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Mobilizing records: re-framing archival description to support human rights

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Abstract This article seeks to raise consciousness within the field of archival studies in order to foster a generative discussion about how descriptive practices might be expanded, approached differently, or completely rethought. It brings together crosscutting theoretical issues and provides practical examples of mediation in order to mobilize these records in support of human rights work. It first problematizes the foundational archival precept of respect des fonds and its sub-principles of original order and provenance. It then analyzes the necessary transformation of institutional policies and standards in order to foster trust and transparency and identifies structural or system wide strategies for ameliorating past abuses.

Keywords Human rights · Archival theory · Archival description · Archival education

Introduction

The principles of respect des fonds, provenance and original order that underlie today's international standards for archival description were formally articulated by the Dutch archivists S. Muller, J. Feith and R. Fruin (1898) in the late nineteenth century. The nineteenth century also saw an increased emphasis on the role of archives in supporting the accountability of public organizations by ensuring citizen

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awareness of and access to records. During the twentieth century, enhancements to descriptive practices were increasingly driven by the desire to support historical scholarship and other forms of research. By the last two decades of the century, the development of standards supporting online dissemination and exchange of descriptive information included standardizing the structures of archival description and incorporating rigorous fielded data elements and rules for assigning subject descriptors and developing authority forms and files (Duranti and Thibodeau 2001; Gorman 2003; Hensen 1997; Walch 1990). Such value-added, post hoc description of archived records is only one aspect of the total amount of metadata that accumulates around individual documents and aggregations of records, as well as the institutions and processes that create them in the course of their lives, however. Both records continuum theory and electronic records research during the same period underscored the complexity and interdependencies of these other forms of metadata and also emphasized their importance in understanding the record and what it reveals about who created it and why (Gilliland 2014).

In the twenty-first century, a growing cohort of practicing archivists and archival studies scholars have argued for the need to pluralize and diversify as well as activate the archives in support of social justice and human rights objectives (Caswell 2010; Caswell et al. 2012; Duff et al. 2013; Faulkhead 2009; Gilliland 2011b; Jimerson 2007; Rioux 2010; Sassoon and Burrows 2009; Wakimoto et al. 2013). This is in part in response to a barrage of critiques from many academic fields concerning the way in which "archival power" has traditionally been exercised, and in part due to increasing archival involvement in the proliferating numbers of tribunals and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions around the world (De Brito et al. 2001; Flinn 2008; Harris 2007; Hayner 2010; Josias 2011; Sachs 2007; Weld 2014). Out of this work, the exigencies for archives to acknowledge and account for the role that recordkeeping metadata, both that generated by the authorities that created and managed the records and that generated by archivists, has played in the past and to re-orient these practices have emerged as a critical concern. More importantly perhaps, archival description and recordkeeping more broadly have been identified by both archival scholars and government inquiries as key agents in the oppression, marginalization, silencing, alienation and traumatization of individuals and communities that have been involved in social justice and human rights movements, for example, through how acts and victims are classified, euphemized, or submerged (Bates and Rowley 2011; Bowker and Star 2000; Duff and Harris 2002; Olson 2001, 2007; Srinivasan 2013). When one re-envisions archival activities, including description, from a human rights framework, it becomes impossible to separate the record from the politics of its origins, as well as from its consequences, affects, or most importantly, the human life to which it is related.

Foregrounding value-added archival description (whether it occurs within the archive as in a life cycle approach, or is distributed across the life of the record, as in a continuum approach) within this context strategically situates points of intervention into both contemporary practice and archival theory. This article seeks to raise consciousness within the field, to foster a generative discussion about how descriptive practices might be expanded, approached differently, or completely

rethought by bringing together cross-cutting theoretical issues and providing practical examples of mediation. It evolved out of the experiences, reflections and recommendations of a group of practitioners, academics, and students who participated in a group discussion on 'Archival Description: Ethics and Priorities' facilitated by Anne Gilliland as part of the UCLA Human Rights Archives Symposium, 'The Antonym of Forgetting: Global Perspectives on Human Rights Archives' held in October 2013. This international symposium brought together human rights activists, academics, archivists and students from around the globe for two days to explore and address challenges involved in human rights documentation. The article elaborates on two main thrusts identified by the group with respect to the challenges and changes necessary to mobilize records through value-added description for human rights purposes. This article focuses predominantly on life cycle approaches to archival description, since the continuum perspective was not represented among the workshop participants. Nevertheless, the authors are very aware of this deficit and welcome further broadening of this conversation. The first thrust problematizes the foundational archival precept of respect des fonds and its sub-principles of original order and provenance; the second thrust concerns transforming institutional policies and standards to foster trust and transparency, and identifying structural or system wide strategies for ameliorating past abuses. This article takes as its starting point the value of collective rhetoric that is founded on both experiential and theoretical knowledge as well as the 'the collective articulation of multiple, overlapping individual experiences' (Dubriwny 2005, p. 396), allowing for a collaborative and exploratory consciousness-raising rather than definitive suggestions, since consciousness-raising as a discursive tactic requires a rethinking of current modes of theory and practice in light of the archival dimensions of human rights atrocities. Initially conceived of as a strategy for the crafting of persuasive argumentation on behalf of organizations or those sharing objectives or priorities, collective rhetoric has also been used to expand the possibilities of group expression (Simons 1970). Campbell (1973, p. 79) specifically situates collective rhetoric as a feminist strategy, one in which 'all participate and are considered expert,' and in so doing it is a strategy targeted at dismantling expectations of positionality assumed between a speaker and an audience. This article is in a unique position to utilize such a strategy as its central concepts arose from a workshop format involving multiple people and in which "lived experiences" including professional expertise, activist work, personal experience and academic training were simultaneously employed. In order to seriously enable potential human rights uses of records, it is necessary to interrogate assumptions about professionalisation, to include multiple manners of knowledge from multiple stakeholders and to acknowledge the iterative process of community or organizational development (Dubriwny 2005, p. 400).

An exploration of respect des fonds as well as institutional responsibilities in this context involves thinking through current and past practices, and highlighting case studies and examples that expose contradiction and implicit values. The article will begin, therefore, by establishing the contemporary context for current practice and standards in archival description as well as foregrounding how human rights is emerging as a presence within archival theory. Then, it will problematize respect

des fonds as a foundational principle of archival theory and practice, utilizing the case study of the Dean C. Worcester Photographs to exhibit the ways in which provenance and its entanglement with private ownership can obscure the possibilities of human rights uses of photographic records. Finally, it will explore the relationship between institutional protocols and standards of description within a human rights framework, re-thinking the relationship between not only the institution and its records, but also between the institution and survivors and descendants of human rights atrocities.

Archival description: contemporary context

The landscape of traditional archival ideas and practices has been considerably transformed over the past 30 years in response to the accelerating movement from a physical to a digital paradigm. However, that is not the only challenge that it has encountered; the influence of postmodern thought as well as the growing fields of memory and identity studies, critiques leveled by post-colonial, gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, community archives initiatives and social justice imperatives have all sought to effect changes in that traditional landscape. Archival description has occupied a unique position within these challenges and provocations, as a site of standardization, divergence and pedagogical groundwork; it is one element that orients new professionals into current practice. These radical transformations all hold in common an identification of the archive as an active site of both power and resistance (Jimerson 2009) and that description plays a significant role in 'the construction of meanings and the exercise of power' (Duff and Harris 2002, p. 264). In addition to the familiar purposes of description for supporting and also governing access, dissemination and use of archival materials, while situating them within a broader external context, description is also a primary mechanism whereby the epistemology and motivations of the records creator are revealed, and the intent of the recordkeeping process is affected. Additionally, description is tasked with placing the record in its archival bond, documenting the record's reliability, supporting presumptions of authenticity, demonstrating the transparency of archival processes, and supporting the archive's obligations to its creators. Critiques of an extractive model of description, one that understands the record as merely a trace of an event or transaction, often point to these functions as necessitating a more complex relationship to a multiplicity of users, whose expectations and needs are as diverse as they are diffuse. Additionally, the separation of content and record ignores the metadata of the record itself as a record, of the processes through which the record has been created and managed. Suggestions for participatory practice, collaboration, co-authorship, post- and semi-custodial relationships have been proposed in the archival literature, broadening both form and function of the archives itself (Gilliland and McKemmish 2014; Huvila 2008; Shilton and Srinivasan 2007). Theoretical concepts such as Wendy Duff and Verne Harris's 'liberatory' description and Elizabeth Yakel's 'archival representation' are extremely valuable contributions to the mobilization of archival description within a human rights framework, but with few exceptions, concrete

examples of action or intervention have not been proposed (Caswell 2012; Duff and Harris 2002; Yakel 2003).

The relationship between human rights work and documentation practices has been intimate, vital and co-constitutive, exemplified by the central figure of documentation within transitional justice movements. Normative definitions of human rights focus on their inherency and universality, and while the particular incarnations and articulations of human rights are ever reaching for consensus and broadly based legitimacy, efforts to both advocate for accountability and transparency retroactively with respect to human rights atrocities as well as build those values into existing systems of documentation need to emerge from cross-cutting conversations between archivists, scholars, activists, and affected individuals and communities. Several scholars have addressed human rights with respect to particular archival case studies, but there remains a need to fully articulate on a macro scale what the practical challenges and possibilities of archival work might be within a human rights framework (Caswell 2012; Gilliland and McKemmish 2014; Harris 2002; Iacovino 2010). It is within this context that this consciousness-raising project begins. In the course of our preliminary conversation as a group, our questions shone light on the archival challenges in our midst: How can archivists describe records in ways that not only reflect the contexts of the record's creation but that open up spaces for those mentioned in or related to the records to contribute their voice? How can archival description allow and make room for the multiplicity of voices in archives to speak? How do we re-conceptualize regimes of evidentiary value and archival authority that are inclusive and at the same time divergent? How can institutions foster trust by rethinking their protocols, policies and practices with respect to description?

Rethinking respect des fonds

In the course of describing voluminous records, archives need to expose the evidential as well as the informational value of these materials in ways that will support both foreseen and unforeseen uses and users into an infinite future. For over a century, there has been international agreement that archival descriptive practices should privilege original order, provenance, and collective and hierarchical description (Gilliland 2014; Gilliland and Willer 2014). Considerable investment in training and software development around specific descriptive standards and practices in addition to the inevitable inertia caused by practices of professionalization creates a consensus overdue for challenge, both in terms of its assumed universality and also of the extent of its enduring merit. The imperative to address human rights considerations, however, forces the issue. As it currently stands, there has been an unrelenting focus in a life cycle approach to archival description on a sole authoritative provenance, on hierarchical description that submerges the "little people" involved in organizational activities, and on the research needs of preferred clienteles such as scholars and bureaucrats. As a result, such description could be read as a cumulative history of microaggressions, to use Black Studies scholar Lipsitz's (1995) words, 'systemic, collective and coordinated acts'. As Dunbar

(2006, p. 8) asserted, microaggressions can be identified at several stages throughout archival work, and can manifest in the methods of organization, or the language chosen for description. Racial and ethnic descriptors have the potential to maintain normative hierarchies within the records '(re)enforcing racial bias and the interests of dominant power structures' (Ibid). Individually these microaggressions might be difficult to discern or might seem to those in power to be minor concerns, but collectively they reveal a systemic and systematic picture of oppression against a multitude of disenfranchised, marginalized and oppressed groups who are involved in and/or affected by the creation and nature of the record and its associated metadata.

The impact and the affordances of digital creation, description, worldwide dissemination and non-traditional utilization of records have dramatically changed the recordkeeping landscape. At the same time, the ascendancy of human rights to augment the trinity of administrative, accountability and research rationales for the existence of archives challenges archivists to contemplate not only the efficacy of current descriptive practices, but also the underlying ethical exigencies. For example, in a field used to contemplating the unknowns of unspecifiable future needs, we need to turn description around so that it can also address the most immediate needs, language, technologies, etc. of survivors and aid agencies on the ground or the ongoing work of tribunals and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

Traditional conceptions of the foundational archival precept of respect des fonds and its sub-principles of original order and provenance are often inadequate and even problematic in the contexts of human rights archives. Understandings of original order, the principle that traditionally refers to maintaining the internal or documentary structures of records as 'they were organized by the agent accumulating them,' (Duff and Harris 2002, p. 267) are in need of reconsideration, particularly in the context of human rights records. As traditionally conceived, original order forces archivists to maintain the logic and bureaucratic order of the repressive regime enacting further violence on its victims, survivors, and their families. In the digital world, original order has become a less meaningful principle of organization because of the multiple ways in which materials could be arranged and viewed by the creators—and the multiple ways in which descriptions could be arranged for and viewed by secondary users. In addition, the complexities of provenance need to be more systematically elucidated and problematized than is possible with contemporary descriptive standards.

Traditionally, provenance has been defined as 'the origin or source of something' or as 'information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection' (Pearce-Moses 2005). In practice, traditionally provenance has been used to refer to a single creator or collector of materials, as well as to the chain-of-custody associated with those materials. In combination with original order, it has two primary goals in this conception: to protect the evidentiary value of the described records and to expose the actions, functions, and deeds from which the records emerge (Duff and Harris 2002, p. 267). Traditionally, provenance privileges the importance of the thing, the record itself, being described over the people documented, implicated or with another stake in the records. These conceptions of

provenance can enact further violences against those who have suffered at the hands of violent and repressive regimes. For example, Caswell (2014) in the context of Cambodia writes about how in this dominant understanding of provenance, the Tuol Sleng mug shots capturing the images of Khmer Rouge victims would be traced back only to the regime they were created by, again silencing the survivors and their descendants in the description of the records' provenances.

Traditional conceptions of provenance have rightly been called into question over the last two decades. Many have suggested that normative archival description practices that create a fonds-level description erode the multi-faceted aspects of provenance by giving credit to only a single individual, family or organization (Cook 1992; Duff and Harris 2002; Hurley 1995; Nesmith 2006; Nordland 2004; Wurl 2005). Acknowledging only one provenance of a record is a vast oversimplification that fails to capture the richness of the record. Re-conceptualizations of provenance, such as Tom Nesmith's description of it as 'the social and technical processes of the records' inscription, transmission, contextualization, and interpretation, which account for its existence, characteristics, and continuing history' present a far more complex foundation (p. 146). Multiple descriptive methods, systems, and standards have emerged to address this more complicated conception of provenance including the series system that envisions records as 'multi-provenancial' and 'creation' as 'only one aspect of provenance' (Duff and Harris, p. 269). In the series system, provenance is expended to include the individual(s) or communities that created the record, but also those that added to it, controlled it, used it, held it in their custody, or described it arguing that each of these interactions with the record change the context of the record and should therefore be documented within our understandings of provenance (Ibid., p. 271). Other work out of Australia regarding Indigenous Australians and their records has called for a number of innovations to the concept of provenance with important implications for human rights. In this context, Chris Hurley calls for 'parallel provenance,' acknowledging the co-existence of multiple records creators simultaneously 'in the formation of records and the functions or processes in which they took part' (2005). Building on Hurley's work Iacovino (2010) points to the epistemic violences caused by traditional notions of provenance where subjects of records are not considered part of the creation process and therefore do not hold rights over the records for Indigenous Australian communities. She calls for the adoption of a participant driven model of provenance in order to work toward recognition of Indigenous rights to records that capture their knowledge and identity by acknowledging them as co-creators of the records (Ibid, p. 358). In participatory archiving models, provenance is defined through the plurality of archival voices and can considered a tool for the inclusion of diverse communities. Though these reconsiderations of provenance mark an important step toward expanding provenance, they do not adequately address the human rights context.

Even if the traditional concept of provenance were to be broadened, however, and this broadening were to be incorporated into descriptive standards in such a way that all parties could be acknowledged for the roles that they played, the very necessity in archival description of spelling out the provenance of materials has the potential to be problematic (Gilliland 2012). There have been calls in recent years to

bring together virtually widely dispersed materials and their descriptions by and about communities that have faced oppression, suppression, genocide and other human rights concerns in order to support both claims and study. For example, in the case of Native Americans, such materials might include records of official government bodies relating to such matters as treaties, relocation of communities, placement of children in boarding schools, and federal aid; holdings of special and museum collections around the world that might include materials collected about or appropriated from Native American communities by explorers, anthropologists, and so forth; and the records, stories, songs and artifacts maintained within the communities themselves. The descriptive portals and other systems within which such a collation might occur are, more often than not, hosted by a major organization such as a governmental body or publicly funded museum apart from the Indigenous community itself. These likely also conform to national and/or international archival descriptive standards that privilege a singular and canonical notion of provenance—one that is also closely tied to the establishment of ownership and the associated rights and privileges. What is a Native American community to do if it fails to acknowledge or accept provenance in the same way, for example, if it considers everything generated by the community to be community-owned or generated, or if it does not consider certain kinds of materials or knowledge to be "ownable" at all? With regard to access to intangible Indigenous heritage, cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Christen writes that,

> 'Archivists have engaged with individual communities on specific, one-time digital repatriation projects that provide layered access or prompt co-curation. However, tacit assumptions about professional standards concerning the extent and limitations of access within the "public domain," the parameters of "open access" in public settings, and the value of, and conditions for, "expert knowledge" in defining collections often hamstring efforts at changes' (2011, p. 188).

The photographs of Dean C. Worcester: a case study in the problematics of provenance

Unpacking the relationship between ownership and provenance allows for new understandings of records themselves. Consider as a case study the dispersed ethnographic photographs of the Philippines taken by Dean C. Worcester in the early 1900's. The Worcester images are dispersed in several North American and European institutions that vary in terms of their sizes, missions, and locations. In addition, the Worcester images came to these institutions at different points in time. Furthermore, their accession involved various actors, who at various points in time, were considered to be the rightful creators, owners and donors of the images. The unclear and at times shifting provenance and attributions of creation and ownership effectively hide related collections. The case of the Worcester images opens up complicated issues of ownership and provenance rooted in the asymmetrical power relationships embedded in the photography of an American member of the Insular

Government, a provisional colonial government. The expression of these power relationships within archival and record keeping structures not only obscures the subjects of the photographs in terms of their subjectivity but also inhibits the potential human rights uses and possibilities contained within them. As documents of exploitative activities that then become private property, the possibility of claiming the photographs as evidence becomes as diffuse as the collection itself.

Worcester sold or donated his images to several institutions (University of Michigan Special Collections Library, National Anthropological Archives and American Museum of Natural History). Other personalities also contributed to the dispersion of the Worcester photographs: collectors of his images (Cameron Forbes, Edward Ayer, and Georg Küpper-Loosen), his children (Frederick Worcester and Alice Day), and those who worked with him in his various ethnological surveys (Charles Martin). Part of the difficulty of tracing the story of the images is the context of the images as material possessions, as objects previously held and owned by a private collector. Some images came to institutions as part of a donation. To trace these exchanges is, in the vocabulary of archives and museums, to trace the images' provenance. In following the principle of provenance, archivists have often subsumed and attributed the images under other collectors, which has obscured their origins in Worcester's work. In other words, by applying the principle of provenance to the individuals who donated collections, the provenance based on origin (Worcester) has been obscured.

Provenance of the images can obscure relationships between parts of collections when the images are held within a larger collection and not described as a discrete, separate collection. Images sold to prominent collectors like Edward Ayer, Georg Küpper-Loosen, and Cameron Forbes were later donated to several institutions. Ayer was an American business magnate who supplied timber to the railroad industry in the nineteenth century. He was widely credited for his substantive monetary and material donations to prominent institutions in Chicago, namely the Newberry Library and the Field Museum. Georg Küpper-Loosen was a businessman from Cologne, Germany, whose ethnographic collections came to the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, after his death in 1911. Cameron Forbes was Governor-General of the Philippine Islands from 1908 to 1913. He donated his personal collections of artifacts to Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The Newberry Library describes its Worcester prints as the 'Edward Ayer Collection of Philippine Photographs.' Worcester is mentioned as the creator of the images and compiler of index under 'additional information' in the library's catalog. The images at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum are acknowledged as images from the Bureau of Science, which oversaw the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes, a colonial agency under Worcester's supervision as Secretary of Interior. The Harvard Peabody Museum describes the prints under its donor, Cameron Forbes.

Subsequent institutional actions also have direct influence on the conditions of the collection beyond that of the donor's intentions and actions. Some museums historically treated photographic materials differently. For instance, the photographs at the National Anthropological Archives (NAA) of the Smithsonian Institution came directly as donations by Worcester himself. When the images reached the

National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), the scientists there divided the images between its Division of Physical Anthropology and the Division of Ethnology. When NMNH established the NAA, all the images were subsequently transferred to this new unit. The collection, however, is still divided to this day. In this instance, the images assumed new roles and contexts that thus complicate their provenance in the institution housing them.

Some images moved from one institution to another. Such is the case of the negatives that are currently kept at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology (UMMA). The negatives were first under a long-term deposit with the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) from 1926 to 1957. In 1957, Frederick Worcester requested the transfer of the same negatives to the Michigan Historical Collections (now the Bentley Historical Library), which subsequently transferred the negatives to UMMA. Another notable institutional arrangement occurred between the Newberry Library and the Field Museum of Natural History. The Field Museum currently holds copy-negatives (as well as prints from those negatives) taken from the print collection of the Newberry Library. It is unclear exactly when the copy-negatives were created. From the biography of Edward E. Ayer, benefactor to both institutions and first President of the Field Museum from 1894 to 1899, Ayer 'sent them to the Museum and had them copied there' (Lockwood 1929). From these copy-negatives, the museum also produced several prints that are now bound, together with other Philippine images, in several volumes of scrapbooks. The images at the Field Museum illustrate a case of inter-institutional borrowing whereby, over time, copies assumed completely new institutional roles and functions.

The organization of the collections according to intellectual ownership and attribution of the images to donors hinders the tracing of creators and source communities. It is difficult, if not almost impossible at this point, to determine whether all the images that are attributed to Worcester by each institution were actually created by Worcester himself. Several camera operators, scientists and collectors worked with Worcester in various expeditions, and often as government employees. His published biography claims that Worcester encouraged, and sometimes demanded, that other ethnographers deposit copies of their images to his office. Worcester claimed ownership of the images produced from his camera and equipment regardless of who operated them (Sullivan 1991; Hutterer 1978).

No institution or publication shows a master list of every image and its respective photographer. If Worcester created a consolidated inventory, it has never been found. In some of his published works, Worcester acknowledged the contributions of other photographers. However, he did not identify or cite the specific photos that they took. His articles, 'Head-Hunters of Northern Luzon' and 'The Non-Christian Peoples of the Philippine Islands,' which appeared, respectively, in 1912 and 1913 in *National Geographic* both attribute the photos to either Worcester or the government photographer working under his supervision, Charles Martin. Similarly, the two-volume index that accompanied the donated prints by Cameron Forbes to the Peabody Museum at Harvard says 'Catalogue of Photographs by Dean C. Worcester.' But the bottom of the page also acknowledges other photographers involved: 'Prints by the Bureau of Science, Manila, P.I. Negatives by Dean C.

Worcester, Charles Martin (Photographer Bureau of Science), and Others.' His article on the 'Non-Christian Tribes of Northern Luzon' in the *Philippine Journal of Science* identifies other contributing photographers: Dr. Merton L. Miller (Chief of the Division of Ethnology of the Bureau of Education), Mr. William Allan Reed (of the Ethnological Survey), and Dr. Albert Ernest Jenks (Chief of the Ethnological Survey).

The general listing of the images at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum cites the photographers with their respective images, but a significant number of prints lack such attribution. In addition to Worcester, Martin, Miller, Reed and Jenks the photographers identified in this list are: J. Diamond, Frank S. Bourns, Dr. Sherman, ESB, Dionysio Encinas, Georg Kuppers-Loosen, Gibbs Aeronaut, Roy Franklin Barton, Murphy, Emerson Brewer Christie and Ball.

Among the photographers, Charles Martin further circulated the images from the Worcester ethnographic surveys. Martin was in possession of a collection of lanternslides that he later sold to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. After serving as government photographer in the Philippines, Martin became the first chief of *National Geographic* magazine's photo laboratory (Sullivan 1991).

The dispersed Worcester images open up complex issues of ownership and provenance. The involvement of various personalities in their creation, movement and distribution, including the various institutional exchanges and actions all contributed to this complication. Provenance in this case is best understood as a way to uncover the multiple and changing notions of ownership. In order to remain useful and relevant in this context, the concept of provenance must help account for this variability instead of obfuscating the various actors involved in the creation of the Worcester photographs in favor of fixed and immutable attribution. Not only accounting for but also enabling this variability allows the photographs themselves to act as records of layered lived experiences and historical contexts and creates the possibility for their use in a human rights context. Few records are created specifically as human rights records; it is rather in retrospect that they become identified as such. Rethinking provenance and its relationship to ownership even in order to allow mutability would still be inadequate without the application of a human rights framework. The provenance of these photographs as it stands represents the elaborate and massive colonial networks and infrastructures that enabled their creation as well as the erasure or de-emphasis of their subjects. Attempts at building in understandings of structural constraints, power asymmetries and exploitative research agendas must occur as interventions to archival description practices.

From custodian to steward: institutional roles, policies and standards

Institutional policies governing documentation and archival work vary greatly. Institutions must reframe their relationship to archival authority, allowing systems and structures 'through which power can leak out' (Olson 2001, p. 659). Archival description standards are not in silos; they work alongside and through local

standards. Language is a large part of these local standards, as description is often tailored to expectations concerning users and language is then tailored to those expected users. Bringing together two documents that specifically address institutional responsibilities within a human rights context highlights the roles of archives and archivists as stewards of societal memory and history. Two reports on human rights directly problematize the role of records in human rights atrocities and prevention; the 'Orentlicher Principles' and 'Archives of the Security Services of Former Repressive Regimes' articulate that all individuals, communities and organizations should have the right to represent and describe themselves as they choose, as well as to reply to records or descriptions of records related to or about them in archives. The 'Orentlicher Principles' refer to a report commissioned by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2005 that lists a set of thirty-eight principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through action to combat impunity (UN 2005). The 'Archives of the Security Services of Former Repressive Regimes' is a report prepared for UNESCO on behalf of the International Council of Archives by Antonino Gonzalez Quintana in 1997 (Quintana 1997). Both of these reports assert that through descriptive practices, archivists describe, contextualize, and authenticate records of past activities and transactions. Archival records serve as 'evidence against which individual and social memory can be tested' and enable individuals to better 'comprehend the past, understand the present, and prepare for the future' (SAA 2011). As such, archival description involves ensuring that records sufficiently document past events necessitating description that is broad, inclusive and spacious enough to accommodate a record that can enable and engage with a multiplicity of voices (Ketelaar 2008, p. 10).

In order to enable the inclusion of this multiplicity of voices in the archives, one must begin with the issue of language. Two immediate problems arise, the first of these are the limitations of existing controlled vocabularies, and the second is literally to do with the language and the scripts in which description is rendered. This first problem is fairly well recognized at this point. Controlled vocabularies, authority files, rules governing cataloging and indexing have limitations in terms of understandings of creators, subjects and users of archival materials. For example, 'Bringing them Home'' the 1997 Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (the so-called Stolen Generations) specifically identified problems associated with archival description and among its recommendations were the imperative to index or re-describe records held in government and non-governmental repositories such as those of churches, schools and other private bodies that related to Indigenous persons who had been removed from their families for any reason (Adami 2007; Ketelaar 2008; HREOC 1997, pp. 301–310; Piggot and McKemmish 2002). Underlying the Report was a recognition that much of what these persons would need to recover, reconstruct and reclaim their Indigenous identities was held in records generated by the very programs that had oppressed them. The problem extends beyond the intellectual inaccessibility of the descriptions, however, (for example, settler rather than Indigenous place names were used to denote the communities from which children were removed thus making it harder to locate

one's birth family) (HREOC 1997, pp. 292–293). Indigenous users in Australia have reported being shocked about the derogatory and bureaucratic terminology that has been used in the records. All of this argues for more, and more detailed description as well as explication of terminology used and inclusion of a community's own terminology, even if all parties do not accept it. For example, Japanese Americans who were interned in the USA during World War II have referred to the camps where they were held as 'concentration camps.' Yet this term has been subject to criticism from others who feel that this usage demeans the experiences of those who were incarcerated in concentration camps in Europe during World War II and that the official government term 'relocation center' should be used instead. Responding, ethnic studies scholar Hirabayashi (2008) notes 'Nazi Germany's euphemisms for their concentration camps revealed such phrases as 'protective custody camps,' 'reception centers,' and 'transit camps.' Ironically, two Nazi euphemisms were identical to our government's usage: 'assembly centers' and 'relocation centers''.

Perhaps less well recognized, however, are the dangers of exposing vulnerable individuals and populations through overly detailed authority files and subject descriptors, or through linked descriptions. For example, an authority file that reveals that an individual in 1930s or 1940s central Europe secretly changed his or her name or religion, perhaps to avoid persecution or prosecution, can have a profound impact upon living descendants today in countries where religious or ethnic identity can still result in vulnerabilities who were unaware of the change or who had maintained that secret. Another example might be individuals documented or mentioned in archival materials who chose not to disclose their sexual identity for similar reasons. Yet another might be the application of linked data to individual archival items such as letters and photographs that then permit linkages within and across repositories and support complex data visualization. Such capabilities have the positive potential to open up archival materials in ways never before possible, but at the same time they throw individual items into relief, often in a decontextualized way—something that has always been a concern for archivists. It would seem to be essential that such linkages also take the user to narrative descriptions that are able to educate the user about the context within which the document was situated–to explain, to reassure and above all, to inculcate an archival literacy that helps users to "read" the record and its contexts. Archival description should then address both of these imperatives simultaneously and with particular care for the needs of survivors and those whose vulnerability is persistent.

A second concern about language is literally with language and the scripts in which it is rendered. For example, UCLA Special Collections holds the Minasian Collection of Armenian Material, an important collection of materials relating to Iranian-Armenian and Indian-Armenian communities. The collection is in Armenian and much is in the Armenian alphabet. The description is available online in English, on the assumption that scholars wishing to use the collection with also read and write in English. However, a repository has a responsibility to members of a diasporic population, especially to any who might not have the necessary capability in the language of the description. This is more than a problem of direct translation, however. It is likely that some members of a diasporic population would not be scholars but rather approaching the collection for entirely different reasons and

would bring a very different set of semantics to bear. In such cases, a very different kind of description might be required (as was recognized in the 'Bringing Them Home' report with regard to Indigenous Australians who were members of the Stolen Generations). Moreover, it asks us to consider what it means when users see a script used with which they do not identify. Archival description must then balance minority rights regarding a script seen to be an integral part of ethnic identity with the continuing affect of it being viewed as symbolic of past nationalistic aggression and genocide by the majority population.

As Elizabeth Crooke has pointed out in the context of Northern Ireland, 'In a divided society, the concept of community…is politically charged, with questions concerning belonging, representation, and agendas underpinning any engagement' (2010, p. 16). In the years that have followed the Yugoslav Wars, books written in Serbian Cyrillic script, the alphabet of the minority Serb population, have been removed from some Croatian libraries, and in 2013, there were protests in the town of Vukovar, the site of a bloody siege and massacre, rapes and imprisonment in concentration camps of Croats by Serb-controlled forces during the Croatian War of Independence, and elsewhere in Croatia because signage had been erected in Serbian Cyrillic. A Croatian Constitutional Law on National Minorities rights makes bilingual signs mandatory in any area where more than one-third of the population belongs to an ethnic minority (BBC 2013).

All of these concerns speak to aspects of description that are often regarded as being distinctive to archives in terms of how archivists approach information organization, seeking, and retrieval. In other information fields, information organization, seeking and retrieval have tended to focus more directly on how to ensure an exact or relevant match between resources controlled at the item level and a known user need and/or behavior. While it should not be forgotten that archival description, and recordkeeping metadata more generally, similarly provides much of the scaffolding around which effective information retrieval systems can be built, we must get away from the notion of canonical descriptions, then taking the role of educating users about how to approach reading our descriptions and our content. Addressing several of the above considerations, Gilliland and Willer argue that

> 'Information professionals should make strategic decisions about when or under what circumstances there might be a compelling need to create rich or even alternate descriptions to address specific identified needs of particular under empowered or niche communities, e.g., through the use of pluralized access points, complex authority files that address co-creator roles, and bilingual descriptions; and when a higher-level approach, potentially supported by linked data might suffice' (Gilliland and Willer 2014).

Transitioning from a custodial relationship to one of stewardship shifts effectively restructures the relationship between the institution and archival materials (Wurl 2005). Repatriation, in digital form, has gained momentum as a strategy for addressing issues that arise when materials that today are located elsewhere than with their source communities. This also includes materials that were removed or appropriated from Indigenous and other communities by explorers, scholars and collectors. Digital repatriation may occur for a variety of reasons.

Among the most prevalent of these reasons is twofold recognition on the part of a repository of the value and necessity of returning materials to a source community but that community may not have the resources to care for the materials. Preservation, storage and staff costs may be prohibitive for a source community to provide access and care for materials. Additionally, a source community might want materials in a more transportable or easily manipulable format or a repository might express reluctance or resistance to returning original materials but might be willing to make digital copies. Such situations invoke description considerations similar to those already discussed, in terms of the need to provide descriptions that are relevant, accessible and useful to community members, as well as sensitive to community concerns about privacy, rights and control over the dissemination of its own heritage and knowledge. However, there remain many questions about the role and scope of, as well as who has authority over such re-description or alternative descriptions of repatriated materials. Source communities have a right to describe materials by, or even about them in their own ways and as a result, we must develop descriptive standards and systems that support that. In addition, use will be affected when multiple differing descriptions of the same materials are made available by different parties.

One model that attempts to explore and empower a multiplicity of descriptive voices is The Plateau Peoples' Web Portal (Christen 2011, 2012; Mathiesen 2012). The Plateau Peoples' Web Portal represents a rethinking of traditional stewardship structures, opening up form, format and process in order to allow for reconfigurations of institutional authority and understandings of ownership. Run on the open source platform Mukurtu, the Plateau People's Web Portal provides access to the cultural materials of three tribes from the Pacific Northwestern United States. These materials were chosen and curated by tribal consultants in collaboration with staff from Washington State University and the Museum of Anthropology using digitized collections from those institutions (Plateau Peoples' Web Portal). The Web Portal staggers and layers the archival description process allowing for the addition to or revision of the record ingested from the institution. Once a digital item is uploaded, tribal administrators are able to add tribal knowledge, edit existing information, add new content, make decisions regarding levels of access and flag any culturally sensitive material. Participating tribes can also upload their own materials into the Web Portal (Ibid). Display options allow for the simultaneous viewing of the institutional catalog record alongside the tribal catalog record. An additional layer is folded into the description process, allowing for community members and users to add tags and comments to the existing records in addition to facilitating the creation and organization of a user's own collection (Ibid). Plateau Peoples' Web Portal both capitalizes upon and challenges existing institutional infrastructure, acting as mediator to provide an inclusive and contextually rich multi-vocal archival space. Stewardship then, becomes a vital concept, defined in contrast to traditionally understandings of custodianship. The distinction between the two terms and their accompanying ethics is essential, a difference between ownership and responsibility. Stewardship implies a long-term, trusting relationship between entities, eschewing models of ownership that assumed that a resource rich institution would automatically know best.

We would also add and problematize two more considerations that have historically been central to archival description. First is the onus on archives to be accountable for and transparent with regard to their activities in order to support the public trust placed in the archives. When archives hold the records of repressive regimes we need to take the opportunity afforded with archival description to reassure survivors that the archives can be trusted and are not an extension of that regime (McKemmish et al. 2011). Second, and closely associated with the first, is the role that archival description plays in elucidating to the user the reliability and continued authenticity of the materials in the custody of the archives. Many records survive incidentally or accidentally but are crucial in human rights proceedings and can be used effectively in human rights contexts. Although their reliability and authenticity may be problematic to ascertain or demonstrate, description can aid in indicating how materials might have survived. For example, photographs of atrocities committed on the Roma in World War II that have recently surfaced but where the provenance and chain-of-custody between the 1940s and today remains unknown (Stefanac and White, forthcoming); Stasi files that were digitally reconstructed after being torn up by Stasi officials (Pidd 2011); and Islamic manuscript holdings of the Oriental Institute (Oriientalni institute) in Sarajevo, destroyed when it was burned in May 1992 by Serb forces, that were partially virtually recreated through the Bosnian Manuscript Ingathering program which sought to compile copies of original manuscripts taken by scholars before the Institute and the holdings of other manuscript repositories were destroyed as well as from indexes of what previously existed (Sweet 1998).

The list of libraries and archives destroyed during acts of war is extensive. This destruction can occur for myriad reasons, taking the shape of unorganized looting, collateral damage, self-destruction as defensive tactic, systematic elimination of incriminating evidence or an attack on a community's cultural identity or collective memory. In 2013, the Pro-Busqueda Association for Missing Children, an El Savadorean non-profit focused on children missing from the country's civil war of the 1980–1992, saw the attack of their offices and the destruction of decades of evidence. Files were burned, computers stolen in the midst of a judiciary review of the amnesty law preventing the prosecution of political leaders, officers and guerillas for the crimes committed throughout the war. Calling for an organized response, Geoff Thale, who works with the Washington Office on Latin America reacted to the attack, 'The human rights community, victims and the government need to think about systematic strategies to protect these archives' (Wilkinson 2013). Records documenting atrocities have contemporary and future value, and while non-governmental bodies often have the trust, resources and ethical authority to serve as stewards of records, their vulnerabilities must also inspire the possibility that in the absence of a record, archival descriptions may take on evidentiary value in and of themselves, going beyond an indexical relationship.

Additionally, when archives are operating under a regime that is accused of ongoing human rights violations, or in post-conflict and post-colonial situations where there are ongoing investigations into human rights violations or where a new government is not sympathetic to past regimes, documenting or disclosing the provenance of materials may put those who created, collected or provided those

materials at considerable risk. It might also result in such materials not being turned over to the archives and potentially being lost forever. For example, archivists working at the Genocide Archives Rwanda (GAR) have discussed the challenges associated with documenting fully the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The video testimonies or as the GAR terms them 'confessions' of the perpetrators are the result the Gacaca Court processes. It remains to be seen whether other perpetrators will step forward voluntarily to provide documentation of their experiences, feelings, and perspectives of the genocide and its aftermath or if their stories will indeed be lost forever.

Institutional roles are not only oriented toward past action, their activities are often defined by contemporary political climates and juridical systems. During wars, external interventions, civil unrest, oppressive regimes and programs, and subsequent peace negotiations, legal processes, and restitution and reconciliation activities, preexisting archives can be seized, stolen, removed to another national jurisdiction for political, security or preservation reasons, and new archives can be created. Holding onto, handing over, returning and opening up such archives are all actions that can have human rights dimensions. Legal processes such as replevin, criminal tribunals and human rights commissions govern some of these actions; others have been the focus of large-scale microfilming and more recently digitization initiatives. In both cases, these have been well documented in the archival literature. Considerable recent focus has been placed on opening up public and data archives and the imperatives for making their contents available and the concerns for vulnerable individuals and communities who might be put at risk-whether they be those mentioned directly in the records or their associates, friends and descendants (Corti 2000; Corti et al. 2000; Hammersley 1997; Thomson et al. 2005). There has not been as much discussion about the role that metadata might play in these activities, however. More granular description about archival material might provide an infrastructure for a more complex screening of requests for materials while supporting automated redaction and release of content.

As already noted, metadata that cumulates around and links records is not limited to archival description. For example, research carried out as part of the InterPARES 2 Project identified several forms of relevant context—juridical-administrative, provenancial, procedural, documentary and technological—that need to be taken into consideration in relation to records, archives and archival activities. These contexts were largely manifested through various forms of metadata that were intrinsic or extrinsic to the records. For example, in the metadata specification model for the Chain of Preservation (i.e., life cycle) model, where 'metadata' was defined as *a machine or human-readable assertion about a resource relating to records and their resources*, and descriptive metadata was defined as those categories of metadata carried forward to be used as evidence for archival description, 137 different metadata assertions were identified (i.e., different instances of types of metadata), and 16 types of assertions were identified. Two types cut across all stages of the lifecycle, one cut across two stages, and the other 15 were evidenced only in one stage (Gilliland et al. 2008, p. 31; Gilliland 2011a). It is important to note that while this research investigated electronic records—that today leave all sorts of electronic traces behind themselves—the phenomenon of

metadata traces is common to all types of tangible records, and quite possibly intangible records also, although that has yet to be investigated from an archival perspective. It is also important that description be conceived from this systems perspective, i.e., across all aspects of identifying, contextualizing, trusting, disseminating, retrieving, using and re-using these materials, and particularly for the activities of inter-relating, cross-searching, and mining them that are so vital for many human rights purposes. Metadata can be an active intervention and may be able to assist in placing content pre-, during, and post-human rights atrocities.

From another perspective, this metadata in itself is capable of yielding tremendous insights into the processes and ideologies underlying the creation and management of the materials and the programs and other activities through which they were generated. This also makes metadata in itself a form of evidence that can be brought to bear in human rights proceedings (Gilliland 2011a; Slymovics 2014). Users need more fluency with metadata and archives can be a site of advocacy and learning. Users must be able to critically read and exploit metadata as well as records along and against the grain (Stoler 2010).

In terms of trust and transparency, there remains a bottom line relationship between metadata and records—i.e., the more metadata that is available, the more transparent the circumstances under which that metadata was created and managed, and by whom, the more likely a record is to be trusted. One area of debate that has been developing in archival description is whether or not it is important for archivists to be transparent about who arranges and describes a collection and when that activity took place (Novak 2013). Indeed, the front matter of the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard includes a data element in which such information can be recorded. This invokes an additional consideration, which is that if records are, as Sue McKemmish has so iconically stated it, 'always in a process of becoming' (1994), and if societal needs for using those records as well as societal perspectives are also always evolving, then surely we must identify a mechanism for regularly updating and revisiting our archival descriptions. Simply describing them once is not sufficient. The capacity to provide an audit trail documenting when, in what ways, and by whom a description was updated has also been built into EAD (SAA 2002). However, this capacity is likely more frequently been used to reflect changes that have been made when a collection of archival materials is augmented or reappraised rather than as a more comprehensive audit trail. Of course, it is unlikely that most archives will ever be in a position regularly to revisit their existing descriptions, but other methods, for example, crowd-sourced metadata, can provide additional and ongoing layers of description and again, in such cases, an audit trail is essential.

Metadata data and conceptual reference models such as the Resource Description Framework (RDF) and CIDOC CRM allow for the focus of description not only to be upon multiple entities (which might include multiple provenancial entities), but also upon the nature of the relationships between those entities (Hawkins 2009; Theodoridou et al. 2010). Thus, they also offer new ways of documenting as well as visualizing hierarchical as well as other types of structural, thematic, and interorganizational and interpersonal relationships and dependencies—although as yet, they are not well designed to address contingency or uncertainty in description.

Descriptive standards must be better able to express relationships where contingency and uncertainty are defining factors. Moreover, the drive to digitize analog collections and disseminate them online has re-opened old discussions about the merits of item-level description, as well as raised the possibilities of within-item description. It is possible to more fully exploit the hierarchy of surrogacy that occurs in descriptions (i.e. descriptions become increasingly abstract as one moves from within-item through item, series, collection, and repository-level description), as well as the federation of descriptions generated by different agencies and/or crowd-sourced to support more plural as well as more nuances in description.

Conclusion

The goal of this article has been to employ collective rhetoric and case study to raise consciousness within broader conversations within the emergent archival human rights framework. Through a discussion of both the foundational principles embedded in archival description as well as the institutional protocols and policies that implement them, this paper hopes to provide groundwork for considering description as a practice with profound human rights uses and consequences. By providing detailed examples and fleshing out these ideas, we show the depth and breadth of the issue as well as recognizing description as part of a larger human rights eco-system. As part of this eco-system, description is also uniquely suited to mobilizing records for evidentiary purposes as well as for collective memory. In destabilizing descriptive standards, we need to leverage the expertise of human rights activists, survivors, descendants and other stakeholders as well as the expertise of archivists, records managers and institutions for emancipatory purposes.

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