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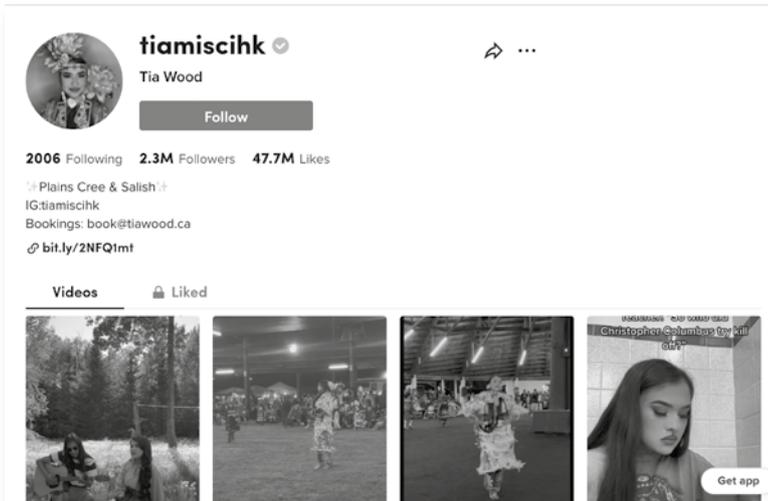
Diaries, the Original Social Media: The Relationship Between the Diary and Social Media

What is a diary? As per the *Britannica* dictionary, the word diary originates from the Latin word *diarium*, which stems from *dies*, meaning “day.” Traditionally, a diary is perceived as a book wherein individuals chronicle their daily activities and experiences, imbuing its content with emotional depth. By engaging in this practice, individuals are able to derive significance and gain insights into their inner thoughts, thus cultivating meaning and perspective.

Diary writing, despite its potential for personal introspection, has also been utilized in detrimental ways. An

illustrative instance can be found in the diary entries of Christopher Columbus. He is widely acknowledged for “discovering” the Americas in 1492, an event that led to the establishment of a federal holiday in his honor by the United States in 1792. However, the colonial and imperialist aspects of Columbus’ voyage have rendered the holiday consistently controversial, prompting many locations worldwide to rename it. For instance, Berkeley, California replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples’ Day in 1992 as a tribute to the original inhabitants of the lands where Columbus landed. Columbus himself is an immensely problematic figure for various reasons. His arrival brought diseases that ravaged the existing population, resulted in the seizure of millions of acres of land, and exploited Indigenous peoples and African labor to enrich both himself and European nations.

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Columbus kept diary entries, in which he wrote about his impressions and assumptions of the “New World.” An example of his initial entry, dated October 1492, reads as follows:

It appeared to me to be a race of people very poor in everything. They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, none more than thirty years of age. They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse, almost like the hairs of a horse’s tail. They wear the hairs brought down to the eyebrows, except a few locks behind, which they wear long and never cut. They paint themselves black, and they are the color of the Canarians, neither black nor white.¹

In this excerpt, it becomes evident that he writes from a racist and paternalistic viewpoint. The narrative solely reflects his own perspective, lacking the inclusion of other voices. Instead of allowing the individuals he encountered to exercise agency and control over their own lives and representations, Columbus assumed the role of decision-maker on their behalf. While on the surface it may appear that he is merely describing the physical attributes of the people he encountered, his portrayal is superficial and dehumanizing. He goes so far as to compare their hair to that of a horse’s tail, further emphasizing the objectifying nature of his observations.

Nevertheless, diary writing can serve as a powerful tool for both resistance and resurgence. The act of re-

sistance encompasses various forms of action, which can include verbal or written expressions. It signifies the presence of agency and involves acts of countering, opposing, and challenging established norms or oppressive systems. Resurgence pertains to practices to counter

colonial policies by redefining identity and ways of seeing the world. In this context, diaries can play a significant role. They provide a platform for individuals to reclaim their narratives, express their experiences, and assert their own perspectives. Diaries serve as personal archives that capture diverse voices, enabling marginalized individuals and communities to resist dominant narratives and revive their own histories, cultures, and ways of knowing. Through diary writing, individuals can document their stories, assert their agency, challenge existing power structures, and contribute to the resurgence of alternative narratives that center on marginalized perspectives and experiences.

Dr. Angela R. Hooks’ *Dairy as Literature, Through the Lens of Multiculturalism in America*² illustrates how diary writing can be a form of resistance and resurgence. Dr. Hooks specifically focuses on Black women diary writers whose diaries have often remained in the shadows, overlooked, and subjected to intentional neglect. She explores the diary as a quasi-literary genre, in which marginalized voices find a space to express themselves and delve into their identities. More specifically, she focuses on personal writings spanning from the 19th century to the contemporary era. She describes the diary as the following: “their diary entries are like a camera lens snapping different scenes from a unique perspective, creating maps that document their lives as more than an imagined journey or a fact book.”³

Indeed, it is crucial to define why diary writing plays an important role in resistance and resurgence: this type of medium provides Black, Indigenous and People of

Color (БИРОС) the freedom to define their experiences in their own terms and to recenter their identities. Dr. Hooks, aptly compares the diary to a testament in which Black women reveal their biographies, souls, spirits and personalities. Within the realm of diary writing, several Black women have made lasting contributions that remain relevant today. Noteworthy figures include Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, Charlotte Forten Grimké, and Laura Hamilton Murray, among others. Their diaries serve as valuable historical and cultural artefacts, offering insights into the experiences, perspectives, and resilience of Black women throughout different periods of history. By documenting their lives and thoughts, these women have made significant contributions to the broader narrative of БИРОС communities, empowering subsequent generations to embrace their own stories and shape their identities.

In her chapter titled “Black Women’s Journals Reflect Mine, Yours, and Ours: Through the Travel Writing of Juanita Harrison.”⁴ Dr. Hooks directs her attention to the diary entries of Juanita Harrison. The latter was a Mississippi-born woman of color who endured arduous training as a lady’s maid during her childhood. However, she harbored a strong passion for traveling the world, which she eventually pursued. At the age of thirty-six, on June 25, 1927, Harrison embarked on a remarkable world tour spanning twenty-two countries. Juanita Harrison serves as an exemplar, demonstrating how the diaries of Black women can be discovered, reconstructed, engaged with, and comprehended. In these entries, she documented her extensive eight-year period of work and travel across over thirty European, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries. Throughout her journey, she penned a total of 220 journal entries or excerpts from letters, recounting the places she visited, the jobs she undertook, and the experiences she accumulated. Harrison’s writings offer a unique and valuable perspective on her travels, shedding light on the lived experiences of a Black woman in various regions of the world during that era.

Certainly, the value of diary entries lies in their ability to serve as historical and archival pieces that can be read and studied by future generations. These records provide an opportunity to engage with the histories and writings of marginalized voices that may have been overlooked or underrepresented in mainstream narratives. Juanita Harrison’s work is a prime example of this. Her work offers fresh perspectives on travel writing, litera-

ture by Black women, and the interconnectedness of travel and race. She illuminates how travel, including the act of writing about it, can challenge and deconstruct racial boundaries.

The Relationship Between the Diary and Social Media

Historically, diaries were intended to be public, rather than being kept in a drawer with a lock, as is commonly associated with the modern notion of a diary. For centuries, diaries have played a ubiquitous role in the lives of individuals. Today, what began as a form of personal writing has evolved and adapted through various mediums to document the work and social lives of people. Both diaries and social media platforms provide a means for one to express oneself and share one’s thoughts, experiences and emotions. Diaries have long served as personal spaces for individuals to record their innermost feelings and reflections, while social media platforms offer a digital space for people to share updates, photos, and opinions with a wider audience. Moreover, it enables interaction through comments, likes, and shares, fostering a sense of engagement and connection.

In contemporary times, social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have become the modern equivalent of diaries. Users use these platforms to share pictures and updates about their work or travels, mirroring the purpose of diaries from earlier periods. In this regard, modern media has not strayed far from its historical predecessors. The desire to document and share aspects of one’s life remains a fundamental human impulse, with social media platforms serving as the modern-day diaries for many individuals.

Dr. Lee Humphreys,⁵ explores the diary writing of women, emphasizing that their entries went beyond personal accounts and encompassed their social roles within their families and communities. These women often held the responsibility of preserving the memories and stories of their kinship units. Documenting and sharing such narratives formed a significant aspect of young women’s diary writing.

Throughout history, and even in the present, knowledge is constructed and shared through the process of documenting and presenting information to others. This

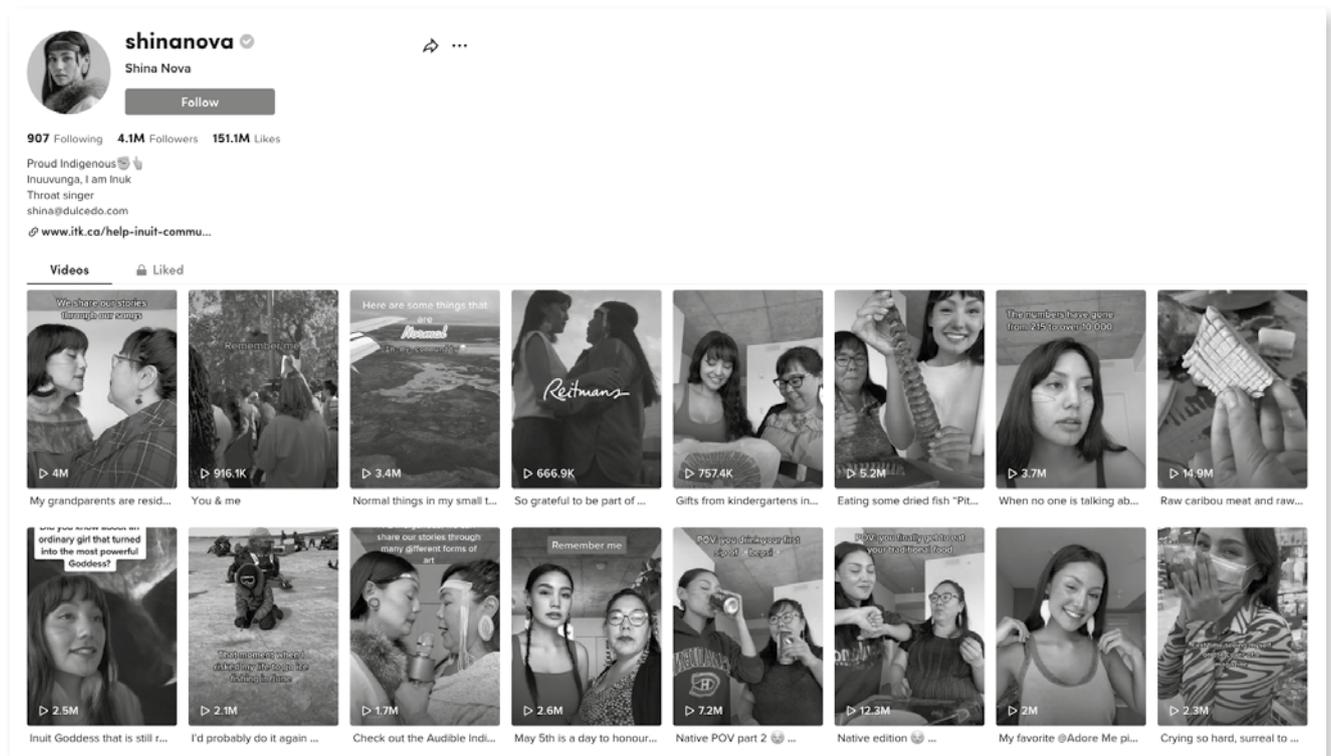
takes many particular forms. For Dr. Humphreys, the diary serves as a valuable comparison because of the ways in which it shares many communicative practices with how we use social media. For instance, diary entries can be likened to social media posts. While diary entries were often private, social media posts are public and contribute to a database of information that can be aggregated over time. Both diary writing and social media involve the act of documenting and registering information for others to see and engage with. They serve as means of sharing stories, experiences, and knowledge, whether within the intimate realm of a diary or the public space of social media platforms. Diaries have been used throughout history to record important events, personal experiences, and day-to-day activities. Similarly, social media platforms provide a digital archive of personal moments and activities, creating a timeline that can be revisited and shared with others.

Rather than replacing diary writing, social media can be seen as an extension of this phenomenon. Platforms like Twitter have emerged as digital diary platforms where users share their thoughts, experiences, and daily activities in a format reminiscent of traditional diary entries. Similarly, TikTok has become a space for individuals to

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express themselves through short videos, akin to a video diary. TikTok has gained significant popularity as a video sharing platform where users can express themselves and document various aspects of their daily lives. It has become a modern-day video diary, allowing individuals to share their activities and moments in a creative and engaging manner. Similarly, Instagram, a photo and video sharing app, serves as another platform for people to curate and share visual content, including glimpses into their daily lives through posts, stories, and even live broadcasts.

One notable example is Indigenous creators who are using TikTok to share their stories and cultures, such as @tiamiscihk and @shinanova. Oral storytelling has been a vital and longstanding tradition within Indigenous cultures worldwide. It serves as a powerful means of preserv-

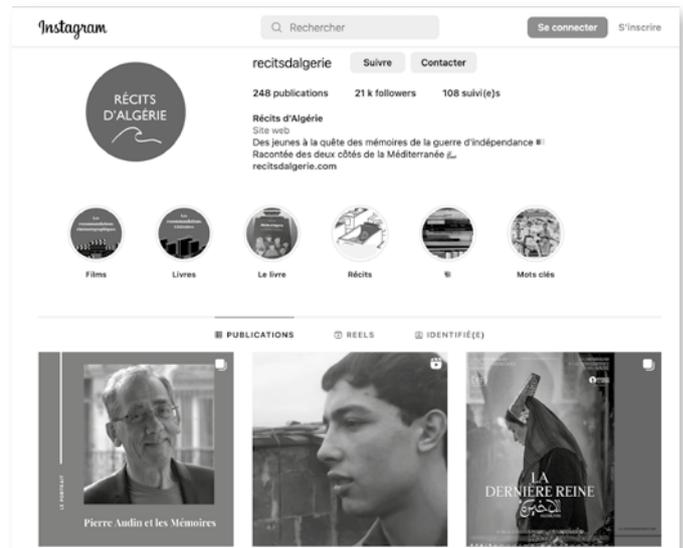


ing history, sharing knowledge, passing down cultural values, and strengthening community bonds. These videos on TikTok are acts of decolonization and resistance. By utilizing social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, @tiamiscihk and @shinanova and similar initiatives leverage the power of these digital spaces to foster connection, representation, and counter narratives that challenge stereotypes and show their day-to-day lives to users that might not be familiar with their traditions.

It is clear that the use of social media platforms serves as a valuable tool for sharing people's stories and voices as well as fostering solidarity and empowering individuals across geographical boundaries. However, it is important to acknowledge that unlike the written pen and paper method, social media platforms are not without their challenges, including concerns related to racial bias and discriminatory practices. Algorithms used by these platforms may inadvertently amplify or suppress certain voices or content based on factors such as race or religion. Furthermore, user interactions on social media platforms can sometimes manifest as racial bias, hate speech, or harassment, creating an environment that is hostile or exclusionary for individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups.

Indeed, with the advent of social media, there exist many challenges pertaining to censorship and invisibilization that occur on these platforms, particularly impacting BIPOC users. Algorithms play a significant role in determining which content is shown or suppressed, which can inadvertently perpetuate biases and limit the visibility of certain voices and perspectives. These censored and deleted posts are removed under the guise that they “violate Instagram guidelines.” However, the issue of censorship and invisibilization is not unique to social media platforms but has a historical precedent. Diaries, as communication artefacts predating social media, have also faced challenges of invisibility. The decisions about what gets published or remains hidden have historically been influenced by gatekeepers and power structures.

It is evident that in the 21st century, social media has indeed emerged as a powerful tool for knowledge transmission and expression. It has provided a platform for individuals, including marginalized communities, to share their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. However, the question of freedom of expression and who decides what is worthy of publication remains pertinent. The decisions regarding content visibility and moderation on



social media platforms are often made by the platform providers themselves, who establish guidelines and policies. Thus, I would like you, readers, to reflect on the following questions: is social media really an avenue for freedom of expression? Who decides whether a particular speech is worthy of publication, or not? In the 21st century, social media is a new tool for knowledge transmission and preceding it, was the diary.

In conclusion, I have coined the term *sociadies*, which represents the fusion of social media and diary writing. This concept goes beyond its digital nature, as it combines elements of both the traditional and modern by incorporating Latin origins into this novel term. Moreover, it signifies the social aspect of social media, highlighting its potential as a platform for expressing one's voice, driving social change, and sharing personal narratives with a broader audience. ■■■

Notes

- 1 Clements R. Markham, ed. and trans., *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (During his First Voyage, 1492-93) and Documents Relating the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real*, England [London], Hakluyt Society, 2010, pp. 37-38.
- 2 Angela R. Hooks, *Dairy as Literature, Through the Lens of Multiculturalism in America*, Delaware [Wilmington], Vernon Press, 2020.
- 3 Ibid, p. xvii.
- 4 Jackson, Chimene, “Black Women’s Journals Reflect Mine, Yours, and Ours: Through the Travel Writing of Juanita Harrison,” *Diary as Literature: Through the Lens of Multiculturalism in America*, 2020, p. 73-87
- 5 Lee Humphreys, *The qualified self: Social media and the accounting of everyday life*, United-States [Cambridge], MIT Press, 2018.