt there to be a tangible need to archive instances of activism hosted on the web. Several spoke of how contemporary social movements have embraced digital media platforms as spaces for disseminating alternative news, movement building, debating issues, and coordinating direct action:

"Feminists, and indeed all activists, are increasingly using digital media to reach out, inform, and mobilise the public for their cause. Whether through online zines, blogs, social media campaigns, and even fundraising websites like Crowdfunder, activism and the digital world have become inextricably linked." (Cora, SFA, diary)

The 1 in 12 Club's Jed points to the greater democracy afforded by these spaces and the absence of counter-narratives in the mainstream media as the reasons behind the use of digital media platforms by oppositional groups:

"The space in which a lot of these conflicts take place are increasingly social media spaces, and something that the left kind of structurally has less of is column inches and airtime"
(Jed, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Considering the presence of activism on the web as analogous with physical documentation of social movements, archival student, Adam, felt that it is necessary to capture these materials and seeking ways of doing so is vital for archivists collecting contemporary activism:

"I think it's important to know how to capture all of that stuff, and how to – 'cos I don't know how to – archive a website for example, or a platform like Twitter. But they're obviously crucial because that's how everyone communicates now, especially activist groups and campaigning groups, it's not just analogue material and files, it's websites and how do you archive that, how do you capture all of that stuff and social media and email as well?"
(Adam, MML & HH, interview)

The SFA's Lucy took this further, extending the value of web archiving not only to include web material created and disseminated within pre-existing activist networks, but also commentary on the socio-political context in which these struggles are taking place. As an example, they referred to the Twitter presence of Ash Sakar and Owen Jones – both on the Left of the Labour party:

“[They] are very vocal about providing these debriefs, these very opinionated takes on things and I think that’s important to record that and put it in an archive because that is an example of a debate unfolding and people and kind of points on a trajectory that are really shaping the course of events.” (Lucy, SFA, interview)

Similarly, Ed (DocNow) highlighted the evidentiary value of social media content. The catalyst for creating Documenting the Now was the murder of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 and the way that social media was used to expose police brutality and structural racism to a global audience:

“I think going back to the beginning, the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, that was something that – he was killed by a police officer and then was left in the road for hours and people took pictures of it, of his body, and shared it on social media. And so definitely it got a lot of attention. And so, the evidentiary aspect of these social media records, I think was something that definitely motivated us early on.” (Ed, Documenting the Now, interview)

In spite of being able to give examples of significant activist materials that are hosted on the web, when directly asked about what they might include in a web archive were they to create one in the future, the response was quite restrained. Lucy from the SFA mentioned archiving their own documents on their group cloud storage and emails as well as their social media output:

“Off the top of my head I would say it would include Tweets, it would also include maybe our kind of... we have a shared google drive, that’s where a lot of our collaboration happens... I don’t know whether also we might include our emails, because that’s one of the main ways we communicate directly with external people.” (Lucy, SFA, interview)

This struck me as strange, because, as far as I am aware, the physical records of the Sheffield Feminist Archive are not held at the Sheffield City Archives as part of the SFA’s collection. It appears that there is a distinction being drawn between what can be collected in terms of physical and web-hosted items, when in actuality their physical archives could include documents related to organising the SFA and their web archives could include material created by local activist groups for distribution online.

Adam was acutely concerned that without grassroots strategies for archiving the web, in the future there will be archival gaps (similar to those in traditional archiving that informed many projects in the community archiving movement, see section 5.1.1) and material relating to ongoing activist struggles will be lost:

“I do think it’s a massive shame that people... I’ve just turned forty, when I’m say sixty if I’m not dead [laughs], will be looking back and will I be able to see all of this stuff that I’ve lived

through there?... And if the left are not going to do it, who will be? Because no one else will, I think there's questions there and it is I think a missed opportunity" (Adam, MML & HH, interview)

At the Glasgow Women's Library, Lucy reinforced this concern rooting it in an overemphasis on the importance of historical narratives and the resulting failure to document contemporary struggles with the same thoroughness:

"If we keep looking back and saying, "Isn't it incredible, what happened in the '80s," and right now we're living in a political climate of incredible oppression that's not too far from the '80s... And we don't have much evidence of what people did to push against anti-trans reforms around declaration of gender, or people's right to protest, or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people's right to live nomadic lifestyles, 'cos we're so busy romanticising what happened in the past, then I don't know where that leaves us... I just hadn't necessarily thought before about how we document all the stuff that goes on intangibly, on Instagram, or anything like that... I think it should be more of a priority than it is for a lot of organisations." (Lucy, GWL, interview)

Certainly, the failure of activist archivists to include web materials in their collection will mean that only a partial narrative of contemporary activism will be represented and preserved. For Ellie at the 1 in 12 Club, perhaps more concerning is the usefulness of an activist archive which does not contain current strategies of social movements operating within an increasingly digital arena:

"There are some tactics which we can still employ, but there are some tactics that don't work so well now and actually it's not about saying, all of this stuff needs to be thrown out, or we've got to take all of this as gospel. It's about looking at it and working out strategically what you can actually use." (Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Consequently, activist archivists' avoidance of web archiving leaves them incapable of fulfilling their stated missions of ensuring representation of marginalised groups and providing activists with the blueprints for successful campaigning in the future. Lianne (AIU Race Centre, Manchester) shares these worries; they are aware that large-scale web archiving projects aimed at capturing our digital cultural heritage exist in the UK, however they do not believe they are dedicated to including the stories of groups on the fringes of society:

"I think it needs to be on the agenda of most organisations... particularly when we're thinking about material being produced by activist groups or groups that sit outside the mainstream. Because the only organisations that I'm aware of who are actively archiving websites are establishment type organisations, I think there's a very big danger of a continued one-sided

sort of documentary heritage, in the shape of websites being preserved, and a lot of other stuff that sits outside that, disappearing under the radar.” (Lianne, AIU, interview)

Lianne’s feelings of doubt surrounding national archiving bodies and their commitment to including marginalised voices in their web archiving efforts is not a surprise. As section 5.1 detailed, the very existence of the community archiving movement is a response to the failures of institutional archives to represent all people, leaving entire communities either absent or misrepresented in the official record. The next subchapter will offer insights into the reality of introducing web archiving into the remit of activist collecting practices through the consideration of the various operational cultures of participating activist archives.

5.3. The many challenges of archiving the web

Of the sixteen activist archivists interviewed, from eight community archive projects, only two – Luminescent Flamingo at The Sparrow’s Nest (Nottingham) and Paula at The Spirit of Revolt, Archives of Dissent (Glasgow) – were engaging with web archiving technologies and this manifested in using the Internet Archive to mirror their existing digitised collections of physical materials. None of the research participants were actively capturing web-based content to create web archives of activist materials relating to their movements. Their reasons for not engaging with web archiving fall into three broad categories: practical limitations; ethical considerations; and conceptual barriers.

5.3.1. Practical barriers to web archiving

Expertise was often mentioned as an obstacle facing activist archives regarding web archiving, along with lack of funds and human resources. It is important to remember that the archives involved in this research rely heavily on grants, donations, and membership subscriptions to fund their activities and many of the activist archivists interviewed are involved in a voluntary capacity. At the Sheffield Feminist Archive, which is entirely volunteer run, none of the organisers were technically proficient in archiving web content and the idea of embarking on such a project seemed daunting:

“I think it just generally would be quite difficult for us to have the time and the resources to be able to do it.” (Sophie, SFA, interview)

“In terms of doing the whole thing alone, it would be really, really challenging, and I can’t imagine us as a project ever being in a position to achieve that alone.” (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Lucy, the sole qualified archivist on the SFA committee, clearly saw the value in learning how to archive content from the web, their background in archives meant they were aware of the existence of free tools and had an extensive knowledge of physical archiving processes. However, they acknowledged that learning the necessary skills to archive material hosted on the web would be a time-consuming process, even with their existing expertise:

"I think that if we were using things like online open access tools, even for me as an archivist, I must admit I've not done a huge amount with born digital material, so... it would be an education even for me. And again, that's not to say that I don't think we should do that, I think it is really important to do that. I think it would just require carving out some time to really learn and get to grips with a lot of these open access tools." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

They elaborated that this barrier would be even more keenly felt by members of the SFA without a basic understanding of archival processes. Like many community archiving projects, the familiarity of volunteers with archival standards for describing and preserving materials is limited and in the case of the SFA this is perhaps exacerbated by their arrangement with the Sheffield City Archives. With local authority archives processing and housing all of their physical donations, the members are unable to use previously established archival procedures as a jumping off point for embarking on a web archiving project:

"Chances are there's gonna be a huge diversity of ages and experiences and people might come to the table with a lot of technical proficiency or they might come to the table having never sent an email before." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

Perhaps dissuaded by the effort the initial stages of such a project would require, Rosa, appeared dismissive of the value of web archiving compared with other ways of capturing feminist narratives such as oral histories – a long-standing focus of the SFA's work and common method used by the community archiving movement to counter the (mis)representation of marginalised groups in the official record:

"I think we've chosen what we're prioritising, and it's not sitting there trying to kind of figure out how to capture stuff on the Internet, we've chosen to prioritise capturing people's stories because that's even more ephemeral, isn't it?" (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Skills and resources were also cited as an obstacle by anarchists from the 1 in 12 Club in Bradford. It comes down to individual's expertise and as long-term member Ellie admitted, *"I think the Club's never been the most tech savvy organisation, I think that's pretty fair to say."* This reality is again connected with the Club's lack of capacity to dedicate time to learning the necessary skills and taking on new long-term projects:

"I think time probably is a really big part of it and capacity, just mental capacity to do things, 'cos for everybody they're doing it as a voluntary thing that you're doing on top of all the other work." (Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Speaking with members of the Club it became evident that not only was web archiving simply not a priority, but the physical archive and library, at least in recent times, had suffered a withdrawal of

resources in order to focus on other areas of the organisation. When questioned about this Duncan conceded that the 1 in 12 Club was constantly struggling to survive:

“At the moment it feels like the 1 in 12 is kind of – I mean, I guess in some ways, it’s almost permanently in survival mode. It’s like what do we need to do to make sure the club can continue to exist, ‘cos it’s always operating in conditions of scarcity, in scarcity of time, of members, scarcity of energy, money, and always operating on the edge of being shut down.”
(Duncan, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

With so many aspects of the Club to staff and fund – bar, venue, café, library and archive – members of the 1 in 12 Club are uniquely burdened compared to other participants in this research. Not only must they be strategic in their use of resources for archival work but ensure that resources are distributed effectively across a multi-purpose organisation.

Unlike the SFA and the 1 in 12 Club, The Sparrow’s Nest (Nottingham) benefits from having a paid member of archival staff, albeit on a part-time basis. It is clear, however, through interviews and diaries that they still feel limited in what they are able to achieve, and they are careful to allocate their resources to projects that best fit the archive’s mission and their skill set:

“All of these things take an enormous amount of time. So, processing documents could easily be a full-time job for two people, then a third person could easily work full time to just find more material and communicate about the stuff we already have. We do not have the resources to have three full-time jobs running on this, we have the resources to do one part time job.” (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, interview)

It is important also, that this is understood with the context that the paid member of staff at the Nest admits they prefer working with the physical materials and are very reluctant to engage with digital media, despite their awareness of its utility in increasing the archive’s audience and accessibility (see section 5.2).

Both Paula and Lianne, doing activist archival work in Glasgow and Manchester respectively, are qualified archivists but experience similar limitations to voluntary and amateur archivists when it comes to archiving the web. Their responses helped to convey the interconnectedness of the barriers their organisations face and the cumulative effect this has on their feeling unable to overcome them. For instance, technical proficiency alone is a barrier that it is possible to overcome with dedicated time for training, yet when, like Paula, you are reliant on project funding which specifies a certain number of hours of work per week, time to learn new skills is a luxury that cannot be afforded:

“I work eighteen hours a week at Govanhill Baths, and that’s from June 2021 to June 2022.”

Because of that HLF money for phase 1B refurbishment, and because of a grant from the Foyle Foundation, which gave me these nine extra hours. So, there's not enough time even to catalogue the material that we have here, never mind thinking about cataloguing the social media." (Paula, GBCT; SoR; Political Song Collection, interview)

Like Lucy (SFA), Lianne acknowledged that their archival training gives them an advantage over others at AIU when it comes to engaging with web archiving, but reiterated that time was a huge obstacle to their acquiring the necessary skills:

"Preserving websites is beyond our capabilities as an organisation, it's as simple as that. It's really complicated. We don't have the capacity or the technical skill to do that... I know some people are really intimidated by digital preservation. And I don't think I am intimidated by it, but I know I need to dedicate a lot of time to build my skills and understanding... And because of the backlog of stuff that has already been entrusted to us, the idea of adding another layer on, which involves actively going out to seek more on top of the stuff that is – I don't know." (Lianne, AIU, interview)

Considering that archiving the web has been high on the agenda of national archiving bodies for the last two decades at least, it was interesting interviewing a current student of archives and records management about the curriculum offered. Adam, whose working towards their qualification at the University of Dundee, reflected that whilst web archiving was referred to throughout the course of their training, there were no modules on offer for learning the technical skills necessary to apply it to their practice:

"I'm sure later or if you're doing the diploma there's probably a module around that, and it's been covered in abstract terms as part of the three modules that I've done as well, but not in depth... I wasn't able to choose a module on that for my year-long certificate, but I would have liked – that would have been appealing if I had been able to." (Adam, MML & HH, interview)

Despite the variety of archives included in this study, be that in terms of their operational models or the communities they represent, they share a common experience when it comes to the practicalities of web archiving. The universality of this issue presents it as a tangible need of activist collections in the North, the question remains, is anyone responding to that need? When asked about the challenges facing community projects attempting to archive the web, Nicola (UK Web Archive, Boston Spa) echoed the sentiments of activist archivists regarding the time-consuming nature of the work, though they were eager to mention that the tools themselves are simple to use:

“For a person at the community level who might be working on their own doing this, there’s a lot of set up, I guess. And saying that the Web Recorder is intuitive to use, it is, but it’s still quite time consuming.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

The greater challenge as far as Nicola was concerned is community archives’ ability to host a web archive once it has been captured. Below Nicola emphasises preservation as the ultimate aim of archival work, and in terms of content hosted on the web, doesn’t see how this can be achieved by community archivists at present; small archive projects simply don’t have the server space:

“You can archive your own website and you can play it back or you could make the WARC files available, share them with other people and allow them to access them in a browser. But that’s not really a preservation system, so I guess what a lot of smaller organisations, who aren’t well funded and don’t have the infrastructure, is to actually host these web archives in a way that larger organisations can do.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

This brings to mind two further thoughts to consider: first, if an archive is oriented towards access and sharing materials as opposed to preservation in line with professional standards, does (lack of) infrastructure become a moot point? . And second, for activist archivists circumventing a lack of infrastructure by outsourcing their web archiving to the likes of the Internet Archive and the UK Web Archive, how does this align with the ethos of their archive? (See section 5.1.2)

Talking with Nicola, it is clear that there is an open dialogue between national archiving bodies and community archiving projects; they have an understanding of and are sympathetic to the challenges activist archivists face. However, their surprise when learning that the majority of activist archivists work on a voluntary basis suggested that the bodies striving to promote community archive work are not fully aware of the extreme conditions of scarcity they are dealing with:

Interviewer: *“So the archives that I’m working most closely with for this project, I think only one of them has a paid member of staff.”*

Nicola: *“Oh, really?”*

This lack of awareness is by no means unidirectional; the following section on communities of practice looks more closely at activist archivists’ knowledge of existing networks and sources of support.

5.3.2. Communities of Practice

In more than one interview a lack of technical know-how developed into a desire for there to be a greater network of support available, be that in the form of professional advice and guidance or a network for peer-to-peer skills sharing amongst community archivists. Rosa, one of the founders of the SFA, believes that a web archive of Sheffield feminism could be possible if there was technical

support and a greater degree of collaboration between professional archive services and grassroots projects. Just as the professional archiving sector is unaware of the extent to which community archives struggle to staff and finance their activities, community archivists are largely unaware of the mechanisms of support that are in place and have been for some time. In reality, these bodies do exist, such as the Community Archives and Heritage Group, but perhaps they are not visible enough to activist archivists who have not been exposed to the sector through traditional archives training, or perhaps their model of support does not go far enough in addressing the needs of each individual community archive:

“Part of me thinks it's almost too challenging for a group of our size, but if there was support, if there was guidance on how to do it, and it just needed people with knowledge of the local scene to point stuff in the right direction. But the technical side could be really well supported by some kind of national infrastructure then with an international infrastructure. And it would just be a case of what you're asking from local groups like us is to know what are the things that are happening? Then I certainly think that would be part of our remit.” (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Paula, who on top of their archival work sits on the committee of the Community Archives and Heritage Group Scotland, does not think that the support available is enough or that their efforts are being focussed into the most impactful areas. This reinforces the idea that the support that exists isn't responding to the needs of their intended audience:

“So, it's a constant struggle to get resources... there are these support networks but essentially what's needed more is support in terms of the infrastructure, in terms of the funding and the resources.” (Paula, GHBT; SoR; Political Song Collection, interview)

Furthermore, Paula asserted that the distribution of resources is biased and that community archives have to fight to demonstrate their worthiness of support:

“The national organisations have a remit to preserve our history for the future generations, and it's interesting for me that the National Records of Scotland actually have someone paid to record everything to do with Church of Scotland. But it doesn't have the resources to preserve community archives. So, there are decisions that are made, and I think those decisions have to be challenged.” (Paula, GBCT; SoR; Political Song Collection, interview)

Many participants were forthright with their belief that archival work is never neutral and that institutional archives are (un)wittingly complicit in reinforcing structures of oppression (see section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). Paula's experience as both an activist archivist and a professional committee

member speaks to the pervasiveness of bias in the archive sector and how this can manifest outside of the collecting practices of an organisation.

For Lianne at the AIU Race Centre, making contact with other community archives that have already succeeded in or are developing strategies for creating their own web archives seems to be more appealing than attempting to replicate the procedure employed by national archiving bodies:

“Beyond the national libraries, national archives, National Library of Scotland, places like that, I don't really know anyone on a smaller scale who is – I'd be really interested to know if there is, because it'd be good to speak to them about how they're tackling it.” (Lianne, AIU, interview)

Lianne and Rosa's comments suggest that there is not much interaction between community archives projects in the UK and that perhaps a more systematic approach to creating radical archiving networks for sharing skills, tools, and knowledge would be welcome. Although the Sheffield Feminist Archive holds a membership with the Feminist and Women's Libraries and Archives Network (FLA) and The Sparrow's Nest is a listed member of the Network of Radical Libraries and Archives (NORLA), there is little evidence to be found online of these networks cultivating the exchange of knowledge and skills between projects. The FLA have not posted on their blog since the height of the pandemic in May 2020, and NORLA has been inactive for a few years before being recently re-booted as a project by MayDay Rooms in collaboration with eight other archives; The Sparrow's Nest is the only member not based in London.

Based in but not limited to the US, Documenting the Now is a community of practice sharing tools and knowledge surrounding the capture and preservation of public social media and web content. They host online communities on Slack, Twitter, and GitHub and, prior to the pandemic, ran regular workshops across the US; they also run a scheme called 'archivists supporting activists' which matches up those in need with those with skills (Documenting the Now, 2022). Speaking with Ed, one of DocNow's technical leads – among many other roles – it was made abundantly clear how important it is to have tailored support for community archiving projects that plays to their strengths and bears in mind their limitations:

“The really important thing is the knowledge and the skills and the craft that the people bring. And the knowledge to pick one tool for one thing and another tool for another... [the funders] initially really wanted to see a tool that would solve the problem, and that's something that we've always been pushing back on. Tools definitely help and creating new tools is great, but there isn't going to be a tool that solves all the problems for everyone. Even for web archiving and social media archiving, but what can help things a lot is

shared knowledge and shared expertise about how to go about doing web archiving in different contexts.” (Ed, Documenting the Now, interview)

Throughout the course of this research, it was only when speaking to activist archivists working in Glasgow that anything resembling a community of practice for grassroots projects was found to exist. Paula and Joey’s interviews revealed two different but overlapping communities of practice; a local Glasgow-based network of community archives of all stripes, and a more geographically scattered network of archives collecting around working-class protest movements:

“One of our wishes and kind of strategically developing things at Govanhill Baths archive is to become some kind of community archive hub. Where we can, and we have some funding this year from the Foyle Foundation to deliver 2D digitisation workshops and oral history workshops, to grow capacity and independent community archives for local groups.” (Paula, GBCT; SoR; Political Song Collection, interview)

Evidence of Joey’s participation in a community of practice can be seen through the series of workshops the Glasgow Housing Struggle Archive ran last year delivered by activist archivists from other projects. Paula from Govanhill Baths Community Trust and The Spirit of Revolt ran a workshop on 2D digitisation and organising and presenting materials, and members of the London Housing Struggles Archive and MayDay Rooms (also in London) shared their experiences of building digital archives and using Leftovers platform:

“We put in that funding to make our website or digital space for the Glasgow Housing Struggle Archive and then run three public archiving workshops for Living Rent members and tenants. So, one focusing on archiving our past and how to organize that material usefully. Then one on kind of documenting contemporary struggles.” (Joey, GHSA, interview)

In keeping with the DIY culture of the wider community archive movement these networks would be a fertile breeding ground for the development and use of alternative archival practices; tools and methods which better suit the capabilities and ethos of activist archives. Reflecting the shift in archival practice from preservation to access and in the vein of queer activist archiving out of which the “good enough” approach to processing materials valuing the message contained in an item over the item itself, participants suggested finding ways to capture material which doesn’t adhere to professional archive standards but would enable immediate access:

“Sometimes you can use tools to kind of subvert their original purpose, so, an example of this – it’s not related to web archiving, but using YouTube for transcription, it’s not necessarily supposed to be used in that way, but that’s how organisations like small community archives can use those things.” (Lucy, SFA, interview)

“We've talked about doing things on a more ad hoc basis, and I guess capturing anything is better than nothing, right? Even if we just said OK, we'll have a day a month where we take a few screenshots like that would capture something, wouldn't it?” (Rosa, SFA, interview)

Lianne (AIU) strengthened the legitimacy of this approach reflecting on the ways that professional archivists would use unorthodox methods of digital preservation in the early stages of dealing with born-digital materials before standardised procedures for such materials was deployed wide-scale. They share the view that capturing something albeit not perfectly is better than losing it all together:

“I think what we possibly do need to do is think about ways in which the essence of that material can be captured in a maybe slightly more low-tech way now, because then that gives the capability of much smaller organisations to do something, even if that something isn't perfect. I mean, that's the sort of way in which when I started working in archives, we were approaching digital preservation.” (Lianne, AIU, interview)

5.3.3. Dangerous documenting: ethical concerns when archiving the web

A concern raised by participants from anarchist archives – The 1 in 12 Club and The Sparrow's Nest - which is less practical and more ethical in nature, was the potential danger that could befall an individual through the documenting of activities considered threatening to the state. This is unsurprising given the overt anti-establishment character of these organisations and the association of militancy with anarchism as a movement. Activists from the 1 in 12 Club frequently displayed anti-police and abolitionist views and the organisation itself was purposefully established as a 'members only' club to enable them to refuse law enforcement entry to the premises. Considering the recent passing of The Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act (2022) which extends the power of the police against protestors, the risks attached to activism in the UK, both militant and peaceful, are being felt now more than ever.

“There are some things, which in political organisations, get discussed, are potentially dangerous to be able to be attributable to somebody, or if you're organising a campaign against a thing... So, people were quite anxious about sharing, or archiving meeting minutes and all that kind of stuff. And there's a tension there and a balance about what you can do with those papers from an organisation, because actually the reasons that you don't want to share them today, or tomorrow, become the reasons why in 15, 20 years' time it's really important that they're shared.” (Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Ellie has highlighted a dilemma faced by activist archivists in terms of being visible to and a useful resource for contemporary activists whilst increasing the vulnerability of those captured in the archive to prosecution. Luminescent Flamingo shared the belief that there are potential dangers in

being too visible online though their concern is less with the state and more with the alt-right whose presence has grown in recent years, especially in virtual environments. They also suggested that a balance needs to be struck between reaching interested audiences and attracting negative attention or even putting the archive at risk. Though the Nest itself has not been the victim of direct attacks, Luminescent Flamingo commented that:

“I am always concerned about a firebomb through the letterbox. It has happened to other places in the last decade. And having a relatively low profile is a fairly decent security measure... one Molotov and suddenly the physical archive is gone.” (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, interview)

Not only does a greater internet presence bring with it the potential for interaction with *“Nazis and Trolls”* (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest), activist organisations are opening themselves up to state surveillance. As well as the mistrust of big tech companies when it comes to the using and storing of information related to activism (see section 5.2), it became evident that surveillance is considered a contributing factor in the demise of alternative news outlet Indy Media.

“[Indy Media] did get into some issues where I think – and I don’t even remember which government it was, it might have been the UK, was requesting everything on their servers, so I think part of that was – you’d have to look at this yourself [laughs] – it was getting a bit tricky to continue it safely as well.” (Mike, Sparrow’s Nest, interview)

Connected with these risks to personal safety is the issue of consent; capturing live content hosted on the web is much more complicated in terms of authorship and ownership than the in-person donation of physical documents to an archive. This would be another area where community archivists would need to seek guidance, therefore becoming an additional drain on resources.

“I think you can create a collection of tweets and then house that. It’d be good just to even have that as something that we can keep hold of. And just generally looking for posts that people have put up... well, obviously we’d probably need to ask permission – I’m not too sure how it works.” (Sophie, SFA, interview)

Speaking with Audrey (CAHG Scotland), there are a wealth of resources responding to the need for community archivists to responsibly collect web and social media content. Relating also to the aforementioned anxieties around internet safety, those at CAHG Scotland place great importance on ensuring that community archivists understand the realities of using third-party platforms.

“We looked at Facebook... but also the effect of Brexit on copyright and data protection and making sure that people within community archives were aware of it, what does this mean

for you, what does this mean for us. And making people aware of what Facebook does with their information. Why is it free? What's the payoff?" (Audrey, CAHG Scotland, interview)

Considerations around consent is not a challenge which is isolated to the community archiving movement, as Nicola revealed, it also plagues national collecting initiatives. Second to the technical difficulties of capturing social media content, consent is a huge factor in the UK Web Archive's decision not to include large-scale social media archiving as part of their remit:

"Another challenge, one that we face as well is about rights management and consent. So particularly social media where you have a lot of data subjects involved. We don't do very much in the way of social media archiving and the main reason for that is the technical considerations, but one of the other reasons is that we wouldn't be able to assess all of the consenting forms in say Twitter and should anything change in that person's status, and they want to withdraw consent for that material to be publicly accessible as well it's handling that." (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

Whilst the decision to avoid social media archiving by national archiving bodies is well founded, it does contribute to the absence of marginalised narratives in the documentary heritage of the UK. Social media platforms, unlike websites, have no (financial) cost, there are minimal skills required, and they are used by millions of people, for these reasons platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are where the voices of marginalised communities reside.

Speaking with Jason from the Internet Archive, there is a way of navigating issues of consent – do not seek it. The Internet Archive will rarely ask permission to archive web content and so far, it does not seem to be creating problems for them as an organisation, quite the opposite. Referring to the IA's founder, Jason said :

"He doesn't try to partner with an organisation, he doesn't run around asking for permission for each step, just starts moving on it." (Jason, Internet Archive, interview)

Later in the interview, he elaborated on this point in relation to another project he is involved with 'Archive Team', who through his connection with the Internet Archive, deposit everything they collect on the IA's servers.

"One of its projects is going after every Afghanistan site; personal, private, company, newspaper, anything on the internet, anything related under the Afghanistan domain, and anywhere where they can find cross-international Afghan stuff because that's them saying 'well, this may not be around in a month'. So, they're doing it now, they're not hanging around waiting for a sub-committee to discuss a possibility of doing it, they're like, 'no we're on it, we've been doing it, we started doing it as soon as America announced they were

pulling out this year. We just downloaded massive amounts.” (Jason, Internet Archive, interview)

Perhaps justification can be found for cases such as this, where the seeking of permissions would have compromised the thoroughness with which they could save the web hosted documentary heritage of Afghanistan before it came under the control of the Taliban. Generally, though, this approach of ‘act now, ask later’, does not sit comfortably with the ethos of community archiving projects where a great deal of time and effort is put into building trustful relationships with the communities they serve.

In the absence of any systematic archiving of social media platforms, be that from institutional archives or activist archiving projects, the question remains, where is all this stuff going? Contemplating this, 1 in 12 Club’s Ellie admitted resignedly that their failure to capture activist social media content means it stays under the control of the platforms hosting it:

“Who’s actually archiving those things, who’s making sure that we don’t lose some of those things? Are we leaving it all to Mark Zuckerberg? Probably, yes, we are and that’s quite terrifying, do you know what I mean [laughs]? I don’t think I’d necessary trust trawling through Facebook posts to give me an accurate view of the history of a social movement.”
(Ellie, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Their response, unsurprisingly, demonstrates an uneasiness in relinquishing control of activist content to companies which are largely opaque about the ways in which user data is stored and shared, and, more generally, espouses a worldview wholly different from the activists utilising their technologies. This mistrust of third-party platforms is shared by fellow 1 in 12 Club member Jed:

“There’s probably a reliance on sites that we shouldn’t rely on nowadays, like Facebook – a lot of the day-to-day organisation of stuff, it all happens on Facebook, which – and I’m not on Facebook, so I don’t really know that much about it, but, it’s like why are we relying on this, fairly, in my opinion, evil [laughs], or potentially evil, certainly not ideal website, to coordinate as activists and as the club? Well, probably because it’s convenient and a lot of people are on Facebook already, so it’s an easy way to reach people.” (Jed, 1 in 12 Club, interview)

Dealing entirely with the archiving of web and social media content, Ed (DocNow) echoed Nicola’s concerns surrounding consent in reference to archiving Twitter content in the aftermath of the killings of Michael Brown and George Floyd by law enforcement:

“The idea of those social media posts being records is complicated too, because the people who created them, how much agency do they have and whether those become part of an archive or not. That was the really the big one for us that we got concerned with.” (Ed, Documenting the Now, interview)

Ed highlighted the delicacy with which these archiving activities must be approached, especially in relation to the emotional trauma experienced by witnesses, friends and families of the victims and the Black community on a local and global level. Of particular concern was the fetishization of violence towards Black people, exacerbated by the virality of graphic images and captions:

“[Michael Brown’s] family didn’t want those photographs to be on the internet. They didn’t want them to be on Twitter. The world already knew about it, and they didn’t want them to be still circulating. And for these... social media platforms to be profiting off images of black death.” (Ed, Documenting the Now, interview)

Members of the SFA also displayed a cautious approach to generating archive material with potential trauma attached. In reference to their Women in Lockdown digital archive, Lucy reflected that more harm than good could result from recording narratives during or too soon after the pandemic which has had devastating physical, emotional and financial effects on people’s lives:

“What labour are we putting on people when we’re asking for their memories and reflections?... You’re asking people to revisit their trauma for the sake of preserving it, which is complicated and problematic in itself – there’s a national conversation to be had about this tide of collective grief, but I just don’t think we’re there yet.” (Lucy, SFA, diary)

Activist Archives – specifically Black Feminist archives (Burin & Sowinski, 2014) – have been discussed in terms of providing the tools and space for healing and the validation that people can find in having access to narratives of grief or trauma that mirror their own. Though both Ed (DocNow) and Lucy (SFA) acknowledge the restorative capacity of archival work, their reasons for hesitancy are compelling and further complicate their navigation of contemporary collecting around marginalised narratives.

5.3.4. Conceptual barriers

Alongside practical limitations and ethical considerations, some participants appeared to hold beliefs and attitudes that would make embarking on a web archiving project more challenging. The intangible nature of these limitations might also cause them to be more difficult to overcome.

There was some uncertainty around what web archiving actually is with some participants using the term interchangeably with having a digital archive; in multiple interviews, questions around web archiving shifted quickly to digitisation of physical materials and then hosting them

online. When I asked Luminescent Flamingo about how they thought having an extensive web archive would impact their usership they responded with the following:

“Define big, ‘cos the petulant child in me is shouting “we already have a big web archive!” but even bigger? Or maybe a web archive that wouldn't be like five to 10 percent of what we have but actually 60 percent or something? Is that what you mean?” (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow’s Nest, interview)

They are referring to the mirroring that the Internet Archive did of their digitised collections. To clarify, The Sparrow’s Nest has a digital archive of a portion of the physical holdings, the Internet Archive has web archived that digital archive – The Sparrow’s Nest does not have a web archive. Having come up against this synonymous use of web and digital archiving on more than one occasion, I wondered whether it was a widespread phenomenon worthy of notice by sector professionals. I asked Nicola:

“Yeah, absolutely. We have this same experience as well.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

Attempting to understand the root of this confusion, Nicola pointed to the common misconception that the Internet is stable and resultantly, web material is not seen as fragile and in need of active preservation:

“I wonder if - do people have the expectation that the internet is an archive, it is being preserved, so do people think, “Oh well I’ll find that online, there’s no need to get this actively preserved because the internet’s there.”? When we know actually how ephemeral the internet is... definitely there needs to be the support and the infrastructure from the heritage sector.” (Nicola, UKWA, interview)

The interrelation of these conceptual barriers to web archiving also surfaced in interviews with activist archivists raising the issue of whether they feel the need to preserve web content in the first place. Speaking with Sophie from the SFA it was clear that the precarity of the internet is not commonly understood, resulting in a false sense of security in the permanence of online content:

“When you’ve got online materials, I'd say that's going to be able to be preserved for longer because well the internet's probably going to survive longer than the physical spaces.” (Sophie, SFA, interview)

Another SFA member felt that the confusion surrounding the security of web content presented a challenge in convincing other volunteers that web archiving is even necessary:

“It's quite hard sometimes to articulate in any kind of succinct way the importance of archiving your digital materials because people understand it as an intangible thing and they think that it will just be there forever, and it will be unchanged. And if technology teaches us

anything particularly in the accelerated period of development that we're going through at the minute is that things become obsolete within a matter of 2/3 years." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

A further conceptual barrier is the perception of digital activism as less impactful than what many participants describe as "old school" activism and thereby not feeling as urgent a need to capture instances of digital activism compared with physical protest ephemera such as placards, pamphlets, and badges:

"When I think of activism, I suppose that makes me think of the Women's Liberation Movement and certainly when you're tweeting about something it doesn't feel quite as revolutionary as being out in the streets burning your bras and holding up protest banners." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

"I feel much more at home in that lost world of old school organisation, so often exemplified in our collections, i.e. folks doing things like phone trees, writing leaflets, flyposting or putting up posters in bars, libraries, info shops etc. Those forms of exchanging information are what I learned about when I first got into active politics, and this is still what I first think of when organising an event." (Luminescent Flamingo, Sparrow's Nest, diary)

Expanding on her earlier comments, Lucy acknowledged that the internet has an important role in spreading awareness around issues and enabling people to educate themselves, however they still viewed digital activism as non-committal, attracting performative participation and low impact when it isn't exercised in tandem with direct action in physical spaces:

"I think that social media can be really useful for sharing and particularly disseminating resources and knowledge exchange, but I think that we have to be wary of how we do this and also taking our activism offline and not just doing something simply for the sake of performativity and optics." (Lucy, SFA, interview)

Cora, also at the SFA, takes this further, asserting that the ease with which individuals – especially high-profile individuals – can weigh in on socio-political debates online without backing up their words with purposeful action can have a detrimental effect on the success of campaigns:

"All too often causes can become derailed by the incredible capriciousness of the internet and the cause can become more about personalities than issues, although this is hardly a new fault of the digital age." (Cora, SFA, diary)

The varying degrees of understanding in terms of the ephemerality of content hosted on the web, and the role of that content in the outcome of social movement campaigns presents a significant challenge to activist archivists before practical issues can even begin to be considered. For activist archiving projects to make concerted efforts in archiving the web, a baseline collective understanding of how that can be achieved and the necessity for doing so would need to be established.

5.4. Summary of main findings

My findings show that activist archivists believed there to be tangible incentives for engaging in web archiving. Echoing the desire for communities to build and have control over their own histories in response to their absence in institutional archives half a century ago, the failure to place value on activist web material and its capture enables the physical archival silences that activist archivists have fought to rectify to remerge in a digital context. The affordances made possible by building and hosting a web archive of digitally assisted activism in terms of democratising access to information and retaining community autonomy over narrative creation align strongly with well-established principles of the community archiving movement. Furthermore, my participants showed concern over the loss of documentation around contemporary struggles not only due to potential neglect by nationally coordinated initiatives such as the UK Web Archive but the agenda of third-party digital media companies in retaining or discarding content.

Despite several participants recognising that web archiving of internet-based activism should be happening, at present it is not common practice. Two of my research sites use the Internet Archive to mirror their digitised collections but do not actively seek web material to include in their archives. There are three key reasons that activist archivists are not engaging with web archiving: practical challenges, ethical considerations, and conceptual barriers. First, operating in conditions of scarcity, my participants felt incapable of devoting funding, time, or resources to learning the necessary skills and sustaining an additional long-term project. This highlighted the need for a more visible and agile infrastructure of support for community archives. Second, there were questions raised regarding consent and social media content, as well as an uneasiness – particularly for anarchist participants – around the safety of individuals captured in the archives, both from the authorities and alt-right groups. Last, some participants held beliefs that render discussions around creating a web archive immaterial, such as in the permanency of the internet and the inadequacy of digital activism to effect change.

6. Discussion

6.1. Why (not) archive the web?

Within web archiving scholarship, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the development of software and its implementation in top-down broad web crawling at a national or global level (Ogden, Halford & Carr, 2017; Pennock, 2013). Considering the relative infancy of web archiving as a strategy for preserving our documentary heritage, it is unsurprising that much of its associated literature are technical papers, policy documents and empirical studies on state-level initiatives. Parallels can be drawn between this preoccupation with the macro-level experience of building and using web archiving technologies and the earliest phase of the archival profession as a neutral collecting body of state affairs in the nineteenth century (Cook, 2013). I am arguing that, just as physical archives have been reoriented over the last century to address issues of bias and representation, web archives now need to face the same scrutiny and attention must be paid to the uncaptured content of the web.

6.1.1. Re-emerging biases

The problematic nature of large-scale automated crawls has attracted much attention from scholars in the last decade (Dougherty & Meyer, 2014; Hegarty, 2022; Maemura et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2017). The lack of transparency regarding the processes of constructing web archives, both operational and ideological, have come under scrutiny (Hegarty, 2022). Of particular focus are the decisions impacting how to bound internet crawls – more often than not based on popularity of sites or national domain names – which it is argued can have an exclusionary effect on information created and accessed by communities that already experience marginalisation offline (Dougherty & Meyer, 2014; Maemura et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2017). In the context of physical archiving the concept of *archival silences* has long been used to refer to missing or obscured histories, largely relating to the experience of minoritized groups and fringe cultures (Trouillot, 1995), and there have been concerted efforts both within and without institutional archives to counteract what Caswell (2014) calls *symbolic annihilation* of such voices. Speaking with activist archivists, the need to reclaim lost histories and/or counteract mainstream narratives was what principally drew them to archival work. The participants of this research dedicate their – in many cases, free – time to combatting the documentary erasure of communities to which they belong or profess allyship with resulting in rich archives created by and for the communities they represent, effectively giving voice to those previously silenced (Caswell, 2014). In spite of this progress in physical archiving, the current discourse around web archiving and the broad yet shallow approach to capturing content hosted on the web is in danger of allowing those silences to resurface in the context of our increasingly digital existence (Dougherty & Meyer, 2014; Maemura et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2017).

Coinciding with Howard Zinn's (1970) rebuke of the perceived neutrality of archival work, the professional sector began to question their individual influences on the collections they care for. At the same time the community archiving movement was gaining momentum and played a significant role in addressing the *archival silences* of minoritized communities either by building their own counter-archives or working in partnership with institutional archives to reorient existing collections. However, as these research findings show, this work has not yet made the leap into archiving the web. A substantial barrier that activist archivists attribute to their failure to extend their work into web archiving is a lack of technical know-how and avenues for acquiring the necessary skills.

6.1.2. "It would be an education".

My research found that even qualified activist archivists felt ill-equipped to include web archiving as part of the remit of their organisation. Web archiving professionals are quick to point out that much of the available software is intuitive to run, but intuitive to whom? The majority of activist archivists I interviewed were volunteers with no background in archival science with varying levels of digital literacy and expressed feelings of intimidation around web archiving. Furthermore, the pace with which new, open source, web archiving tools are being developed and promoted as solutions for small-scale archiving projects has the potential to deepen those feelings of intimidation and confusion over which tools would best suit their needs. As Ed from US-based Documenting the Now revealed, a large part of their role as a support network is recognising the different needs of the activist archivists they work with and signposting them to the most appropriate tools and resources.

Another factor to consider with voluntary organisations is the often ad-hoc nature of their work and in some cases high turn-over of volunteers. For an activist archive to create their own web archive in a way that enables sustainability and growth, multiple members would have to be comfortable using the software and quality assurances would have to be put in place – conditions that, at this time, felt unachievable by the participants of this study. Much literature examining the community archiving movement has noted the conditions of scarcity within which these activist archivists are working (Caswell, Cifor & Ramirez, 2016; Flinn, 2011; Tobar, 2015); skills, time, money, and infrastructure all interplay, pushing activist archivists to streamline their activities. Building on the findings of community archivist scholars before me, my research suggests that the utilisation of digital media by contemporary activists exacerbates the existing challenges faced by community archivists of physical materials.

For some participants, their feeling of inadequacy in terms of the skills needed to archive the web translated into a need for greater mechanisms of support. In the UK there are bodies such as the Community Archives and Heritage Group which is made up of professional memory workers who donate their time and expertise to provide resources for independent archiving projects. That said, I

found that my interviewees were largely unaware of the support that was available and those who felt that it did not always align with the needs of independent archivists. This reiterates Cook's point about collaboration between professional and community archivists and the need for an open dialogue if institutional archives are going to provide meaningful support (2013). CAHG should not be judged harshly for their inability to adequately support activist archiving efforts, after all, their remit as a support network includes heritage organisations as well as community archives. Instead of expecting them to be able to deliver highly focussed support to activist projects, perhaps it would be better to explore other avenues of accessing guidance more appropriate to activists' needs.

6.1.3. "Doing things on a more ad hoc basis".

The community archiving movement has provided fertile ground for innovation in archival practice, with models such as post-custodial preservation and participatory description feeding into efforts made by traditional archives to reposition themselves as inclusive public resources (Caswell, 2014; Cook, 2013; Ceeney, 2008). Interviewees from the Sheffield Feminist Archive and AIU Race Centre were aware of the successes of DIY preservation techniques in radical archiving circles in the US and suggested that the most viable way for them to archive the web would be to adopt similar tactics. The Interference Archive (Brooklyn) broke with convention implementing an open stacks model enabling users to browse materials unchaperoned, and the Lesbian Herstory Archive (New York) popularised the "good enough" standard for processing materials, again shifting emphasis towards access and use and away from long-term preservation (McKinney, 2020; Sellie et al., 2015).

Aware of the ephemerality of web content, particularly when hosted on social media platforms (Costa, Gomez & Silva, 2017), some participants offered short-term capture solutions such as screenshots of WhatsApp messages, noting its partial replacement of in-person organising. A participant from the AIU strongly advocated for the use of makeshift tactics in capturing web content with the justification that similar steps were taken in the initial stages of digital preservation by community and professional archivists alike. For them, the risk of losing valuable materials whilst waiting for appropriate training and software to become available outweighed the issues of archiving material to a less than desirable standard. This position strongly echoes the Lesbian Herstory Archives justification for the "good enough" approach which is that certainly they want to create the best digital copies possible and create useful metadata, but they are not going to waste time grappling with professional standards and practices, their priority is ensuring immediate access to queer materials by the communities that need them (McKinney, 2020).

The SFA also pinpointed areas of traditional archival work which sit in opposition to their ethos as a community project, namely the processes of long-term preservation having a prohibitive effect on the accessibility of materials to their community in the present. This position is shared by the Lesbian Herstory Archive, who, somewhat disparagingly, refer to preservation as materials being

“safe’ from use” (McKinney, 2020: 13). Both instances reinforce Ziegler’s stance that whilst there is much wisdom to be found in traditional archival practices, activist archivists should not be afraid of abandoning or adapting principles that do not apply to their work (2014).

The role of the internet, including social media, in contemporary protest culture is widely discussed in reference to Twitter as a vehicle of social change from the digitally enabled revolutions across Western Asia and North Africa in 2010/11 (Castells, 2012; Mason, 2012), to the global exposure of hashtag campaigns #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter (Freelon et al., 2018). Swann and Gelphi (2019) stress the value of this social media content as documentary evidence of our recent history and the platforms themselves containing maps of events unfolding in real time, as well as the discussions surrounding them. Documenting the Now pinpointed the use of Twitter during and after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, (2014) as the stimulus for creating their organisation which is dedicated to aiding the archiving of activist social media content. That digital media plays a key role throughout the life cycle of contemporary social movements was widely acknowledged amongst the participants of this research. In some cases, this prompted fears that without concerted efforts to web archive activism, future generations of activists will not be able to use archives as a resource for reflecting on and embedding within their strategies for ongoing struggles. Where activist archives have specified that a key mission of their work is to inform present and future activism through engaging their communities with archival materials, their inability to do web archiving prevents them from achieving their aims.

6.2. The archival turn in all activism

My findings help to build a narrative of the intersection of archival work and social activism in the specific context of *activist archiving* differentiated in scholarship (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015) as activist-led archiving of social movement ephemera as opposed to: *active archivists* – largely professional archivists who work with transparency and awareness around the influence of their worldview of the archival process; and *archiving activism* – the passive documentation of activism by oftentimes institution archives. Through the interviews conducted, four main categories of activist archival activities emerged, and my participants were involved to varying degrees in one, some, or all of these activities. The categories are as follows: confronting and filling *archival silences* (Caswell, 2014; Trouillot, 1995); democratising access to archive material; facilitating immediate community engagement with records for activist campaigns; and using archive material to hold authorities to account. The final activity was less frequently mentioned than the other three, its inclusion however is significant, as it contributes to the archival literature discussing the use of archives by activist groups and community organisers in advocating for justice, most notably in cases of historic totalitarianism (see: Caswell, 2012 – Cambodia; Dirks, 2004 - for multiple examples; Godoy, 2018 – El Salvador; Hassan & O’Mealia, 2018– Kenya).

As well as using a novel entry point for exploring the nature of activist archival work – web archiving – this research also broadens our understanding of the community archiving movement both geographically and ideologically. My selection of research sites includes hitherto under-represented communities in existing literature which is dominated by research into feminist and queer archiving projects (Eichhorn 2016; Manson & Zanish-Belcher, 1999; McKinney, 2020; Wakimoto et al., 2013). The inclusion of working-class and anarchist archives alongside, feminist, queer, and black archiving projects has helped to enrich our understanding of contemporary activist archiving by reinforcing the common experiences of activists doing archival work as well as introducing new concerns around ethics and safety. Furthermore, my decision to focus on UK-based archives, mostly operating in the post-industrial cities of the north of England and Scotland, brings a fresh perspective to an otherwise New York- and London-centric body of research (Burin & Sowinski, 2014; Eichhorn 2013; Fair, 2014; Flinn & Alexander, 2015; McKinney, 2020; Pell, 2015). My inclusion of activist groups and regions so far absent in the literature helps to confirm the existence of shared motivations and challenges, as well as highlighting the uniqueness of projects within the spectrum of the community archiving movement.

6.2.1. Accountability & post-truth society

I found the concept of archiving for accountability to be strongest in relation to radical archiving in the US, with Documenting the Now referring to several grassroots organisations that are archiving social media content to be used as evidence against state violence. Jason (Internet Archive) similarly stressed the value of the archives in making visible patterns of violence across time; he referred specifically to the treatment of certain communities by law enforcement and how archives are crucial in proving that these are not isolated incidents. Furthermore, talking with the UK Web Archive, it was noted that a recent survey of their visitors found that they recognised the value of archiving the web in collecting evidence and holding authority figures to account alongside its cultural significance. The prominence of the former can be understood in terms of the relatively more extreme experience of police brutality towards black and brown communities in the United States and the role of activist archiving in the fight for justice. The latter, in theory, could be understood as the result of general dissatisfaction and distrust of the neoliberal political doctrine much discussed in social movement scholarship (Castells, 2012; Fenton, 2016 & 2020; Kavada, 2016). In the last decade, this mindset has come to be referred to as the “post-truth” disposition (Shelton, 2020), as it has been adopted by the general public and is no longer confined to activist circles. Certainly, for Eichhorn (2013), the phenomenon of activist archiving is rooted in the socio-political conditions of neoliberalism; the archives provide a conceptual and physical space where communities can collectively imagine alternative futures in a world which encourages individualism.

6.2.2. “Archives are always going to be these sites of struggle and power.”

The fervour with which my participants spoke of their archival work as being deeply and inescapably political both confirms and extends Eichhorn’s declaration (2013) that an archival turn in feminism has taken place. A member of the 1 in 12 Club noted the apparent affinity between anarchists and library and archive work; Moran (2014) observed the same phenomenon in their research in the US and pointed to the centrality of political literature to the anarchist movement as an explanation. Several of my participants offered the following explanation for the phenomena of activist archiving: the documentation and preservation of a movement’s history felt like the most practical way for them to donate their skills to the cause. This insight allows us to better understand the nuances of activist archiving and its distinct character as separate from *active archivist’s work* and *archiving activism* (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015). It also highlighted the subtle differences between activist archiving projects by capturing the perspectives of people who are involved in the direct action they are archiving, as well as those whose archival work is the sole thrust of their activism. Despite these differences, a shared belief found amongst my participants was that a person’s politics inform all their actions, reinforcing the idea that the creation of an independent archive is a political act in and of itself (Caswell, 2014; Flinn, 2011).

Eminent archives scholars Michell Caswell (US) and Andrew Flinn (UK) both place huge significance on the potential for independent archiving to empower their communities, but to what end? My findings provide insights into what shape that empowerment can take. Merely existing was by no means the extent of my participants’ vision of their activist archives. Many of my participants, saw it their mission to embolden marginalised communities to assert their place in the historical record, and to equip them with the tools they need to overcome the structures of oppression, and this was to be achieved through the creation or counter-narratives and resource banks for inspiring present and future activism (Moran, 2014; Teetaert, 2014; Tobar, 2014).

Unequivocal about the political nature of archival work, The Sparrow’s Nest saw it to be their duty to record histories largely excluded from the official record. Sharing this stance, members of the Sheffield Feminist Archive believed in the transformative effect of repopulating the historical record with everyday narratives of women’s experiences. Moreover, their partnership with the city archives means that not only are they carving out a space for marginalised voices, but they are doing it from within a structure that formerly silenced them (Sadler & Cox, 2017). For the feminist, queer and race related activist archives involved in this research, the reclamation of hidden histories appeared to be the strongest of their archival activities. Participants from the Sheffield Feminist Archive and the AIU Race Centre spoke of the importance of demanding that attention be paid to marginalised communities by having their experiences documented and preserved on an equal level with the rest of society. Particular emphasis was put on the damage that archival silences can have

on the communities that they diminish through *symbolic annihilation* (Caswell, 2014) – this was mentioned largely in reference to migrant communities and people of colour in majority white societies and in terms of demanding that the value of non-white and non-male people were acknowledged through the reclamation of obscured histories.

For the founders of Steel City Queer History, as well as saying definitively “we have always been here”, capturing the nuances and emotions of queer narratives was the driving force behind their archival work. To shift the representation of queers in the archive from legislature wrapped up in the criminalisation of homosexuality to personal accounts of living privately or publicly as a queer person. Enriching the discourse around AIDS testing and survivors’ narratives of the HIV crisis is reminiscent of Burin and Sowinski’s research on the British black feminist archives (2014), which framed the archives as a place of healing and solace in the equivalent grief of others.

6.2.3. “The accessibility of historic materials feeds directly into matters of privilege, classism, racism, [and] sexism.”

The question of access brought forth significant insights into the dynamics of partnering with institutional archiving bodies. Without their own premises, the Sheffield Feminist Archive were faced with a choice between housing their collections with the local authority archives and the university. Any misgivings they had about partnering with a state-run archive were amplified in the context of involving an academic institution, for them the academy represents a more acutely felt elitism. This is briefly mentioned in Zieger’s chapter (2014) in which they draw attention to how the commercialisation and expansion of universities has been instrumental in the displacement of low-income communities and the exclusionary potential of needing the correct credentials and identification for access to the archives. Having chosen to partner with the city archives, after the point of donation, the SFA have no control over how their materials are described or accessed. Consequently, some participants from both SFA and AIU Race Centre speculated around potential barriers their communities may face in visiting institutional archives. On a very basic level, the protocols in place for interacting with materials in the archives can be very limiting and make visitors feel at best uncomfortable and at worst unwelcome. Steel City Queer History’s Suzy joined them in their concerns that for first-time users the archives are shrouded in mystery, which as a member of the British Library team conceded does little to remove the perception of institutional archives as being steeped in elitism. Compounding the issues of physical restriction are the intangible but no more important concerns around the complicity of institutional archives in historical and ongoing structural oppression (Anderson & Christen 2019, Caswell, 2014; Eagle, 2019; Ernst 1999; Frank, 2019; Pell, 2015; Zinn 1976).

Feeding into questions of community-control and agency over archives and the narratives they depict (Caswell, 2014; Pell, 2015), the notion of a web archive provided an opportunity for

struggling activist archives to create an autonomous space without the need for a physical space. For members of the Sheffield Feminist Archive who were particularly vocal about the legacies that archives retain in terms of classism, racism, and sexism, imagining a feminist web archive, regardless of its feasibility, presented a degree of independence that would see their community-centred ethos better realised than their current reliance on their partnership with the city archives which houses their collections. The view that housing community archives within university and local authority archives is often problematic is widely held among community archiving scholars (Caswell, 2014; Cook, 2013; Flinn, 2011; Flinn et al., 2009), and the activist archivists and a professional web-archivist involved in this research. My findings reiterated the multifaceted nature of exclusion experienced by those visiting institutional archives, emphasising both the unwelcoming reading room environment and their legacy of perpetuating societal hierarchies (Anderson & Christen, 2019; Eagle, 2019; Morrone, 2014; Teetaert, 2014; Ziegler, 2014). The failure of national archiving bodies to responsibly represent all groups of society, which is widely discussed in archival literature (Anderson & Christen 2019, Caswell, 2014; Eagle, 2019; Ernst 1999; Frank, 2019; Pell, 2015; Zinn 1976), was acknowledged by a participant from the British Library, who spoke candidly of the pressing need to decolonise collections.

Efforts have been made – prior to, but certainly intensified by recent institutional reckoning with the legacies of the British empire – to ensure that national archives collect and celebrate the experiences of the entire citizenry. Whilst such initiatives are positive steps towards a more inclusive society, an important consideration is communities’ willingness to have their histories collected by institutions connected with structures of oppression (Cook, 2013). Speaking with Nicola at the UK Web Archive, it was evident that on occasion people have been reluctant to hand over their materials to the care of the British Library. In part this resistance is ideological with activist and marginalised groups viewing institutional archives as embedded within structures of oppression, but there is also a practical aspect. Nicola spoke of their frustration with having to work within the constraints of legal deposit legislation which dictates the accessibility of their holdings and in Nicola’s view impedes their fulfilling of their mandate as a service in the public good. Ogden’s paper (2022) discusses how legal deposit legislation in conjunction with collection policies and adherence to professional standards results in National web archiving projects being categorically unable to create fully representative archives.

6.2.4. “Toolkits for how to be active.”

Confronting the symbolic annihilation of their communities was a shared motivation across the activist archivists involved in this research, it was, however, just one of many ways they were utilising archives as vehicles for change. As Schreiner notes, in marginalised communities’ fight for recognition the archives are vital not only in the creation of oppositional narratives, but as

“collective tools for social justice” (Schreiner, 2014: 123). Whilst the anarchist and working-class movement participants involved in this research also believed that they are not visible in institutional archives, for them the greater task at hand was to activate those records by ensuring access and engagement by communities of activists and marginalised peoples organising for better future, something which the Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive was deeply committed to. Speaking with their founder, Joey, it was clear they intended to create an extensive resource bank of tenants’ organising, and to build a movement around those archive materials with the knowledge and longevity to affect real change. The Sheffield Feminist Archive and the Sparrow’s Nest also encouraged use of their archives by activist groups to learn from the successes and failures of the past and more effectively agitate for a more just society (Eichhorn, 2013; Ziegler, 2014).

Keenly aware of the limitations of their archives, makeshift solutions were offered by several participants who felt that the benefit of immediate capture and accessibility of content outweighed the longevity of materials processed and preserved to professional standards. This echoed the trends in radical information work in the US where alternative methods of processing and storing materials have been developed to aid access and discovery of materials, specifically: the Lesbian Herstory Archives, credited with developing the “good enough” digitisation standard (McKinney, 2020), and Interference Archive who run an open stacks model, claiming “preservation through use” (Sellie et al., 2015). That archive materials are lying dormant and impotent until they are touched, read, and reflected upon; activated by the user, is felt ubiquitously within the activist archive scene (Buchanan & Bastian, 2015). In line with the concept of “preservation through use” (Sellie et al. 2015), activist archivists from working-class movement archives suggested that it was common for archives of this type to see sharing of materials as an act of preservation. Speaking of the advice the Glasgow Housing Struggles Archive had received from the long-established May Day Rooms in London, hosting materials on multiple publicly accessible platforms (as well as physically) would ensure their future longevity and present utility for social movement campaigns. This position was shared by a participant at the SFA who also ascribed to the radical archiving philosophy that the value of archival records is rooted in their activation by the user (Pell, 2015). The practicalities of delivering immediate community interaction with archive materials when a project is attached to institutional archives did throw up further tensions between community-based and professional archives. A Glasgow-based participant drew on their experience of the National Archives of Scotland to propose that community archives are much better placed to respond to the needs of their communities in terms of making materials accessible quickly. This reaffirms Caswell’s (2014) idea that community archives by principle are more flexible to the changing needs of the communities they represent.

This emphasis on access is strongly connected with activist archivists' conceptualisation of their archives as "toolkits" for participation in contemporary activism. This idea of community archives as "weapons of struggle" is well documented in Melissa Morrone's 2014 compendium of radical information work (Moran, 2014: 176). Furthermore, the value of the archives as a space not merely a collection of individual items referred to by Moore and Pell as "counter-publics" (2010) feed strongly into some participants' vision for their archives. The research of Moore and Pell (2010) and Fair (2014) stressed the social role that activist archives as nuclei of their communities where ideas can be discussed, and networks of solidarity can be built. This concept was reiterated in my findings, most notably by participants from anarchist archiving projects (1 in 12 Club; Sparrow's Nest) whose organisations are steeped in the anarchist values of cooperation and mutual aid. Together with working-class movement archivists, they were particularly explicit about the role of archives as a meeting place for activists to come together around the materials and use them to spark discussions and inform strategies for action (Tobar, 2015; Yaco, Jimerson, Caldwell Anderson & Temple, 2015). This finding gives weight to Moran's observation that anarchist archivists, perhaps more than other groups, place great importance on their archives as a social space, referring to them as "active locations for anarchism" (Moran, 2014: 174).

As well as providing blueprints for coordinating action, my participants also saw great value in the holistic view of a movement dedicated activist archives can provide. A participant from the SFA, speaking in reference to the murder of Sarah Everard by a police officer in 2021, highlighted how encounters with the archive can allow a person to see how present events are not isolated but are in essence repeated throughout the history of a community. This reinforces Munoz's stance that frames activist archives as "sites of temporal rupture" where interaction with a community's history is vital for conjuring a shared vision of the future (Munoz, 1999 cited in McKinney, 2020: 164). The power of the archives to disrupt cycles of violence is dealt with at length in Caswell's most recent work *Urgent Archives* (2021) and is intertwined with the role of activist archives in seeking accountability of oppressors.

6.2.5. "This pandemic has exposed how easily our old ways of doing things can crumble." The outbreak of Covid-19 also had a profound effect on the accessibility of archive materials during periods of restricted movement and lockdown measures. At a time when many public services were physically closed, Archives explored ways to continue serving the public through digital media platforms (Spinney, 2020; Wegener, 2021). Recognising the long-term impact that the outbreak of Covid-19 has had on every aspect of our lives, archivists world-wide have embarked on rapid-response projects (Spinney, 2020; Wegener, 2021), as well as developing ways of ensuring that their existing collections are accessible. Nationally, the UK Web Archive is collecting websites related to

Covid-19 and regionally, there are numerous efforts to capture local narratives of the pandemic (McCann, 2020) – just typing “collecting covid stories UK” into a search engine turns up pages and pages of links to archives across the country building collections around their community’s experiences. Having undertaken my fieldwork in and around various phases of lockdown, the impact of Covid on my participants’ conception of contemporary activism and the collection of its related materials was an inevitability.

My findings confirm that the pandemic certainly played a role in activist archivists embracing the digital; many were committed to making collections accessible through digitisation projects and/or engaging with their communities via increased social media presences. Motivated by a shared ideology of ensuring easy access to activist materials the Sparrow’s Nest (Nottingham) and the Spirit of Revolt (Glasgow) have long prioritised the digitisation of collections, the SFA however, was one of the participating activist archives for which Covid-19 was the catalyst for creating digitally hosted accessible archives.

The pandemic prompted conversations to occur around the intersection of digital activism and contemporary memory work. For example, Acker and Flamm (2021) explored the use of GitHub to curate web archives around Covid-19, specifically in the face of censorship in China, Burkholder et al. (2021) reported on a case study into the coproduction and community participation into LGBTQIA* archives during the pandemic, and Jones, Sweeney, Milligan, Bak & McCutcheon (2021) discussed the ways that the pandemic has brought to light the inadequacies of our current approach to digital preservation and the resultant impact on our ability to honour all experiences. Despite an awareness of the impact the pandemic has had on the nature of contemporary activism and ways of collecting and accessing archives, it was not enough to compel activist archivists towards capturing materials of dissent hosted on the web. For my participants, the value of archiving the activist web did not outweigh the barriers they face in terms of technical proficiency and time. This is partly reflected in the literature by Wright (2019), who notes how processes such as web archiving may draw energy and resources away from other activities seen by members as more essential elements of their archival work such as processing physical materials and community engagement.

Participants from wholly voluntary organisations such as the Sheffield Feminist Archive and 1 in 12 Club (Bradford) spoke frankly of their need to prioritise certain activities at the expense of capturing activist content that is hosted on the web. The former placing a greater value on collecting oral histories with the justification that verbal testimonies are equally if not more ephemeral than digital activist materials; and the latter focussing its efforts on maintaining a space for and sense of community in the face of increasing austerity and uncertainty intensified by the pandemic. Written in the spring of 2020, diaries collected from members of the SFA capture the uncertainty triggered

by the pandemic; of particular concern were issues of accessibility and connectedness with communities, reflecting again the elevation of access over preservation within the community archiving paradigm (Sellie et al., 2015).

The pandemic presented a watershed moment both in archival practice and contemporary activism; it pushed activist archivists, like those at the SFA, to consider how their dependency on a parent organisation impacts their ability to serve their communities during times of prolonged uncertainty. In this case, though the concept of a web archive was not embraced, significant steps were made in modernising their project through the launching of a digital archive – something that had been aspired towards since the SFA’s inception in 2015 – sparking hope that somewhere down the line they will feel emboldened to venture into web archiving.

6.2.6. “Beyond our capabilities... it’s as simple as that.”

Research highlighting the conditions of scarcity within which many community archive projects operate is plentiful (Caswell et al., 2016; Flinn, 2011; Sadler & Cox 2017; Schreiner, 2014; Tobar, 2015; Wakimoto et al., 2013). That the community archiving movement is under-resourced in terms of staff, skills, funding, and infrastructure is well-trodden ground in archival literature, that said, these issues have yet to be considered in terms of archiving the web. The findings of this research bring a new dimension to our understanding of activist archiving as they attempt to collect contemporary materials of activism, a substantial amount of which reside on the web.

At this point in time none of the activist archives contributing to this research are archiving content hosted on the web, nor is it high on their agenda for the near future. The reason for this is simply that they feel under-resourced to devote time and energy into learning the necessary skills for web archiving. Out of the sixteen activist archivists I interviewed, only four had designated time for their archival work and receive payment for their labour. Furthermore, the majority of research sites rely entirely on member subscriptions and funding streams to finance their activities. Their experiences resonate strongly with the findings of previous case studies exploring the upkeep of physical collections by community archivists (see; Caswell, Cifor & Ramirez, 2016; Flinn, 2011; Tobar, 2014). Furthermore, as Evans, Perricci, and Roberts (2014) highlight, community archives rely on the unwavering dedication of a few individuals for their survival and perhaps this is not always achievable for archiving projects whose communities are highly dynamic and dependent on how much activists are able to commit on top of their other responsibilities.

Capacity was an oft-repeated concern for my activist archivists; organisers of the entirely volunteer run SFA, felt that an independently created web archive was in no way achievable due to their intermittent access to funding, fluctuating involvement of the organising committee, and varying levels of digital competency. Feeling constrained by their material circumstances was shared

by interviewees from every other activist archive, with the most extreme cases likening the running of their project to a constant fight for survival (1 in 12 Club). In cases where activist archiving projects benefitted from the involvement of a trained archivist, the issues caused by lack of resources persisted. Qualified participants at the AIU and SFA spoke candidly of their need for training in web archiving technologies and their concern that their fellow, less-experienced, activist archivists may find the learning process challenging. Moreover, the combination of allocated project hours and endless backlogs of materials to process allows little time for activist archivists to learn the skills needed to archive the web (Pell, 2015), never mind implement them on a long-term basis. There is, however, a ray of hope; in their research on the Lesbian Herstory Archives, McKinney (2020) noted that other community archives were not as enthusiastic about beginning digitisation projects due to a lack of volunteers, technical know-how, and funding, now such projects are commonplace in radical archiving circles and perhaps it is only a matter of time before web archiving becomes a mainstay of activist archiving.

Worth noting too, is the lack of guidance available; the fixity of web archiving within national strategies for documentary heritage collection is not reflected in the resources created to support community archiving efforts or the curriculum for archiving degrees. Whilst the UK has a non-governmental infrastructure of support for community archives (Community Archives and Heritage Group), their usefulness from the perspective of activist archives is perhaps diminished by the broadness of the term community archive. Community archiving literature continually struggles to provide a definitive definition of community archives (Brown, 2020; Flinn, 2011), consequently, everything from the Chester Canal Heritage Trust to rukus! Black LGBT archive are encompassed by its umbrella.

That existing infrastructures of support are less impactful than they intend is reinforced by participants from the AIU and the SFA expressing a need for a more active and visible network of preferably peer-peer support. Lianne (AIU) in particular, felt that it would be much more beneficial to learn strategies for archiving the web from projects that are ideologically and operationally similar to their own archives as opposed to applying processes used by professionally run national initiatives. It was only when speaking with participants based in Glasgow that some semblance of a community of practice for activist archiving was present – one at a local level and another more geographically scattered but with a tight focus on tenants' organising and working-class activism. My findings suggest that, in general, there is not a great deal of interaction between activist archiving projects in the UK and a more systematic approach to creating radical archiving networks for sharing skills, tools, and knowledge, akin to Documenting the Now in the US, would be welcome. Although the Sheffield Feminist Archive holds a membership with the Feminist and Women's

Libraries and Archives Network (FLA) and The Sparrow's Nest is a listed member of the Network of Radical Libraries and Archives (NORLA), there is little evidence to be found online of these networks cultivating the exchange of knowledge and skills between projects. The FLA have not posted on their blog since the height of the pandemic in May 2020, and NORLA has been inactive for a few years before being recently re-booted as a project by MayDay Rooms in collaboration with 8 other archives; The Sparrow's Nest is the only member not based in London.

This is in stark contrast to the situation in the US where organisations such as Documenting the Now operate as a community of practice supporting the archiving of social media by activist groups. Aside from providing tailored support both online and face to face, they run an initiative whereby professional archivists are matched up with activists in need of specific skills support. Whilst the situation in the US is far beyond the scope of this research, the strength of their community archiving movement, specifically the activist archiving movement, is worth considering as a blueprint for what a radical archive network in Britain could look like.

6.2.7. "We're so busy romanticising what happened in the past."

Whilst many participants appeared to have made peace with their decision not to engage with web archiving technologies, some presented that choice as a failure. Andy from the 1 in 12 Club was unambiguous in his assertions that not archiving anarchist web content was a missed opportunity in capturing the contemporary anarchist movement. Adam (MML) and Lucy (GWL) also expressed concerns that activist archiving efforts were too often focussed on the past to the detriment of the present. Lucy felt that the romanticisation of past struggles draws activist archivists' attention away from capturing the materials of significant struggles of our time. This position reflects that of Ziegler, who writing in 2014 asserted that to archive a community, an activist archive must identify what kinds of materials are being created by that community, where they can be found and how best to go about capturing those materials (Ziegler, 2014). Considering the hybridity of twenty-first century social movements, it is certain that their corresponding materials exist in both online and offline environments, therefore, a lack of appropriate mechanisms to capture both web and physical materials will lead to incomplete archives of activism. This is something that Adam highlighted in his interview when he imagined trying and failing to find traces of his present activism in the archives of the future.

This reveals a tension between the various activities of activist archivists, whereby reclamation of obscured narratives eclipses the more future-oriented missions of the projects such as building sustainable movements and archives as vehicles for accountability. This tension is strengthened by the very nature of activist archival work as tragically under-resourced; were activist

archives abundant in staff, funding, and time, compromises would not have to be made between preserving past narratives and capturing present ones.

Whilst Adam was largely concerned by activist archivists' failure to represent a full narrative of contemporary activism through the neglect of materials hosted on the web, a participant from the 1 in 12 Club suggested that this neglect would also impact their usefulness as resources for future activism. They highlighted how the activist landscape has altered dramatically since the advent of the digital age, referring specifically to the use of social media to make, maintain, and mobilise oppositional networks, and doubted whether an archive of traditional methods of organising would be entirely relevant in coordinating action in the present and future.

6.3. Capturing social movements

My reasoning for wanting to gauge the extent to which grassroots projects are web archiving activist content lies in the very nature of contemporary protest culture. Embracing digital media has allowed social movements to overcome geographical and temporal barriers, widening their spheres of influence across borders. That social movements are increasingly hybrid, operating simultaneously within online and offline environments, has resulted in different kinds of materials being created by these activist groups and consequently the means of collecting, preserving, and providing access to those materials has also changed. Furthermore, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shifting our lives into digital environments including our means of participating in social activism strengthens the claim that materials hosted on the web are valuable artefacts of our documentary heritage. Wiederhold (2020) noted the dramatic increase in the usership of social media platforms during the pandemic and Chenoweth et al. (2020) outlined the numerous ways that lockdown measures and heavy reliance on digital platforms has led to the development of new techniques for advocacy and social activism.

The utility of digital media throughout the life cycle of social movement campaigns – disseminating information, garnering support, encouraging debate, coordinating action – was shared by a number of participants. Members from anarchist archiving projects built on this suggesting that digital media platforms allow for a multiplicity of voices and are an important tool for the left in countering dominant narratives in the mainstream media. This position reflects Castells' work around Networked Social Movements (2012), which outlined the revolutionary effect that the internet could have on democratising participation in social movements. Not only does instantaneous international communication significantly reduce the personal cost of participating in social activism, but digital media platforms also allow activists to be involved in the creation and distribution of content contributing to a shift away from organisationally brokered networks of collective action towards self-organising networks of connective action (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012).

Demonstrative of this more fluid understanding of participation was one activist archivist's suggestion to capture political commentary in tandem with online activist ephemera. They used the example of Ash Sakar and Owen Jones (Left-leaning Labour members) who both use their social media accounts to weigh in on issues and scrutinise the presiding government and increasingly the actions of their own party. Another participant reiterated the importance of finding ways to capture content hosted on platforms like Twitter emphasising its use by activist and campaign groups as a favoured means of communication.

6.3.1. Mirroring the movement

The organisational culture of these activist archives echoes the characterisation of contemporary activism in social movements literature. Just as Ziegler found the ethos of those collecting matched that of those being collected at their research site, the Radical Archives of Philadelphia (2014), I too found that my research sites were embodying the organisational structure of the movements they were archiving. As an organiser with the Sheffield Feminist Archive, I am intimately acquainted with their commitment to operating as a horizontally organised project (Castells, 2012). Official roles of secretary and treasurer are assigned merely for bureaucratic and financial purposes, the work is distributed as evenly as possible, and tasks are circulated on a monthly basis (Sutherland, Land & Böhm, 2014). The 1 in 12 Club, as an anarchist organisation, is also deeply committed to horizontality, though two participants from the club admitted that in practice a great deal of the workload falls to just two members and there is not an established culture of skills sharing across members, which Sutherland et al., suggest is vital for ensuring that power imbalances do not develop, and accountability is spread across the project (2014).

Though beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting that for Fair, this mirroring extended to the organisation of collections themselves (2014). Speaking of the Interference Archives, Fair emphasised that independent archives have the ability to manage their materials in a more horizontal way, free from the limitations connected with top-down organisational structure of institutional archiving bodies (2014). In the case of Occupy Wall Street, Evans, Perricci, and Roberts (2014) noted that activists believed that the most ideologically sound way of housing their collections would be in an online environment which would allow for a greater degree of participation and decentralisation, a view shared by the SFA when discussing the benefits of hosting their own digital archives.

6.3.2. Activating archives

The aftermath of Michael Brown's murder by police in 2014 is considered by social movement scholars and US-based participants of this research as a fundamental shift in the way that contemporary social movements operate and how ordinary people interact with them (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018; Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, 2017). The participation of the general

public in sharing words and images about the death of Michael Brown was instrumental in bringing the atrocity to the attention of the rest of the world and catapulting Black Lives Matter into the global movement it is today. Two participants underlined the importance of independent archives to take on the task of ensuring the preservation of digital activist content such as the messages of anger and solidarity after Ferguson, with one in particular connecting this need back to a mistrust of institutional archives to fairly represent marginalised experiences.

Worth noting too is the symbiotic relationship between activism and archival work as opposed to perceiving the archives as the passively collected afterlife of a campaign. For my participants, it was their view that the archive could be an instrument in mobilising communities and strengthening their claims against their oppressors. Eichhorn's research into the archival turn in feminism (2013) centres archives as integral to the movement's production of knowledge and realisation of activism; building on this concept my findings suggest that there are three major points within the life cycle of social movements that the archive can be utilised as a vehicle for change. The first is in the creation of a collective ideology built on the narratives woven by activist archives – Fair highlights the social aspect of activist archives with the cultivation of collective identities as a fundamental aspect of activist archival work (2014). The second is the positioning of the archive as a weapon in ongoing struggles (Moran, 2014), a valuable resource for inspiring and guiding present and future activist endeavours. The third is the archive as a source of evidence of grievances that can be referenced by movements seeking justice and the holding of authorities to account. As Jason from the Internet Archive and Rosa from the SFA underlined, activist archives can provide proof that instances of oppression in the present did not occur in a vacuum and that there is a historical precedent for the treatment of marginalised communities.

6.3.3. "A firebomb through the letterbox".

The use of archives for evidentiary purposes can have negative consequences for activists and the archives they are depicted in. Some participants, largely from anarchist archiving projects, raised concerns about the safety of their communities and their archives by making their activities more visible via online platforms. Those at the 1 in 12 expressed fears of having the documentation of their members such as minutes freely accessible, though they were willing to concede that after a period of fifteen-twenty years, for example, they do see the utility in using those materials to inform decisions in future campaigns. At the Sparrow's Nest however, they were very reluctant to endanger those depicted in their archives through the broadening of their presence on the internet. They spoke of the potential threat of becoming targets for alt-right groups, to the extent of expecting physical attacks on the building where their archives are housed and took comfort in the relative security of obscurity. Considering that anarchists are in principle suspicious of authoritative bodies

(Moran, 2014), these findings could possibly have been dismissed as paranoia – almost Orwellian levels of mistrust in authority – but the passing of the Police, Crime, and Sentencing Act in 2022 brings to the surface a clear governmental agenda of silencing oppositional voices. Perhaps general opinion is that state surveillance of private citizens is something that happens in totalitarian regimes and not western democracies, however, Owen’s research (2017) mentions the Pew Report (2014) which found that forty-three percent of Americans were aware that their data was being accessed by the government in anti-terrorism efforts. There are also reports of the London Metropolitan Police using social media platforms to monitor the location and personal information of over nine thousand activists, none of which have criminal records – the sole basis for their surveillance is their anti-government sentiment.

My participants perspectives tap into the very real concern that the traces activists leave online expose them to a greater level of monitoring and infiltration than previous forms of activist communication. Aziz and Beydoun (2020) discussed how the heightened visibility of black and brown activists on social media in turn heightened the risk of marginalised communities being subjected to more intrusive and damaging forms of surveillance at the hands of law enforcement. Legal repercussions are a potential deterrent for some activists, whilst others may have developed custom virtual networks to avoid detection by the authorities, leaving little or no trace of their activities available for preservation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Flinn, 2008). This is something that concerned one of my participants at the Sheffield Feminist Archive, who, recognising a person’s right to be forgotten, feared that the dangers of being documented will mean some activists will consciously evade the archives and result in losing pieces of history. Evans, Perricci, and Robert’s research around Occupy Wall Street (2014), also highlighted the challenges of dealing with living creators who are fearful that the archive could be used as evidence against them by law enforcement. Ultimately, activists need to weigh up the benefits of using digital media to amplify their voice and raise consciousness around issues with the costs to their personal safety, and archivists need to decide whether preserving those materials for the future is worth endangering the activists they depict in the present.

6.3.4. “Tweeting about something doesn’t feel quite as revolutionary as being out in the streets”.

Some of the attitudes towards digital activism held by my participants can offer new insights into the debates around the effectiveness of digital activism in social movement scholarship. For participants at the SFA and the Sparrow’s Nest their conceptualisation of activism was deeply embedded in physical forms of protest and organising. They speak of posters and placards, leafleting and newsletter distribution, and do not see the shift of these activities to digital environments as holding the same weight as those traditional methods of spreading awareness and building movements.

Their failure to equate social media content produced and distributed widely between activist networks and the online public with the physical ephemera of protest movements gives weight to the concept held by cyber-sceptics, “slacktivism”. Coined by Morozov (2011), the term refers to the detrimental effects of digitally enabled activism through liking, sharing, or tweeting content on the success of campaigns. He believes that, at best, digital forms of activism are not impactful in the process of social change and, at worst, they actively minimise people’s participation in physical direct action. Furthermore, a participant from the SFA questioned the democratising potential of the internet noting that in some instances online campaigns have been dominated by privileged voices and have been used by celebrities for virtue signalling and cultivating a sympathetic public image.

These perceptions of digital activism as being less impactful than traditional means of organising perhaps contributed to my participants ideas of what their web archive would contain if they were to create one. The SFA saw the creation of a web archive as more of an exercise in self-archiving, imagining it to include their organising documents, emails, and their social media output. They limited their collecting of web materials to private communications and organisational records, what Treré (2015) defines as the ‘backstage’, as opposed to the public facing ‘frontstage’ which largely manifests on social media feeds and threads. This would feel less significant if the physical records of the SFA organising group were part of their collecting remit for their collections held at the Sheffield City Archives, yet, as far as I know, they are not. This response also strengthens the idea that activist archivists see their archival work as fundamentally activist in nature; by placing significance on the archiving of their own organisational materials they are situating themselves as an important piece of the narrative of contemporary activism.

6.3.5. “Are we leaving it all to Mark Zuckerberg?”

The use of social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, for coordinating social movement campaigns throws up issues for both large-scale web archiving initiatives and activist archivists. Rather than the wilful decision not to archive activist material hosted on the web, national initiatives failure to capture digital activism lies in the fact that activist groups tend to use third-party platforms to host their networks as opposed to paying for the start-up and maintenance of a website. Due to the dynamic nature of these platforms and the rapidity with which content is created, altered, and deleted, it is not possible for large-scale automated crawls to capture the content hosted on them (Hegarty, 2022). Nicola from the UKWA confirmed this stating that, along with technical considerations, the complexities of consent and ownership of materials on these platforms are substantial barriers to the web archiving of social media content in any systematic way. Furthermore, a lack of clarity around issues of consent creates a burden on activist archivists to seek guidance on how to responsibly archive social media content in addition to the existing burdens

discussed in section 6.1.2 – learning new skills and carving out the time needed to commit to such a project.

In light of the above, the question comes to mind, how are the Internet Archive navigating issues of consent? Both my research, and a recent paper by Ogden found that, more often than not, the Internet archive is not requesting consent before archiving materials. Jason from the IA and Archive Team gave me the example of a rapid response project around collecting the documentary heritage of Afghanistan hosted on the web as the US military were preparing to withdraw from the region. However, this is an exceptional case, and both my and Ogden's conversations with Jason suggest that this approach is typical for the Internet Archive where the emphasis is on "urgency and action over bureaucracy or philosophical debates about best practices" (Ogden, 2022: 120). This, however, does not seem an appropriate model for activist archives to emulate; as Christen and Anderson underline (2019), The philosophical underpinnings of activist community archiving projects require that archives are collaboratively created and that communities are represented responsibly.

That neither national archiving bodies nor activist projects are preserving activist social media content was concerning for one of my participants who said that the idea of having materials in the hands of Mark Zuckerberg was "terrifying". Earlier in this discussion I presented findings relating to activist archivists' acknowledgement of the utility of social media platforms throughout the life cycle of social movements, and whilst this position still stands, it must be noted that, in general, the use of social media by activists and the groups archiving them was seen as a necessary evil of participating in contemporary protest culture. A number of my participants displayed a mistrust and or avoidance of social media which reinforces Flinn's thoughts on the challenges of archiving activism hosted on the web (2008). Along with Bennet and Segerberg (2013), he suggests that in a bid to operate clandestinely, activists may develop custom virtual networks for circulating oppositional materials, and thereby leaving no traces of their activities to be captured by archivists.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Revisiting the research questions, aims and objectives

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore the web archiving needs of activist archive projects in the North of England and Scotland, with specific focus on the capability and willingness of activist archivists to archive materials hosted on the web related to their causes, the barriers they face, and their thoughts on the fate of web-hosted activist materials with or without their involvement. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were developed:

1. Digital media platforms are used throughout the life cycle of contemporary social movements, how has this affected the way activist archives are collecting activist materials?
2. How do activist archivists anticipate their archive collections being accessed and used by their communities?
3. In what ways are activist archivists currently engaging with web archiving?
4. Do activist archivists see a need for activist web content to be archived?
5. What kinds of barriers are these archives experiencing with regards to archiving the web?
6. What concerns do activist archivists have about where activist web content is currently being archived?

To address the questions above, I devised a set of research objectives which then formed the phases of my project. Initially I reviewed the existing literature in the following areas: new social movements and their evolution in the digital era; the interactions between community archives and social justice movements; the theoretical and practical research into radical community archiving trends; a history of web archiving and current strategies – the successes and shortcomings; issues of ethics and bias when archiving the web; and the imagined use of community-based physical and web archives in the twenty-first century. I then proceeded to identify UK-based activist archives using the criteria I devised with the aid of Caswell's principles of community archiving (2014) in combination with two definitions of the activist archiving spectrum (Flinn & Alexander, 2015; Sellie et al., 2015) – see chapter 1. Then, between March 2021 and January 2022, I conducted semi-structured interviews with sixteen activist archivists creating collections related to a range of social movements in cities in the North of England and Scotland, as well as four archives and heritage sector professionals involved in supporting grassroots archival work. I also collected themed diary entries from seven participants across my three main research sites in the Yorkshire area. The data collected was then analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2022). Finally, I

presented my findings and produced a theorisation of activist archivists' experiences of and attitudes to web archiving situated in the archival turn in activism in the UK and the ethical implications of participating in and preserving online activism (see chapters 5 and 6).

7.2. Contributions of the research

The contributions to scholarly knowledge made by this thesis are manifold (Tracy, 2010); it is one of the first major empirical studies of activist attitudes to web archiving; one of the first studies conducted in the UK focussing on activist archives outside of London; and one of the first pieces of research into radical archiving that brings together the insights of a variety of activists archiving different social movements including feminism, anarchism, queer rights, racial justice, and working-class movements. My findings were discussed in relation to the three main bodies of literature; web archiving, critical archive studies and social movement studies, at the intersection of which my research resides.

Addressing scholars and practitioners of web archiving, I examined the impact of my findings on the fundamental challenges of democratising participation and collecting the web in a representative way, thus answering research questions 3 and 5 on activist archivist's engagement with web archiving and the barriers they encounter. By approaching the task of archiving the web from small-scale grass roots perspectives, this research prompts the debate to shift its focus away from the techno-centric top-down investigations of web archiving that currently dominate the field. There is currently a lot of interest in participatory approaches led by national archiving bodies and libraries; by shifting the perspective, my research has revealed fundamental barriers which impede the participation of activist archivists in national web archiving efforts to capture a diverse and inclusive documentary heritage. The exploration of question 6 addressing the current strategies for archiving activist web content confirms the limitations of domain-level web archiving initiatives which, as web archiving practices mature, have begun to attract the attention of web archiving scholarship. Moreover, this study highlights the need for an open dialogue between national web archives and community projects to ensure that activist narratives hosted online are preserved representatively and responsibly.

The perceived need to archive activist web content – research question 4 — was explored through a discussion of the ideological foundations of activist archiving and their implications for collecting contemporary social movement campaigns; this contributed to the debates around memory work and social justice in critical archive studies. As did activist archivist's intended uses of their archives by their communities, addressed by research question 1. The breadth of activist archives involved in this research both reinforces and expands claims around the archival turn in activism made by community archiving scholars in recent years. Weaving together the perspectives

of activist archivists from a wide range of social movements has led to the development of a categorisation of the key activities of activist archival work and how they stem from and feed into the fundamental principles of activist archiving. Furthermore, the focus on the archiving of web materials builds on existing literature exploring the problems faced by community archiving projects in terms of the creation and maintenance of physical and digital collections and how these issues persist and are exacerbated in the context of capturing the web.

My findings on the motivations for archiving activism and the challenges of doing so in increasingly digitised environments builds on the literature surrounding the nature of contemporary social movements. By answering research question 2 on the implications of the rise of digitally coordinated action for activist archivists and their attitudes towards online activism, I have highlighted the importance of activist archiving for the documentation of social activism and the ethical and conceptual issues therein. With activist archiving under-explored in social movement literature, this study makes a significant contribution to the field by demonstrating how activist archival work can be (and already has been) integrated into the life cycle of activist campaigns with the aim of building more sustainable social movements in the present and future. Activist archives should not be viewed as the passive documentation of social movements but as vital tools that encourage social movement actors to critically engage with the materials of past and present struggles to inspire and inform present and future action. Having attempted to organise my discussion into three distinct sections, I acknowledge that these categories of understanding are highly interrelated and the findings for each of my six research questions work together to inform my discussions addressing these three key audiences.

7.3. Key insights

None of the activist archivists involved in this research were archiving the web at the time of data collection. That they felt unable to do so contributes to existing discussions in archival scholarship surrounding the challenges facing community archives (Caswell, Cifor & Ramirez, 2016; Flinn, 2011; Pell, 2015; Tobar, 2015), however, bringing a new dimension to our understanding – the preservation of content hosted online. My research found that the challenges faced by community archives collecting physical materials are amplified with regards to the archiving of web materials. There are robust mechanisms of support in place for community archiving projects such as the Community Archives and Heritage Group, however, in the UK they are yet to provide resources and guidance on how to archive the web. I believe that radical archives in Britain would benefit greatly from the existence of an organisation similar to Documenting the Now in the US which aims to equip activist archives with the knowledge and tools to archive web and social media content on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, the lack of a network for skills and knowledge sharing amongst activist

archives was keenly felt, though there was evidence of some mutual support between activist archives in the same city (Glasgow) and collecting the material culture of similar communities (working-class movements).

7.3.1. Physical barriers

The barrier most keenly felt by my participants was their feeling inadequately skilled to archive materials hosted on the web; even in cases where my participants held qualifications in archives and records management, the prospect of attaining the necessary skills was viewed as beyond their current capacity. This was connected with a general perception that participants did not have the time to devote to either the learning of new skills or their application in what would be a long-term project alongside their other responsibilities within their activist archive. As I previously mentioned, supportive infrastructures for community archiving do not provide resources for learning how to archive the web. Furthermore, speaking with a current student of archives and records management, it does not appear that web archiving is prioritised within the present curriculum, which is surprising considering that an increasing proportion of our documentary heritage is hosted in digital environments. Conversations with a web archivist at the British Library suggested that this is due to the intuitive nature of the available tools, though these conversations also highlighted that professional archivists are not always aware of the degree to which these community archivists are operating within conditions of scarcity.

Precarious financial situations also presented significant challenges to activist archives with regards to archiving the web. Many of the activist archivists I interviewed were involved in projects with no steady form of funding, relying predominantly on donations and membership dues, others were employed via funding packages allocated for specific project work. Whilst there are a number of free open-source software packages for archiving web content, many activist archives do not have the infrastructure to host and provide access to archived web materials, whether that be the means to purchase storage space or to pay for the design and maintenance of an appropriate website. Alternative routes to ensuring that activist web materials are captured and preserved do exist, such as uploading websites to the Internet Archive or nominating sites to be saved by the UK Web Archive, however, the concept of outsourcing the archiving of marginalised materials lies in opposition to the fundamental principles of community archiving, namely retaining community control over its narrative. This connects with existing literature surrounding the nature of the community archiving movement, and how their relationships with institutional archives interact with their organisational ethos (Cook, 2013; Tobar, 2014) – the constant push and pull between their vision and their survival.

7.3.2. Ethical issues

In terms of ethical barriers, navigating issues of consent was a deterrent for some participants. Activist archivists were of the opinion that obtaining consent for the archiving of web hosted content is not as straightforward as negotiating the donation of physical materials. This was a particular issue for members of the Sheffield Feminist Archive who are not involved in accessioning materials to their collections housed at Sheffield City Archives. In this case, the process of learning about consent and related issues would have no basis in existing archival knowledge or practice. The lack of clarity in matters of consent and ownership in online environments is also a deterrent for national web archiving initiatives when it comes to the more collaboratively created content such as that on social media platforms where single threads can contain a multitude of different voices. Along with the technical inadequacies of automated crawlers regarding the capture of dynamic content, obtaining consent is a major factor in the UK Web Archive's decision not to archive social media content. These issues feed into existing discussions surrounding the failures of national web archiving initiatives to preserve a fully representative documentary heritage (Hegarty, 2022), and the argument that bigger archives are not de facto more inclusive.

Of greater concern in terms of the ethical implications of web archiving activist material put forward by members of the two anarchist archives involved in this research was the safety of those depicted in the archives and the archive itself. Participants from the 1 in 12 Club and The Sparrow's Nest were fearful of the potential risks of capturing and hosting subversive activities in online spaces. Anarchist archivists were afraid that the documentation and availability of materials evidencing activities that might be deemed illegitimate by the state may compromise their own safety and security due to their being more easily identified with the help of artificial intelligence and at increased risk of unintentional leaks of information. They also voiced concerns that some of the communities they work with may not trust content and data about them to be stored and made available digitally, due to mistrust of institutions and fear for themselves. The most extreme scenario was the potential for increased visibility online exposing the archive itself to online abuse and even direct attacks. Luminescent Flamingo's fears of advertising their archive's existence to oppositional and potentially violent individuals reinforces Flinn's (2008) concerns regarding institutional archiving of marginalised communities, who are most likely to be objects of state surveillance or hate-driven attacks. Concerns, mistrust, and fears related to archiving the digital connects with claims brought forwards by a vast corpus of literature published in the last decade, highlighting the dark side of technology and how it affects especially minoritised communities or oppositional groups, which archivists seem to be - at least partially - aware of (see for example: Eubanks, 2018; Guberek, McDonald, Simioni, Mhaidli, Toyama & Schaub, 2018; Latonero, Hiatt, Napolitano, Clericetti, &

Penagos, 2019; Leslie, Briggs, Perini, Jayadeva, Rincón, Raval, Birhane, Powell, Katell, & Aitken, 2022; Noble, 2018; O’Neil, 2016; Vannini, Gomez & Newell, 2020).

7.3.3. Challenging concepts

My findings provided further insights into some of the conceptual barriers to activist web archiving. The first is not specific to activist groups and is perhaps applicable to any amateur archiving venture as it is associated with a lack of knowledge. A couple of participants believed the internet to be a stable place and showed little concern that materials could be irretrievably lost. It is possible that this is connected with the right to be forgotten and the resurfacing of previously deleted content, web archiving and digital preservation literature, however, has stressed the volatility of the internet as a strong argument for having strategies in place to periodically capture websites before they are altered, updated or removed (Bingham & Byrne, 2021; Costa et al., 2017). Encouragingly, several participants showed an awareness of the ephemerality of web materials, particularly in relation to social media platforms – Steel City Queer History’s Suzie mentioned the cultural impact of MySpace losing all content uploaded before 2016 – in conjunction with an understanding that these dynamic spaces are precisely where activist web content is hosted.

Just as activist archivists’ faith in the permanence of the internet would render web archiving efforts redundant, so too would the wholesale belief in the ineffectiveness of digital activism. Two participants were especially reverent of what they described as “old school activism”, explaining that they did not equate tweeting or sharing content with traditional means of direct action. This conception of digitally enabled activism as less impactful than and a distraction from physical oppositional activity, referred to in social movement literature as “slacktivism” (Morozov, 2011), fails to see how digital media are incorporated into the mechanisms of a movement, focussing instead on a causal relationship between participation and progress (Dennis, 2018). Thankfully, the majority of participants acknowledged the role of the internet throughout the life cycle of hybrid social movement campaigns (Treré, 2018) – often emphasising its use in consciousness raising – and consequently its worthiness of being captured and preserved.

7.3.4. Who is archiving the activist web?

In the absence of grass roots activist web archiving efforts, the question of who is doing the work to archive online instances of activism remains. Whether the online documentary heritage of social movements is lost forever or captured by institutional archives or the third-party platforms they are hosted on was problematic for my participants. Concerns surrounding their materials being under the control of social media companies such as Meta or Twitter connects back to earlier discussions about how safe those depicted in their archives would be from legal action or physical harm. That my participants were aware of issues of ownership of content hosted on third-party platforms was

encouraging, and for community archives without that knowledge, organisations such as CAHG are committed to delivering guidance around the use of third-party platforms and the compromises community archives have to make when using free digital media to organise and connect with their communities. Participants were equally averse to the idea of having the materials created by their communities that are hosted on the web archived by institutional archives like the UK Web Archive. A key concern was that in such situations marginalised peoples would find themselves silenced or misrepresented in the same ways that they have been throughout the history of physical institutional archiving. In this sense the same archival silences that the community archiving movement emerged to combat in the late twentieth century would be replicated in the web archives. This fear is justified by the wealth of recent scholarship on the inadequate representation of unofficial voices in large scale automated crawling initiatives (Dougherty & Meyer, 2014; Hegarty, 2022; Maemura et al., 2018; Ogden et al., 2017; Rockembach, 2017; Roland & Bawden, 2012). Even in cases where activist archives had partnerships with institutions or parent organisations, there were strong negative views of traditional archives held across the board.

I found that activist archivists saw traditional archives to have multiple layers of inaccessibility. The first being the red tape surrounding user interactions with archive materials. That a person must know what they want to access before visiting the archive, often needing to register as a reader, and/or book an appointment, surrender pens, pencils, mobile phones, and potentially be supervised handling items, does not make for an enjoyable experience. This connects with a fundamental misconception of how archives work. With physical archives there is an expectation that it functions like a library with visible, browsable materials; with web archives there is an expectation that the user interface functions like a search engine; neither of these scenarios are true. Speaking with the UK Web Archive and participants who work in local authority archives alongside their activism, there is an awareness of the confusion that archival arrangements and procedures cause the general public, but with preservation as the core mission of national and local authority archives this is unlikely to change dramatically. The next layer contributing to archives inaccessibility is their perceived elitism; this is a particularly strong association with regards to special collections housed in university buildings where, until recently, academic credentials were a requirement for visiting the archives. The final layer rendering institutional archives inaccessible is the agenda of traditional archives' collecting practices and the hegemony of white, western, male, bourgeois, heteronormative narratives. As a Black woman working in archives, Lianne from AIU shared that she rarely encountered Black histories in the archives, and certainly not those from the perspective of the Black community. Furthermore, Lianne suggested that the framing of Britain's colonial legacy by the archives is a factor in the nation's failure to reconcile the atrocities of the

Empire and the recent backlashes against decolonialist activism such as the toppling of the Colston statue in Bristol in 2020. As with many national archiving bodies, the UK Web Archive at the British Library is becoming more transparent about their colonial history and taking measures to be more representative and responsible in their collecting, describing, and exhibiting of their materials.

Taken together, these last two layers echo the claims made by critical archives literature around the role archives can have in the perpetuation of structural power imbalances (Anderson & Christen 2019, Caswell, 2014; Eagle, 2019; Ernst 1999; Frank, 2019; Pell, 2015; Zinn 1977). Not only do activist archivists see traditional archives as privileging white men in terms of who is represented in the collections, but also who has access to the materials. This position was a motivational factor for many of my participants to do archival work and the creation of collections that confront archival silences and amplify marginalised voices was a key realisation of their activism.

7.3.4. Why should the activist web be archived?

Through a combination of the literature review and my fieldwork I have identified four categories of activist archival work, which are as follows: reclaiming obscured narratives; democratising access to information; informing present and future activism; and holding authorities to account. Considering our increasingly digital existence and specifically the hybridity of social movements as commonplace, if activist archivists remain incapable of or unwilling to archive the web, these activities will become more difficult to undertake. For many of my participants, their archives were seen as a resource bank for present and future social movements to draw inspiration, as well as practical knowledge for successful campaigning. In the absence of archive materials documenting how social movement actors utilise digital media technologies throughout campaigns, activist archives with their wealth of physical protest ephemera will become less relevant for future activists. This point was touched upon by Ellie from the 1 in 12 Club who reflected that, even now, the evolution of tactics from when she was heavily involved in the 1980s to the present has affected how useful activist archives are in providing the blueprints for contemporary activism.

Bearing in mind the lack of trust my participants voiced relating to both third-party platforms and traditional archiving bodies, the use of activist web content as evidence in holding authorities to account may not be possible if activist archivists are not the ones capturing that material and having control over its use. Similarly, activist archivists can have no hand in the democratisation of access to information if they are not the gatekeepers to the materials in question. Consequently, I believe that without systematic strategies for creating activist web archives, the activist archives of the future will no longer be able to realise their visions.

7.4. Recommendations for future research

There were a number of themes that were touched upon during the course of this doctoral research, but were beyond the scope of this current project, which I believe deserve further attention. First, that existing mechanisms of support for the community archiving movement were limited in their capacity to provide guidance around web archiving, calls for a thorough exploration of activist archiving communities of practice in the UK. This could include an investigation into both peer-to-peer networks and the relationship between activist projects and infrastructures of professional support. Brief mentions of something resembling mutual support between two participating archives suggests that there are already some peer-to-peer networks for skills and knowledge sharing in the UK, their origins as well as their impact and reach would be a valuable addition to our understanding of the radical archiving scene in Britain. With the conditions of scarcity that these activist archives operate within likely to continue, the pooling of resources via a network, both in terms of technology and the skills to use them, could be the key to the survival and enduring relevance of activist archival work.

Also worthy of unpicking is how activists and archivists are navigating the dangers of documenting oppositional activities. My research found that concerns around the safety of their community and archives were only voiced by those belonging to anarchist social movements. It would be valuable to ascertain whether those worries are shared by archivists collecting materials related to other social movements and whether activists who are not involved in the documentation of activism are aware of these issues. The former would broaden our understanding of whether this fear of legal or violent repercussions is isolated to, for want of a better word, more militant movements, or whether activists of all stripes are feeling threatened by recent crackdowns on the right to protest. The latter would provide insights into whether activist groups are being proactive about the traceability of their activities through online channels and how this impacts archivists' ability to collect and preserve online hosted materials of dissent.

This research project and the corpus of community archiving literature it draws on is entirely western-centric, therefore, it would be prudent to encourage scholarship in the global south to consider the engagement of local activist archivists in the web archiving of online activist materials, particularly in countries without national initiatives for archiving the web. Such research could prove valuable in expanding our understanding of activist archiving as a global phenomenon and offer insights into the motivations and challenges of doing activist memory work in the digital age outside of the anglophone world.

Through this research I have identified four categories of activist archival work: reclamation of absent or misrepresented narratives; informing present and future activism; democratising access to information; and archives as evidence for holding authorities to account. These activities were

largely referred to as imagined uses of their archives by activists involved in this research, however, whether these archives are being used in these ways by their communities was beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, I propose that a research project tests my idea of four categories of archival work in a different context by focussing on the users of activist archives. This would shed light on whether the imagined use of activist archives by the people who build them is realised in the way that their communities interact with them.

7.5. Practical recommendations

Here I will outline some practical recommendations for stakeholders based on the findings of this research. The fundamental issue is communication, or lack thereof; communication between activist archives, between activist archives and bodies of support, and between activist archives and national archives.

Having found that individually activists archives have limited resources to engage with web archiving technologies, it would be in their interest to reach out to other activist archives, whether that be in their local area or projects that are collecting around similar ideologies, with a view to establishing a community of practice for sharing skills, knowledge and even resources. In this way the burdens of time and potentially cost involved in upskilling would be spread across a wider network of people.

My findings also revealed that the existing mechanisms of support for community archives are not visible enough, nor providing guidance or training in areas most useful for activist archivists. For bodies supporting the community archiving movement, such as CAHG, I would recommend that they create a resource bank with advice for amateur archivists on how to create their own web archive; this could include a list of free open-source web archiving tools with pros and cons, training videos on how to use specific software, tips for preserving and hosting web archives, as well as guidance on copyright and consent when archiving materials hosted on the web. Furthermore, supporting bodies should consider ways they can better promote their service to community archives; many activist archives are operating with very limited capacity and having the need to source training and guidance alleviated would have a positive impact on their ability to benefit from the support available.

Both the literature and my findings raise concerns over what is being archived and what is not by national web archiving initiatives, and despite their efforts to increase public participation in web archiving, there are some fundamental barriers to this approach. In terms of what can and cannot be archived, there needs to be a revisiting of collection policies of web material and a reorientation towards access and public use of web archives. Furthermore, the issue of mistrust of institutional archives by marginalised communities needs to be addressed; national archiving bodies need to take steps to acknowledge their complicity in marginalising communities through the

privileging of hegemonic narratives and reach out to neglected communities in order to build trust and ensure that collections are representative and inclusive moving forward.

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9.2. Ethics documents

9.2.1. Ethics approval



Downloaded: 26/10/2021
Approved: 08/02/2021

Bethany Aylward
Registration number: 180252992
Information School
Programme: PhD

Dear Bethany

PROJECT TITLE: Capturing New Social Movements: Web archiving needs of activist collections in South Yorkshire.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 036632

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 08/02/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 036632 (form submission date: 15/01/2021); (expected project end date: 07/12/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1086277 version 1 (15/01/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Paul Reilly
Ethics Administrator
Information School

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6730661/file/GRIIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

9.2.2. Consent form and participant information sheet

The University of Sheffield Information School	Capturing social movements: Web archiving needs of activist collections in Yorkshire.
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Researchers

Researcher: Bethany Aylward bmaylward.1@sheffield.ac.uk

Research Supervisors: Andrew Cox a.m.cox@sheffield.ac.uk & Sara Vannini s.vannini@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the research

My project aims to identify whether local activist groups are using web archiving techniques to preserve digital material related to their cause. I am interested in the relationship between activism and archival work, especially in the context of digital activism.

Who will be participating?

I am inviting adults over 18 who are current members of local activist groups that are collecting physical and/or digital activist materials to take part.

What will you be asked to do?

My research will involve three types of gathering information - observations, interviews, and diary studies - that will take place over a 12-month period. Due to Covid-19 restrictions all our interactions will be online until further notice.

Your involvement in generating data will be periodic over the 12 months, and the level of your participation is your choice. For example, you may consent to have your contributions to meetings observed but decline consent to be interviewed or take part in diary studies.

1. Observations: I will ask to attend and observe meetings of the organising members of activist groups.
2. Interviews: I will ask you to take part in an interview which will last 40-60 minutes and be audio recorded. During the interview we will talk about: your work as an activist; preservation of activist materials; the possibilities of archiving web content e.g. social media posts, blogs, and press coverage related to your cause; and how you imagine your collection to be used by the public. There will be space in the interview for you to bring up topics you think are relevant or important.
3. Diary studies: I will ask you to produce several diary entries across the 12-month period, reflecting on your work and what it means to you and the impact of the pandemic- these can be written, typed or audio recorded depending on your preference.

All these methods will be brought together to help me understand the relationship between social movements and the collection of physical and digital materials.

What are the potential risks of participating?

The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life. If at any time during the research process you feel uncomfortable, please alert me and we can stop, change the topic of conversation, or find an alternative way to explore the issue.

I understand that your work as an activist may be voluntary and to participate in my research on top of that could be burdensome but also greatly appreciated.

The local focus of this project means that whilst your contributions can be made confidential, any readers associated with your activist community may be able to identify you through your organisation/role/opinions.

What data will I collect?

1. Interviews: Interviews will be audio recorded and automatically transcribed using the caption generation function of our chosen platform. These will be exported as word documents and checked for accuracy by me personally.

2. Diary studies: Diaries, regardless of format, will be collected by me via email. I will transcribe any handwritten or audio files so that all reflections are in the same format for analysis.

What will I do with the data?

The data we generate together will be analysed for inclusion in my doctoral thesis. Your data will be stored in the Information School's research data drive at the University of Sheffield which can be accessed only by me, my supervisors, and ICT staff operating the facility. I will also store an encrypted password protected copy on my personal computer.

Upon completion of my PhD the data will be deposited in the University's data archive. The deposit will include raw data that will be identifiable unless you have requested personally, or your activist group has requested collectively, to have names and places made confidential.

Towards the end of this project there will be a chance for us to meet and discuss the findings. At this point, we can discuss any changes to your individual or collective confidentiality before the dataset is deposited in the archive.

I will be able access to the data for inclusion in any further research, conference presentations and journal articles that may result from this project and your consent to participate in this project includes the use of the data we generate together in these ways.

Due to the nature of this research, it is likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

Will your participation be confidential?

We will have the opportunity to discuss the level of confidentiality you feel comfortable with (addressing each of the methods described above individually) before the project begins and at any point during the research process.

This is a solo research project and what you share with me will not be seen by any data processing services. The raw data - observation notes and summaries, interview recordings and transcripts, and diaries - will be identifiable for the purposes of coding and analysis with access limited to me and my supervisors.

In the write up of my findings I will give you a pseudonym (code name) unless you explicitly wish to remain identifiable. Similarly, the activist collection you are involved with can either be pseudonymised (given a code name) or remain identifiable in agreement with you and the other members.

Please be aware that if your activist collection is identifiable, even if you are personally pseudonymised readers may be able to identify you from the information you share, especially with regards to findings from observing group meetings. I cannot guarantee that members of the group will not discuss their participation, although I will request that they not do so.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this study will be included in my doctoral thesis which will be publicly available. Please contact me if you would like a copy. This project is also likely to form the basis of journal papers and presentations at academic conferences.

What is the legal basis for processing your personal data?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. In order to collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, I must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that I am using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

As I will be collecting some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive information about political opinions and race, I also need to let you know that I am applying an additional condition in law: that the use of your data is 'necessary for scientific or historical research purposes'.

Declaration of consent

- I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before 1st September 2022 - member check phase: opportunity for researcher and participants to meet and share findings - without any negative consequences.
- I understand that if I withdraw, I can request for the data I have already provided to be deleted; however, this might not be possible if the data has already been presented or published.
- I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question(s), or to do any of the activities.
- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research, unless I have agreed otherwise.
- I give permission for the researcher to re-use my data for future research as specified above.
- I agree to take part in the research project as described above and give my consent to the following:
 - I agree to be observed during meetings and my contributions included in a written record
 - I agree to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded
 - I agree to take part in a diary study (either written or voice recorded)
 - I agree to take part in **all** of the above

Participant Name (Please print)

Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)

Researcher Signature

Date:

Note: Further information, including details about how and why the University processes your personal information, how we keep your information secure, and your legal rights (including how to complain if you feel that your personal information has not been handled correctly), can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr Paul Reilly, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk).