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New Digital Worlds

Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy

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Roopika Risam



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments *vii*

Introduction
The Postcolonial Digital Cultural Record *3*

Chapter 1
The Stakes of Postcolonial Digital Humanities *23*

Chapter 2
Colonial Violence and the Postcolonial Digital Archive *47*

Chapter 3
Remaking the Global Worlds of Digital Humanities *65*

Chapter 4
Postcolonial Digital Pedagogy *89*

Chapter 5
Rethinking the Human in Digital Humanities *115*

Conclusion
A Call to Action *139*

Notes *145*

Index *171*

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Introduction



The Postcolonial Digital Cultural Record

As Hurricane Maria drifted away from landfall in Puerto Rico in September 2017, leaving a humanitarian crisis in its wake, the Group for Experimental Methods in the Humanities at Columbia University snapped into action. Building on their earlier work improving the OpenStreetMap platform used by aid agencies like the Red Cross during the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the group organized the "Puerto Rico Mapathon for Hurricane Relief," bringing together university staff, students, and members of the local community to outline and validate geographic landmarks—buildings, bridges, roads—on the OpenStreetMap against updated satellite imagery. Using the Twitter hashtag #prmapathon, Alex Gil, one of the mapathon organizers, shared the event-planning process, inspiring colleagues at other universities to coordinate similar events that day and in the weeks that followed. The more than 60 participants who turned out for the mapathon at Columbia and others at over 25 universities in the United States learned how to improve the maps being used by aid organizations, exercising their digital humanities skills to help people in Puerto Rico.[1]

The Puerto Rico Mapathon is an important example of how postcolonial digital humanities has come to the fore as an intervention in digital knowledge production through theory, praxis, and pedagogy at the nexus of the humanities and the sciences. Postcolonial digital humanities is an approach to uncovering and intervening in the disruptions within the digital cultural record produced by colonialism and neocolonialism. While Hurricane Maria exposed the cruelties of neocolonialism in Puerto Rico, highlighting the United States government's tepid response and indifference to the territory's debt crisis, mapathon organizers recognized the contributions they could make to disaster relief by improving maps of Puerto Rico that populate the digital cultural record. Participants brought together theory and praxis, directing their desire for humanitarian intervention and their technological skill sets towards the goal of mapping a

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territory that revealed colonial hallmarks persisting in the digital cultural record. Many also taught others to do the same, making a pedagogical contribution to the project. Through their participation, an intervention in postcolonial digital humanities, they helped upgrade one of the digital representations of Puerto Rico, remaking a digital world while saving lives.

As the Puerto Rico Mapathon demonstrates, the digital cultural record has consequences for people's lives. For events like the mapathon, intervening in the digital cultural record is an acute matter of life or death in the Anthropocene, where the stakes of race and colonialism play out in the medium of environmental disaster, on the bodies of Puerto Ricans—United States citizens cut off from access to food, water, shelter, and health care. And yet the digital cultural record, in its gaps, omissions, and rehearsal of colonial dynamics from the analog cultural record, also has a chronic problem of epistemic violence, which contravenes cultural survival for communities whose languages are underrepresented, histories are suppressed, and stories are untold. By bringing together humanists and scientists to pool their skills to transform the digital cultural record, the Puerto Rico Mapathon further hints at the importance of overcoming divisions between the humanities and the sciences—like those we have inherited from C. P. Snow's pronouncement that the two are incommensurate cultures—as a survival strategy.[2]

Thus, postcolonial digital humanities is not only a theoretical or analytical approach to the digital cultural record. Rather, it requires praxis at the intersection of digital technologies and humanistic inquiry: designing new workflows and building new archives, tools, databases, and other digital objects that actively resist reinscriptions of colonialism and neocolonialism. Consequently, postcolonial digital humanities explores how we might remake the worlds instantiated in the digital cultural record through politically, ethically, and social justice-minded approaches to digital knowledge production.

A postcolonial intervention in this realm has become urgent as digital humanities has gained currency within the academy, producing new methodologies for literary, cultural, and historical study. These "new" methodologies, however, are not conjured out of thin air by digital humanities practitioners, but are built on the histories and traditions of humanities knowledge production that have been deeply implicated in both colonialism and neocolonialism. In response, postcolonial digital humanities attends to the practices necessary for engaging faculty, librarians, students, and those employed by galleries and museums in the vital work of deconstructing these influences and remediating the digital cultural record.

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The opportunity to intervene in the digital cultural record—to tell new stories, shed light on counter-histories, and create spaces for communities to produce and share their own knowledges should they wish—is the great promise of digital humanities. However, the framing of digital humanities in public discourse has obscured its value for the digital cultural record. In 2009, William Pannapacker anointed digital humanities as "the next big thing" in the humanities.[3] Today's digital humanities "moment," as Matthew K. Gold suggests, has been marked by academic institutions and funding bodies investing heavily in digital methods; creating new centers around the world; supporting growth in hiring for new, often non-tenure-track, positions in digital humanities; funding new streams of grants for technology-driven humanities scholarship; and attracting attention from mainstream media sources.[4] The allure of digital humanities in higher education stems in large part from the great promise that academic administrators see in it. They imagine its role in revitalizing humanities education; increasing student retention, engagement, and marketability in the workforce; and generating alternative academic careers for doctoral students by expanding the skill sets of humanities Ph.D.s facing a dismal job market in the aftermath of the Great Recession.[5]

Such interpretations of digital humanities ignore its value for humanistic inquiry, where its promise lies not in these instrumental uses—a burden that no area of study should be expected to bear—but in its most significant contribution to human knowledge: its role in developing and sustaining the digital cultural record of humanity. Those who are equipped with digital humanities skills are uniquely poised to contribute to this record. They do this by thinking critically about digital methods for humanities research and by building the objects that populate the digital cultural record. They create new competing, overlapping, and contestatory digital worlds that jostle one another to tell the rich story of humanity.

As they undertake this work, however, digital humanities practitioners do so in the context of a politics of knowledge that has not been hospitable to those outside the dominant cultures of the Global North. Thus, the critiques of the cultural record articulated by postcolonial scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Aijaz Ahmad[6] have not gone away as the digital cultural record has been developed. Rather, the hallmarks of colonialism in the cultural record—fissures and lacunas, politics of representation that render subjects of the Global South under the gaze of the Global North, and complicity in the act of world making—are being ported over into the digital cultural record, unthinkingly, without malice, in part because postcolonial critique has not made many inroads in the practices of digital humanities. These traces appear,

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as Amy Earhart suggests, in the ways that digital humanities scholarship has replicated literary, historical, and cultural canons.[7] As a result, the digital cultural record is in danger of telling the story of humanity from the perspective of the Global North alone.

In fact, colonialism within the cultural record is not only being reproduced but is also being amplified by virtue of the fact that the digital cultural record is constructed and disseminated publicly, online, in a digital milieu beset with its own politics of identity. As scholars of media and new media studies like Radhika Gajjala, Lisa Nakamura, and Anna Everett, among others, have pointed out, gone are the days when the internet could be theorized as a blank slate for the creation of new identities, communities, and stories—not that it ever was that space.[8] In fact, as the last few years have shown, whether through the Gamergate attacks on women in the video game industry, lawsuits against the #blacklivesmatter hashtag, or flocks of right-wing trolls attacking scholars of race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism like George Ciccariello-Mahler at Drexel University or Saida Grundy at Boston University,[9] digital humanities practitioners must contend not only with the colonial hangovers from the cultural record, but also with the forces that are actively constructing the medium of the digital cultural record—the internet—as a hostile environment where universities, libraries, and the cultural heritage sector are under threat, right along with the knowledge being produced and made publicly available by them.

Defining Postcolonial Digital Humanities

While debates have raged over whether digital humanities is a discipline, a field, a methodological toolkit, or some combination of these, the term broadly articulates a connection between computation, digital tools and media, and humanities-based inquiry.[10] Digital humanities practitioners tend to resist committing to a definition, claiming that the term "digital humanities" is largely a construct and, as Matthew Kirschenbaum proposes, "a concession that exists to consolidate and propagate vectors of ambiguity, affirmation, and dissent."[11] But operating without a definition is a luxury for those whose work is already recognized and legitimated within university, library, and cultural heritage communities. For example, Isabel Galina's efforts to build Red de Humanidades Digitales, the Latin American digital humanities organization, with colleagues at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, were complicated by scholarly disagreement over a definition of "digital humanities." She notes:

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"I searched in vain for a universally and for lack of a better word 'certified' official definition that I could present to my superiors. I contacted several people about this and in general what I found were excellent general working definitions but not one documented, 'this is it' reference."[12] In communities, particularly in the Global South, where digital humanities is a new concept or where this work has a long history but competes with fields like computer science, informatics, media studies, and communications for funding, being able to articulate a definition is essential to gaining the recognition necessary for soliciting money, creating infrastructure to support digital knowledge production, winning grants, and seeking other forms of support.

Postcolonial digital humanities is grounded in a definition of digital humanities that offers an expansive approach to the digital cultural record. It most closely hews to the capacious definition articulated by Kathleen Fitzpatrick:

> It has to do with the work that gets done at the crossroads of digital media and traditional humanistic study. And that happens in two different ways. On one hand, it's bringing the tools and techniques of digital media to bear on traditional humanistic questions. But it's also bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on digital media. It's a sort of moving back and forth across those lines, thinking about what computation is, how it functions in our culture, and then using those computing technologies to think about the more traditional aspects of culture.[13]

As Fitzpatrick's definition implies, digital humanities can be conceived as broad in scope, derived from many areas of study: humanities computing, new media studies, computers and writing, rhetoric and composition, communications, and science and technology studies, among others. The vision of digital humanities articulated by Fitzpatrick has significant value. As William Pannapacker suggests, digital humanities has pedagogical merit because it enhances digital literacies among students.[14] It also has public impact, Lisa Spiro proposes, because it provides public access to historical, literary, and cultural studies texts and objects and it engages users in the task of manipulating data through mining, models, and maps.[15] As Pamela Fletcher and Crystal Hall argue, digital humanities can also inform public policy that supports the humanities and, in turn, contribute to the common good.[16]

In spite of its value, digital humanities is not without its detractors. Given its sudden popularity, particularly with academic administrators,

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digital humanities has inspired critiques ranging from its implication in undermining the significance of humanities methods to its complicity with neoliberalism in the corporate university. In such narratives, digital humanities has taken over English departments, reduced literature to mere "data," and killed close reading. Much like "theory" in the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, digital humanities is charged with contributing to the decline of the humanities. Catherine Tumber claims this is because digital humanities is "tarted up with non-verbal tech effluvia—that led to the humanities' deterioration and public disaffection in the first place."[17] In critiques advanced by Sanjena Sathian and Rebecca Schuman, digital humanities becomes nothing but a false promise for reenergizing the humanities at a time when they are under attack from budget cuts, skeptical administrators, and right-wing ideology.[18] Adam Kirsch goes one step further to claim that digital humanities is responsible for the death of the humanities because "the very idea of language as the basis of a humane education—even of human identity—seems to give way to a post- or pre-verbal discourse of pictures and objects. Digital humanities becomes another name for the obsequies of humanism."[19] Tumber echoes this sentiment by contending that "today's doyens of so-called digital humanities are gutting what lies at the heart of the liberal arts: language and the narrative sensibilities that shape meaningful human endeavor."[20] Such critiques also hold digital humanities responsible for the sins of the neoliberal university, as critics like Daniel Allington, Sarah Brouillette, and David Golumbia link it to casualized academic labor, instrumental forms of learning through projects instead of reading and writing, and a reactionary politics of knowledge.[21] These critics worry that the technologies used for digital humanities scholarship will supplant that which is "human" about the "humanities." More troublingly, they point to an absence of diversity within digital humanities as evidence for their claims, eliding scholarly developments in this area, including postcolonial digital humanities.

These condemnations are largely aimed at a narrow definition of digital humanities—computational textual analysis in digital literary studies—which ignores multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. As such, they rely on a single genealogy for digital humanities, locating it in humanities computing, which is only one of its many scholarly influences. Susan Hockey broadly describes humanities computing as "the applications of computing to research and teaching that are loosely defined as 'the humanities,' or in British English, 'the arts,' " primarily in textual studies.[22] While critics' claims are specious at best for humanities computing, they further overlook the essential role of digital humanities in the creation of the digital cultural record, which requires interdisciplinary

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expertise and collaboration. As Alex Gil argues, digital humanities is unique because it is the main scholarly intervention that fosters collaboration between faculty, librarians, museums, and galleries.[23] By bridging the gaps between these communities, Gil suggests, digital humanities is poised to "retake the scholarly record" and better understand the "global material epistemologies" for digital knowledge production.[24]

Postcolonial digital humanities, along with other interventions like #TransformDH and Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, examines the political dimensions of digital knowledge production from its margins. For postcolonial digital humanities, the primary goal of scholarship is to intervene in the colonial and neocolonial dimensions of the digital cultural record by fostering production of the multiple epistemologies for digital knowledge production that are needed to ensure that cultural heritage from communities of the Global South finds a place in the digital cultural record. As such, postcolonial digital humanities is situated in the broader milieu of "critical digital humanities," a term coined by David Berry.[25] He includes critical digital humanities in a set of technological practices necessary for reading and writing the digital world and participating in politically engaged practices in the digital age.[26] As a form of critical digital humanities, postcolonial digital humanities responds to Alan Liu's advocacy for the role of cultural criticism in digital humanities.[27] It also takes up Galina's challenge to facilitate methods and epistemologies for expanding the digital cultural record to include not only the Global North but also the Global South. As she argues, "We also need to incorporate cultural critique of DH [digital humanities] into the way our projects work so that we are aware and do not unconsciously build in features or aspects that perpetuate exclusion instead of reducing it."[28] Though it emphasizes cultural criticism, postcolonial digital humanities is not, as James Smithies suggested when the term was first proposed, simply another term for "critical digital humanities."[29] Rather, it takes as its basis the belief that a postcolonial approach requires designing new tools, methods, and workflows that are based in local practices. These practices, which favor the particular over the universal, offer the promise of a more expansive humanities that takes advantage of the technological means of digital knowledge production to create space for underrepresented communities to populate the digital cultural record with their own stories.

To facilitate such interventions, postcolonial digital humanities addresses underexplored questions of power, globalization, and colonial and neocolonial ideologies that are shaping the digital cultural record in its mediated, material form: the contemporary internet environment where this record lives. Henry Jenkins uses the term "convergence culture" to

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describe the internet as a space "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways."[30] The internet is also intrinsically shaped by global mediascapes and networks of capital, communication, and power that postcolonial theorists like Arjun Appadurai, Raka Shome, Terry Flew, and Bonnie Rui Liu have argued are both conditions of and contributors to contemporary globalization.[31] As postcolonial new media scholars suggest, the fraught space of the internet requires attention to how we thoughtfully cultivate new communities to create new worlds in the digital cultural record. For example, Radhika Gajjala's work identifies how community formation online in the Global South negotiates silence and voice online.[32] She proposes that the internet has fostered the development of online communities, particularly ones forging South-to-South connections.[33] These communities, including scholarly ones, are essential to diversifying the digital cultural record. Importantly, Pramod Nayar's work on digital Dalits identifies the role of subalternity in cyberspace, calling attention to how subaltern voices are silenced.[34] In turn, these voices are in danger of being stifled in the digital cultural record. Yet, as María Fernández suggests, recouping the underexplored relationship between postcolonial studies and electronic media can claim space in the digital cultural record for postcolonial cultural production.[35] These perspectives on media are essential to understanding the terrain of the digital cultural record. Both a blessing and a curse, digital media and technologies have accelerated knowledge production and enhanced access to knowledge creation in digital humanities, producing a space where the digital cultural record can come into being. But because the digital cultural record exists in a media environment that is caught in a battle between corporate interest, academia and the cultural heritage sector, racial and cultural politics, and consumer power, that record itself has become a spoil of war.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the efforts of corporations like Elsevier and Springer to invest in the knowledge industry, profiting from paywalled scholarship and archival materials. Elsevier is known to be particularly egregious in its pursuit of control over open access scholarship. Its tactics have included lobbying the United States government in opposition to open access mandates, acquiring open-access repositories like the SSRN preprint repository and removing articles, and buying companies like Bepress, which runs the Digital Commons platform used by many universities for institutional repositories.[36]

But even in the nonprofit knowledge game, scholarship and cultural heritage are controversial commodities, particularly when working with

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sources from the Global South. The issues at stake in this commercialization of knowledge are evident in the example of Aluka, a transnational African digital archive that is now available through JSTOR. The project emerged from international collaboration to build a digital library for southern Africa that was initiated by Ithaka—the nonprofit organization that focuses on preserving the scholarly record through initiatives like JSTOR. Aluka's holdings, which were developed through the work of local scholars in southern African countries and contributors from abroad, focus on cultural heritage sites and anticolonial and anti-apartheid freedom struggles. Now part of JSTOR, Aluka is available by subscription around the world, though it is free to more than 300 academic and nonprofit institutions that are part of JSTOR's African Access Initiative.[37]

At the heart of Aluka's move to JSTOR is the question of who owns digital cultural heritage, given its commodity value and the cost of database design and access. As project directors Allen Isaacman, Premesh Lalu, and Thomas Nygren note, "As it relates specifically to the domain of history as a discipline, the digitization process places contested archives in a cyberspace that is highly commodified."[38] The ingestion of Aluka into JSTOR has raised a host of issues, from intellectual property rights to the misappropriation of national heritage.[39] Advocates, on the other hand, suggest that the histories brought together in the archive, drawn from across southern African countries, shed new light on narratives that might otherwise be read exclusively in national contexts when they are, in fact, transnational and thus transform how we understand the term "postcolonial" today.[40] These debates over Aluka highlight the tensions between digital knowledge production of the Global South and the hegemony of the Global North in the digital cultural record, where corporate, nonprofit, and academic forces are in danger of overdetermining its shape and practices.

Engaging in these politics of knowledge, postcolonial digital humanities is also rooted in a broader history of exchange between postcolonial thought and science and technology studies. Sandra Harding has long made the case for putting postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and science and technology studies in conversation with each other. Such a combination, she proposes, allows scholars to rethink narratives of technological development centered on the Global North.[41] Doing so confirms the importance of knowledge traditions from communities within the Global South and reveals how both imperialism and colonialism have shaped value within scientific discourse.[42] Harding's frame of reference is an important one for the digital cultural record, which is produced through computational and digital tools, methods, and workflows that privilege

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the epistemologies of the Global North. While some of these approaches may be relevant to digital knowledge production in the Global South, an uncritical embrace of them delegitimizes contributions to the digital cultural record from the Global South, which may use different methods or take forms that look unfamiliar from the point of view of the Global North.

To decenter this perspective, postcolonial digital humanities also draws on Kavita Philip, Lilly Irani, and Paul Dourish's work on postcolonial computing, which responds to Human-Computer Interaction for Development (HCI4D), a scholarly community at the intersection of technology and development. Postcolonial computing critiques development within HCI4D to underscore the vexing questions of authority, power, and legitimacy that are evoked in the rhetoric of technological development.[43] In contrast to development-focused engagement, postcolonial computing offers an alternative lens on designing and analyzing technology, foregrounding the dynamics of culture and power that subtend design practices. Postcolonial computing emphasizes cultural specificities in order to challenge presumptions about "good" universal design practices. As human-computer interaction has become a global phenomenon, the idea that design aesthetics or systems are universal has been called into question. Thus, postcolonial computing decenters knowledge from the Global North in favor of a localized approach that emphasizes cross-cultural engagement and the effects of uneven development on design.[44] This approach serves as an important model for digital humanities, which falls prey to the assumption that practices of the Global North are universal forms of knowledge, rather than what Donna Haraway terms "situated knowledges."[45] On the contrary, as Élika Ortega argues, "all DH is local DH."[46] Thus, for postcolonial digital humanities, "good" digital humanities practices are "local" practices that reject the universality of methods.

Another significant influence on postcolonial digital humanities is decolonial computing, which calls for renewed attention to critical race theory within technocultures. Syed Mustafa Ali grounds decolonial computing in the critiques of social contract theory raised by Charles Mills and in the decolonial theories of the Global South articulated by Walter Mignolo, among others. Ali argues that even progressive approaches to computing, like postcolonial computing, have paid insufficient attention to systemic racism and white supremacy, which Mills argues subtends the social contract.[47] A decolonial approach to computing, Ali proposes, works from the peripheries rather than the European center and underscores delinking and the border, with emphasis on embodiment and situated knowledge

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within the Global South.[48] In the context of digital humanities, decolonial computing calls attention to relationships between race, colonialism, and neocolonialism, which are shaping the digital cultural record. It further emphasizes the importance of South-to-South connections, which are integral to developing practices that are necessary to reimagine the digital cultural record from frameworks beyond those of the Global North.

Taking up the challenge of this lineage, postcolonial digital humanities scholarship includes a range of methods and practices in media, mapping, scholarly communications, and cultural heritage that complicate the existing state of the digital cultural record. Sarai, at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, for example, serves as a platform for examining media archaeologies and information infrastructures in India, challenging universal narratives of these phenomena.[49] Through their mapping project called In the Same Boats, Kaiama L. Glover and Alex Gil consider how to model transatlantic intellectual exchange among Afro-Atlantic intellectuals. They visualize these thinkers' co-location over time in the Atlantic world to prompt further consideration of unexplored connections between them.[50] Kelly Baker Josephs's work as founding editor of *sx salon*, an important intervention in scholarly communication, has created a digital forum facilitating innovative inquiry in Caribbean literature.[51] In New Zealand's cultural heritage sector, Tusk, created by Matariki Williams and Nina Finigan in 2015, serves as a platform for critical conversations in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. Notably, its contributors, which include Maori cultural heritage professionals, pay particular attention to the significance of Maori cultural heritage in New Zealand and the ethical imperatives of this work.[52] Through such contributions, postcolonial approaches to digital humanities draw on questions of cultural authority and value from postcolonial studies to explore how they are mediated by digital media and computation, influencing the digital cultural record in both construction and composition.

Postcolonial Digital Humanities beyond Representation

While postcolonial digital humanities tackles the colonial and neocolonial echoes in the digital cultural record, it does not position itself against digital humanities. Nor is it part of moves to "disrupt" digital humanities advocated by scholars like Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel.[53] The rhetoric of "disruption" in this context proposes to reappropriate the term from its connection to technological innovation and to rehabilitate its critical potential.[54] The move to recuperate disruption generates

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affective response and connotes innovation and newness. It recalls the seemingly radical moves of Occupy Wall Street, the liberatory possibilities of Arab Spring, and the demands for recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement. At first glance, disruption conjures blows struck against hegemony, a feeling of "out with the old and in with the new," and hope for transformation. However, the very qualities that give disruption currency as an intellectual category have made it a buzzword for contemporary globalization, attracting the fond gaze of global capitalism and neocolonialism.

Moreover, the digital cultural record is already rent by disruptions born from capitalism, colonialism, and racism. From the Latin *disrumpere* (to break into pieces, burst asunder), a disruption is an interruption: "the action of rending or bursting asunder; violent dissolution of continuity; forcible severance."[55] The lives of colonial subjects and people of the African diaspora have historically been viewed as disruptive to dominant cultures that preserve a white status quo, as have their languages, histories, and cultural heritage. W. E. B. Du Bois draws attention to this issue in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), where he identifies the global color line as the problem of the twentieth century and describes the disruptiveness of lived black experience with the perennial question, "How does it feel to be a problem?"[56] This question, Du Bois suggests, is the essence of double consciousness, the incommensurate duality of black experience: "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[57] Double consciousness articulates a disruption of the unity of the black self even as the black self disrupts the dominant culture. As Du Bois notes, these phenomena have resonances for colonial subjects around the world.[58] In the realm of cultural production, both the cultural and digital cultural records reflect the phenomenon of disruption that Du Bois articulates. Therefore, positioning critiques of digital humanities as "disruptions" deflects attention from the disruptions that already exist within the digital cultural record, from the voices that were never part of the cultural record in the first place to the stories that have constructed individuals and communities of the African diaspora and the Global South as objects, rather than subjects, of knowledge.

Furthermore, invoking disruption as a position for critiques of digital humanities fails to take into account the complicity of universities, libraries, and the cultural heritage sector in devaluing black and indigenous lives and perpetuating the legacies of colonialism in the cultural and digital cultural records alike. This is visible in structural devaluation facilitated by lack of representation in the academy; segregation within universities;

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and the restructuring and defunding of African American, Africana, Black, and Ethnic Studies departments. The overwhelming whiteness of library leadership remains disconcerting as well, since libraries play a central role in constructing the digital cultural record.[59] Meanwhile, the cultural heritage sector of the Global North has long been implicated in colonialism, including the appropriation and exhibition of cultural heritage from indigenous and colonized subjects that remains ongoing.[60] Thus, engaging in knowledge production writ large brings with it complicity in the silences of a dominant culture that has proven itself both racist and colonialist. Digital humanities risks compounding the two through public-facing scholarship. For example, Sarah Powell suggests that the failure of copyright laws to take into account the spiritual significance of indigenous cultural heritage marks indigenous knowledge as being in the public domain and thus freely available for reproduction.[61] This is an ethical problem because, as James Smithies notes, the cultural heritage of indigenous communities like the Maori in New Zealand has already been stolen before, and it is at risk of further theft in the production of digital archives and other commodifiable forms of digital representation.[62]

If digital humanities practitioners are not actively acknowledging the influence of these factors on their work and exploring how to push back against them, they risk enabling them. Just as with the cultural record, the digital cultural record is implicated in structures that produce colonial discourse, devalue black lives, and, in turn, facilitate state violence. The privileged position of digital humanities practitioners working in the academy, libraries, and the cultural heritage sector also raises the ethical stakes of identifying community partners and collaborators to give voice to their own experiences or shed light on materials with which we are working—should they wish them to be represented. Doing so is integral to resisting the inequalities that might be unintentionally created and magnified in the digital cultural record.

In this context, postcolonial digital humanities is not positioned against digital humanities. Rather, it exists in the flexible spaces between "digital" and "humanities." As David Theo Goldberg and Patrik Svensson argue:

> It is in the "between" that the most interesting, creative, and provocative work of the digital and the humanistic is today being done. In this, the digital has not only prompted the humanities to open up to their own beyond, their own horizons of possibility; the humanities have likewise pushed the digital to become more than techne, more than a narrowly technological application. This liminal position is simultaneously precious, productive, and precarious.[63]

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Postcolonial digital humanities intervenes in the expansive notion of digital humanities as a trading zone, taking advantage of what Patrik Svensson identifies as its "higher degree of heterogeneity and inclusion of other epistemic traditions."[64] Such a model, Svensson notes, "needs to support and allow multiple modes of engagement between the humanities and the digital . . . [to] maximize points of interaction, tackle large research and methodology challenges, and facilitate deep integration between thinking and making."[65] In this space of discovery and building, between humanities and the digital, postcolonial digital humanities eschews disruption in favor of conversation, communication, and collaboration. The hope for change comes not from self-proclaimed acts of disruption, but from creating sustained communities of practice that foreground critiques of colonialism in scholarship; uncovering existing disruptions within the digital cultural record that have been produced by colonialism, slavery, and racism; and navigating the complex ethics of collaboration with communities that historically have been and still are affected by colonialism.

While moving beyond the frame of disruption is essential, thinking beyond representation as a method for postcolonial digital humanities is critical as well. It is tempting to think that an additive approach to the digital cultural record is sufficient for remediating the disruptions that characterize the digital cultural record. When considering many of the digital humanities projects that have been created, maintained, and financially supported over decades, it becomes apparent that they skew heavily towards canonical authors and histories within the Global North. In digital literary studies, for example, projects like the William Blake Archive, the Walt Whitman Archive, and the Dante Gabriel Rossetti Archive give the sense that digital humanities may, in fact, be the digital *canonical* humanities.[66] Digital historians have done a better job on this matter, with projects like Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Visualizing Emancipation, and Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America actively exploring and laying bare the histories of slavery and racism.[67]

And yet, mere addition is not enough. This is not to dismiss the importance of adding more voices and new stories to the digital cultural record. Indeed, there is phenomenal, thought-provoking work being undertaken, like the Colored Conventions project, which traces the participation of free and fugitive African Americans in "Colored Conventions" that were collaboratively developing strategies for equality and justice in the nineteenth century, or the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project at the University of Houston that is recuperating the Hispanic

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literary heritage of the United States.[68] Such interventions are absolutely necessary, but they cannot be expected to bear the weight of representation in the digital cultural record alone. While these projects are fighting the good fight, challenging the role of race and colonialism in the digital cultural record, cultural canons are being reproduced and amplified not only in the visibility and discoverability of knowledge, but in epistemologies of digital knowledge production as well. The reification of canons in digital form is not only a function of *what* is there—what gets digitalized and thus represented in the digital cultural record—but also *how* it is there—how those who have created their projects are presenting their subjects. Namely, are they presenting them in ways that rehearse colonialist knowledge production? Or are they recognizing the role of colonialism in actively constructing the digital cultural record and, quite directly, seeking to push back against it?

Thus, significant attention to the circumstances surrounding knowledge production of digital humanities projects is needed, including how projects are designed, how material in them is framed, how data in them is managed, and what forms of labor are being used to create them. This gap was the inspiration for Social Justice and the Digital Humanities, created in the "De/Post/Colonial Digital Humanities" course that micha cárdenas and I taught at the Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching Institute in 2015.[69] Not intended as prescriptive, the project is framed as an invitation to digital humanities practitioners to help articulate the principles and precepts that should be considered when designing digital humanities projects. Social Justice and the Digital Humanities is thus framed as a series of questions intended to help practitioners think through and make legible the influences of colonialism, racism, and other axes of oppression on projects. Ideally, this should happen while projects are being designed from the ground up, but it can also be used for reevaluating and reassessing the design practices of already completed projects. In short, its purpose is to help practitioners take into account the local circumstances surrounding their projects, from the conditions under which they are being designed to who is being represented in or omitted by them. Such an approach to design ensures that the burden of representation in the digital cultural record is not borne only by those adding new stories and voices—a job that has been undertaken in large part by people of color and women. Instead, all digital humanities practitioners must assume the task of not reinstantiating the colonial dimensions of the cultural record in its digital forms.

An exemplary project that takes this responsibility seriously and interrogates its own politics of colonialism is Livingstone Online, directed

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by Adrian Wisnicki and Megan Ward. The explorer David Livingstone was a colonialist par excellence, and his abundant papers are now available through the Livingstone Online digital archive. But there is more than meets the eye here to Livingstone Online. Wisnicki and Ward have addressed the fact that Livingstone was a troubling figure and that creating a digital project on him participates in a particular kind of politics that risks reaffirming the colonialist values of the digital cultural record. They recognize that they are, as the archive's tagline states, "illuminating imperial exploration," but they do so while actively avoiding glorifying colonial expansion.[70]

Livingstone Online offers an essential intervention in the colonial politics of the digital cultural record. As Wisnicki and Ward note on the project's introduction page:

> *Livingstone Online*'s goal is neither to praise nor condemn David Livingstone the individual. He was and remains a controversial figure. Rather, the site proceeds on the basis that Livingstone's varied and vast manuscript legacy offers an unparalleled window onto key aspects of nineteenth-century global history and intercultural encounter.[71]

Fulfilling the goal of "conducting research in a transparent manner that invites critical interrogation and debate,"[72] the project reveals the complexities and contradictions of Livingstone's life: his contributions to cultural imperialism through missionary work, his abolitionist politics, and the role of his explorations in the colonization of Africa. In "The Theory behind *Livingstone Online*," an essay that makes the theoretical decisions subtending the project legible, Wisnicki and Ward note that "although no digital museum, library, or archive can redress such biases, *Livingstone Online* uses digital technologies to foreground the often lost hands, voices, and sources that shaped Livingstone's work and writing."[73] Moreover, by resisting the praise/condemnation binary, the project's important contribution lies in its negotiation of the challenges of working with colonial materials.

This intervention, however, is not only a matter of content but also of form. Wisnicki and Ward note that the site is designed to encourage "lateral, anti-hierarchical exploration of content in order to foster user-led interpretation over passive reception of authorized knowledge."[74] To emphasize this, they rely on a range of both historical and contemporary images to "replace iconic, singular representations of Livingstone with images that show him in multiple relations to the people around him."[75]

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Contextual material on colonialism in the project further facilitates the user-led experience of material in the archive as well as the proliferation of multiple interpretations of Livingstone's legacy. As the digital cultural record expands, we will continue to see the production of digital knowledge on the Livingstones of the world, but Livingstone Online stands as a critical example of how to negotiate colonialist politics in such material.

In academia, libraries, and the cultural heritage sector, there is simply not enough funding to fully redress the inequalities in the digital cultural record. Furthermore, the cultural record itself is disrupted by voices that were never recorded, for which we will never be able to create digital representations. Consequently, representation will never be a sufficient approach to addressing the colonial and neocolonial inscriptions in the digital cultural record. Digital humanities practitioners, therefore, must also interrogate colonialist and neocolonialist politics through project design to intervene in the epistemologies of digital knowledge production. Put together, the representational and epistemological dimensions of digital humanities scholarship hold the possibility for creating a postcolonial digital cultural record.

Examining the contemporary landscape of digital humanities, this book explores the practices of postcolonial digital humanities that interrogate the ongoing influences of colonialism and neocolonialism within the digital cultural record and reimagine the practices necessary for remediating it. By invoking the term "postcolonial," I draw on the intellectual tradition of postcolonial theory and its critiques of colonialism in the cultural record to make the case that digital humanities practitioners of the Global North must redress their practices and that postcolonial scholars have an important role to play in constructing the digital cultural record. For these practitioners, postcolonial digital humanities offers a productive way of looking at the relationship between technology and power in digital humanities scholarship through representation, methodology, labor, and language. This requires considering how digital archives perform and resist colonial violence, examining how scholarly organizations influence digital humanities practices on a global scale, teaching students that they can intervene in the digital cultural record, and understanding the forms of the human that are sanctioned through digital humanities scholarship. At the intersections of postcolonial thought and digital humanities lie the possibilities for transforming the practices of digital knowledge production.

The first chapter of this book outlines the parallel histories of postcolonial studies and digital humanities, making the case for the relationship between the relative popularity of the two and the geopolitical

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circumstances that have shaped their trajectories in the twenty-first century. Just as colonialism and digital humanities are both projects in world making, postcolonial digital humanities, I argue, emphasizes the possibility of creating new worlds that resist inscriptions of colonialism in the digital cultural record. I further identify the issues at stake in postcolonial digital humanities: the democratizing of knowledge in the digital age, cultural contexts for tools and methods in digital humanities, labor practices, and the role of the English language in digital humanities scholarship, tools, and projects.

Examining the role of colonial violence and representation in digital archives, the second chapter considers the utility of postcolonial digital archives. Traces of colonialism within archives remain with us, I suggest, reproducing archival violence in the production of digital archives. This chapter focuses on two archives, the Early Caribbean Digital Archive and the Bichitra Online Tagore Variorum, which actively resist reinscribing colonial violence and exemplify the principles that are essential to creating postcolonial digital archives. I also examine postcolonial digital archives of born-digital materials from social movements, through the case of the R-Shief archive and analytics platform.

Looking closely at the global landscape of digital humanities, the third chapter explores colonialist world making within organizational structures of digital humanities. Considering representations of global digital humanities that reaffirm and challenge the role of the Global North in overdetermining scholarly practices, I examine how digital humanities scholarship, advances in scholarly communications, and new professional networks have been deployed to establish a global vision for digital humanities. By embracing a logic of diaspora for scholarly organization, I contend, organizational forms of digital humanities can resist their colonial underpinnings and transform scholarly communication through attention to local practices.

Moving to the question of pedagogy, the fourth chapter explores engaging undergraduate students in postcolonial digital humanities so they can understand their roles as not only consumers but also as creators of technology and media in the twenty-first century. Postcolonial digital pedagogy, I propose, mitigates the challenges of teaching postcolonial texts while engaging students in hands-on activities to explore the colonial politics of digital knowledge production. Through low-stakes assignments and larger-scale class projects, teaching postcolonial literature through digital humanities helps students understand that new digital worlds are theirs to make through interventions in the digital cultural record.

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Finally, the fifth chapter considers human futures in these new digital worlds. Critiques of digital humanities that suggest it evacuates the "human" in the humanities obscure the important question of how digital humanities projects are producing universalist notions of the "human." I situate these critiques in the rhetoric of the "crisis of the humanities," tracing it to C. P. Snow's depiction of the humanities and sciences as two separate cultures. However, the humanities and sciences can meet as equal partners in digital humanities through greater attention to the forms of the human authorized in emerging technologies being adopted for digital humanities scholarship. This is particularly important in the realm of computational approaches to digital humanities, where the relationship between colonialism and language is being reproduced through initiatives to create texts that can pass as human.

Together, these chapters articulate the assemblage of theory, praxis, and pedagogy that lies at the heart of postcolonial digital humanities. These practices are not intended as prescriptive but as the beginning of a conversation about creating new approaches to digital humanities that emphasize the significance of cultural critique and the vital need to resist the lingering influences of colonialism and neocolonialism on the projects, tools, and methods of digital humanities. This intervention examines the fuller possibilities of a digital humanities engaged in social justice that decenters the practices and knowledge hierarchies of the Global North to facilitate multiple epistemologies for digital knowledge production around the world. Through postcolonial digital humanities, new digital worlds are possible. In them we find hope for creating a postcolonial digital cultural record.

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NOTES

Introduction

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