2017 Gene J. Williams Award Winner

The Gene J. Williams Award, presented annually by the Society of North Carolina Archivists, recognizes excellence for a paper on an archival topic written by a North Carolina graduate student for a graduate level course. This award honors the late Gene J. Williams, archivist at the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and at East Carolina University and charter member of the Society of North Carolina Archivists.

A Responsibility for Tomorrow: The Role of Archives in the History, Memory, and Identity of Groups Victimized by Genocide and Other Human Rights Abuses
by Nicole T. Pawelski

I have only two photographs of my grandfather from his childhood. In one, he is posing with his younger brother. In the other, he is about 15 or 16 years of age, surrounded by the other boys living in the American Near East Relief Working Boys' Home in Cairo, Egypt. Growing up, I knew that my grandfather was an orphan, an Armenian born in eastern Anatolia, and that something terrible had happened to his family. It explained why this man with the kind eyes rarely spoke more than a handful of words whenever I saw him. He always had this aspect of never being really present; his silence was his armor against the ghosts of the past. But the silence intrigued me. How could I find out what the past held if no one wanted to talk about it? How could I learn anything if my only documentary evidence was two photographs?

Now fast forward a few decades. With the advent of the digital era, researching no longer necessarily requires a trip to another state or another country in order to gain access to information. With the click of button, anyone can search for anything, and you might actually come up with relevant information. In my case, it brought me to the Near East
Relief Digital Museum, which according to their website (http://neareastmuseum.com/about/) "commemorates America's historic response to the Armenian, Assyrian, and Anatolian Greek Genocide by preserving, reconstructing, and sharing the rich history of the relief effort." I researched the collection, and contacted the archivist. Through her, I learned that the seemingly conflicting narratives of my grandpa's childhood (he was rescued by American aid workers in Aleppo, Syria, but the photograph clearly states that he resided in a home in Cairo, Egypt) were probably both accurate. Young children like my grandfather and his brother would have been housed in an orphanage in Aleppo. When they reached their teenage years, they would have been transferred to what was called a "working home," where they would learn a skill that they could practice in adulthood and be matched with an adult Armenian in the local diaspora community for mentoring and apprenticeship. This would explain how my grandfather learned tailoring and how he was eventually sponsored for schooling in Paris at the Sorbonne. At the same time, I was able to contribute the photograph of my grandpa at the working home to the digital museum, as it was not one that they had in their collection.

My experience led me to consider the role of archives and modern technology in the formation of memory and identity in marginalized and displaced communities, many of which have been victims of human rights abuses and even genocide. This topic has (unfortunately) much significance for 21st century researchers. The mass destruction of Christian minorities that took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and the end of World War I was the first, but by no means the last, mass annihilation of an ethnic or religious minority by a totalitarian regime during the 20th century. The term "genocide," coined by the Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, refers to this destruction in a modern context, outside of a colonial framework. According to Peter Balakian, Lemkin's readings about mass killings, including that of the Armenians, and the experiences of his childhood led him to develop this concept, which he wrote about as early as 1933. In 1948, after the near extermination of the Jewish population of Germany and Eastern Europe, he introduced a three-part concept of genocide that the United Nations adopted in a truncated version in 1948 when it
enacted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Though the Convention acknowledges the first two parts, physical existence and biological continuity through procreation, it ignores the third part: spiritual or cultural expression. In fact, the destruction of spiritual or cultural property and heritage would not become a war crime in international courts until 2016.

Balakian believes, however, that Lemkin felt that the destruction of cultural heritage was in fact an essential concept in his understanding of genocide. He first acknowledges Lemkin's upbringing: "Jewish cultural memory in eastern Poland was inseparable from histories of violence. Even in Lemkin's childhood some seventy or eighty Jews had been killed in a pogrom in nearby Bialystok in 1906, and so his coming of age could not fail to be marked by an acute sense of membership in a threatened minority." He goes on to quote Lemkin:

> Cultural genocide can be accomplished predominately in the religious and cultural fields by destroying institutions and objects through which the spiritual life of a human group finds its expression, such as houses of worship, objects of religious cult, schools, treasures of art and culture. By destroying spiritual leadership and institutions, forces of spiritual cohesion within a group are removed and the group starts to disintegrate. This is especially significant for the existence of religious groups. Religion can be destroyed within a group even if the members continue to subsist physically. In other words, the cultural touchstones of a community, such as its libraries, archives, museums, schools, and houses of worship, contain and embody the core of its identity. A community without its cultural heritage is like a body without a soul; the very things that make it valuable and unique no longer exist. Even if members of that community should survive, they have very few options for sharing their values and history with future generations.

This poses distinct problems from an archival perspective. The first is legal in nature and involves the archive as secure repository for authentic, reliable records. How can justice be
secured for victims of human rights abuses when any legal documentation might be destroyed or suspect? And even if the perpetrators go to trial, what role do trial-related documents play in the writing of history and the reconciliation of peoples? The second involves memory and cultural identity: How do victims of genocide and human rights abuses reclaim their lost heritage? How does that heritage change as they attempt to come to terms with what they have suffered and lost? Finally, from a broader perspective, can archives and archivists help prevent human rights abuses and make sure that the voices of the marginalized aren't lost to history? Traditionally archives were kept by those in power in order to secure and protect that power. The role of the archive has changed over time, especially in response to the massive amounts of documentation that exist in the modern world, which makes the archivist's role in appraising, preserving, interpreting, and providing access even more important. Should the archival profession stay fixed in its historically neutral role as keepers of the record, or should it encourage its members to take a more active approach in appraisal, description, and even creation of records where none may exist? Following are some different perspectives on these three questions of law, memory, and the role of the archivist.

The Armenian Genocide is widely considered the first modern genocide. After the end of World War I, when the rest of the world began to hear about the atrocities committed against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire at the behest of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), Britain, France, and Russia called for justice by threatening the crumbling Ottoman Empire with international legal action. Since the Empire had been under martial law since 1909, several military tribunals were formed in Istanbul to determine guilt in the case of the massacre of the Armenians. These trials were complicated by political developments in the Ottoman Empire, with the Ottoman government in Istanbul increasingly at odds with the growing nationalist movement based in Ankara. Public opinion in the country sided more and more with the nationalists. The military tribunals were unpopular, and the proposed Treaty of Sèvres firmly pushed the majority of the Turkish people into the nationalist camp. According to Gabrielle Simm, the Treaty of
Sèvres "required the Turkish Government to hand over persons suspected of war crimes or crimes against a national of the Allied Powers and persons responsible for the massacres for trial by the Allied military tribunals" and "to cede territory in central Anatolia, considered by Turkish nationalists to be the heartland of a future Turkish state, to create the new independent state of Armenia."\(^4\) It is interesting to note that the Treaty would have also required the Turkish government to turn over "all documents and information of every kind, the production of which may be considered necessary to ensure the full knowledge of the incriminating acts, the prosecution of offenders and the just appreciation of responsibility."\(^5\) However, by 1922, the nationalist government in Ankara was running the country, and Treaty of Lausanne "which contained an amnesty for all crimes committed between 1 August 1914 and 20 November 1922 and no mention of an Armenian state" replaced the unpopular Treaty of Sèvres.\(^6\) To complicate matters further, the nationalist Republic of Turkey denied, and continues to deny, that the genocide ever occurred. In addition, Simm notes

Evidence from government officials, Armenian survivors, and government documents sheds light on the record-keeping practices of the Ottoman government and constitutes an archive on which later assessments of historians are based. Issues of the official journal reporting on the trial, including the plan to exterminate the Armenian people, had disappeared by 1922, leaving later researchers to piece together records from newspaper reports.\(^7\)

Was justice served for the Armenian victims of the Genocide and their descendants? That notion is still being debated one hundred years later. The role of archives in this matter is both crucial and complicated. The Republic of Turkey continues to claim that its archives are open, complete, and accessible, yet we know that archives have historically served as keepers of the "official" record of a society and that the "official" record reflects the judgments of those in power. Any research and historical analysis based on these archives, then, can be considered (whether intentionally or not) biased. This tension between politics and history is one of the main subjects of debate in the legal questions related to archives.
and genocide. According to Simm, the term "genocide" itself is "more a legal term than a historical one, designed for the ex post facto judgments of the courtroom rather than the historian's attempt to understand events." This narrowness of the legal perspective can be problematic. Pok Yin Chow asserts that

courts and tribunals are particularly unsatisfactory venues to establish history; not necessarily because of what legal procedures they seek to establish, but for what they tend to dismiss…A full and public disclosure of truth through judicial processes is necessarily partial and fragmentary from a historical point of view.

This has led marginalized groups to seek alternative avenues for writing their own versions of history. The Paris Peoples' Tribunal, which convened in France in 1984, is one example. This was not a state-based court but a civil proceeding requested by three non-governmental organizations in order to investigate whether or not the massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire is considered genocide and what the implications might be. Because the Tribunal took place 80 years after the genocide, there was no question about justice being served to the perpetrators who were long since dead. However, it brought the Armenian question back into public consciousness and allowed alternative documentary evidence (such as foreign diplomatic records, records of humanitarian organizations and the testimonies of their workers, and the oral and written narratives of survivors) to be entered into the public record. As a result, Researchers now have another perspective on what continues to be a contentious topic, both politically and historically.

Sometimes a criminal trial can combine both narratives: those of the political establishment and those of its victims. This is the case with the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The war crimes court based in The Hague spent two decades gathering evidence about human rights violations and genocide during the Balkan Wars of the early 1990s. The documentation amassed is massive and varies in both type and perspective. According to David Kaye:

It is a repository of testimony, analysis, judgment, opinion, dissent, contempt, imagery, and memory.
Its archives hold the stories of those who suffered through the siege of Sarajevo, the massacres around Srebrenica and in Vukovar, the numerous rape camps Bosnian Serb forces set up around Bosnia in the early 1990s, ethnic cleansing in the Krajina, and much more. It gives voice not only to the victims but also to the accused, those who, like Serb President Slobodan Milošević, repeatedly rejected the Tribunal's authority in lengthy disquisitions before the bench. The Tribunal stores the assessments of diplomats, military officers, international analysts, journalists, and others who brought experience and expertise to the ICTY's work. In videos and transcripts stored on terabytes of servers, prosecutors make motions, defense counsel object to them, judges decide them, and a small army of clerks read evidence into the record that may support or refute them.11

While the depth and breadth of documentation (judicial, non-judicial, and administrative) is impressive, it is also a double-edged sword. The first problem relates to appraisal: what will the UN do with all of this material? Kaye quotes the UN as estimating that "the total of its physical records by the end of 2010 will require 3,704 shelf metres and that its electronic records will increase by as much as 8,000 terabytes or more (which will require specific server rooms)."12 Careful and thorough appraisal will be essential to establishing an accessible post-trial archive.

The second problem related to this material is future use. The UN sees it as a source for promoting reconciliation in a post-conflict society, but Kaye believes that this definition is too limited. The Tribunal itself has been divisive in the Balkans and it is unlikely that it would be less so in the secondary use of its archives. Thus, its efficacy in promoting reconciliation between communities is doubtful. At the same time, these multiple perspectives could potentially make the archives a rich source for researchers. Kaye says that such an archive not only has the power of openness and rationality behind it, but it also has the authority of reality. ((The ICTY will be making as much of the records publicly accessible as possible, apart from those subject to individual witness protection and other
legitimate claims to confidentiality, and there is simply no central figure in the Tribunal or broader UN universe with the authority or power to verify one particular narrative over another, apart from (perhaps) the final judgments of the appellate chambers).\textsuperscript{13}

Disparate narratives thus allow for a broader, nuanced view of the events related to the Balkan Wars and their historical contexts.

It is important to keep in mind the distinctions between history, memory, and archives. Chow lays out an example of this in his discussion of memory laws v. archive laws. Archive laws exist to protect documents and records from willful destruction. Memory laws, however, exist to prevent the discussion of disparate narratives. Chow notes that memory laws are legislated in France to criminalize denials of the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide, as well as to officially recognize the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity (while outlawing contrary contentions). Another, more controversial, law requires education programs to teach the 'positive role' that France played in its history of colonialism.\textsuperscript{14}

These memory laws raise important ethical issues: should we criminalize a certain narrative if we do not agree with it? We may find it morally reprehensible to deny the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, or the international slave trade, but does that reprehensibility outweigh the ethical importance of considering all narratives and giving voice to all perspectives? As a future archivist, and the granddaughter of Armenian Genocide survivors, I have to say that it does not. Only by making sure that all voices are heard can we achieve the broadest possible interpretation of truth.

This brings up a related question: if documentary evidence has been destroyed, if cultural heritage has been razed to the ground, if people have been murdered and survivors silenced, then how can the voices of a marginalized group be heard? What happens when you only have two photographs and a legacy of silence? This question can best be understood not in terms of documentary evidence but of memory and identity. How do you make sense of the unspeakable, the
incomprehensible? There are no easy answers, nor is there only one answer. Different groups, even different individuals within the same group, process traumatic experiences in unique ways.

Marie-Aude Baronian sheds light on one perspective in her consideration of the filmmaker Atom Egoyan, a Canadian of Armenian descent:

> mass media and visual technology possess the capacity to make images and to share images available of the past and, in doing so, work to produce 'prosthetic memories' which, as Alison Landsberg has argued, are memories we did not experience as such but to which we can feel intimately connected.\(^{15}\)

Though the children and grandchildren of survivors may not have literally experienced these events, they become part of familial and cultural identity. *Ararat* is Egoyan's best-known work related to the Armenian Genocide. Its use of the "film within the film" technique is very effective. As Baronian says, "The intention of *Ararat* is not to conclude or close down by presenting a singular narrative, but rather to open up and complicate our approach."\(^{16}\)

She says that each character tries to make sense of the genocidal past and heritage by interacting with visual media: there is 'the film within the film' (everyone from filmmaker to actor to the film's producer, driver and consultant is confronted with the denial of the genocide), a painting by Arshile Gorky and an (amateur) video by a young Armenian man. Each visual medium permits, even if artificially and partially, a coming to terms with the traumatic past.\(^{17}\)

Though a work of fiction, the film becomes archival in the sense that it contributes to the cultural heritage of the Armenian people, whose history of suffering and loss has become embedded in their collective memory.

Another approach to memory and trauma comes from the Bosnian community through the work of Hariz Halilovich, who has documented the stories of survivors of the Balkan Wars. These oral histories often begin with some sort of
documentary evidence of a past life: photographs, school certificates, even audio and video footage. One family that he interviewed, a mother and her children now living in Australia, had the horrifying experience of seeing video footage (provided by the ICTY) of an execution on their local news channel and of recognizing their lost husband and father in it. One of the most heartbreaking stories that he recounts is that of Hida, "a mother who lost her son Senad at Srebrenica and who lacks almost any material evidence about her lost son. She uses her imagination to create what Gilliland and Caswell (this volume) call an 'imagined record' to help her cope with her loss." Halilovich visited Hida a number of times; eventually the Missing Persons' Institute identified a femur and a piece of cranium as belonging to her son. Hida adapted what she learned from this forensic evidence to construct her own story about his final moments: They found him in a paddock, not far from Srebrenica [...] He must have got lost as he didn’t know the area. His body was not in a mass grave [...] He didn’t get into their [Serb] hands alive. No, he didn’t. He was hit while trying to escape. Maybe it was shrapnel? Fifteen years of rain and snow moved away his bones.

In interpreting this story, Halilovich states: "By selectively blurring facts with fiction, and infusing them with sadness, affection and intimacy, Hida is effectively creating an alternative, a more humane and more bearable, narrative about what might have happened to her Senad. In that regard, she does not differ from other archivists involved in (re) creating historical narratives." In this case, Hida (as archivist) is not interested as much in creating historical accuracy as in creating a memory of her son that she can hold with the least amount of pain possible in such circumstances. It will not bring back Senad, but it will allow her to continue to live with his absence.

If the films of Egoyan can be considered cultural memory, and the oral narratives collected by Halilovich personal memory, then the work of South African archivist Verne Harris embodies both. In his article "Antonyms of our Remembering," Harris highlights some of the problems that face human rights archives and archivists within the framework of transitional justice. He quotes the legal scholar
Adam Sitze who identifies the "need by particular global interests to have experts who can claim a social scientific ability to conjure new democratic life from the corpses of authoritarian polities without giving any space to revolutionary transformation." This discourages the difficult work of reconciliation by replacing it with archives of memory work that, in their remembering, allow forgetting. He talks about the struggle of "those engaged in post-conflict and post-oppression memory work" who "wrestle with structures of power resistant to meaningful societal transformation, with discourses that feel worn-out if not oppressive, and with a weariness at personal levels that is the product of long periods of exposure to pain and to stress."

It is within this context that I would like to consider the role of archives and archivists as they relate to human rights abuses, reconciliation, memory work, and marginalized communities.

Michelle Caswell uses the context of community archives to frame these issues. She presents a flexible framework based on community archives discourses that can be adapted for any situation. As she notes,

Different types of communities may experience a variety of issues that will necessitate divergent and creative solutions; what works to document police brutality against a transgender community in Los Angeles, for example, may or may not work for survivors of state-sponsored violence in Syria, and vice versa.

Community archives tend to be less rigid about the types of material that they collect. This brings both material and cultural diversity to collections, as "openness to multiple formats reflects an attention to cultural difference that many mainstream repositories have historically ignored; by recognizing oral, visual, and kinetic ways of knowing, community archives reflect the culture, epistemologies, and values of their communities." This leads into archival activism, for Caswell believes in the importance of breaking "the traditional (but admittedly eroding) archival boundary between records creator and archivist by actively documenting…communities through oral history, photography, and video projects." One can see parallels with the ICTY archive, which allows the narratives of
victims to stand side-by-side with the testimony of perpetrators. But ultimately archival activism goes further: "the creation of community archives can be seen as a form of political protest in that it is an attempt to seize the means by which history is written and correct or amend dominant stories about the past." Finally, reflexivity refers to self-reflection. As quoted by Harris above, memory work can be exhausting and disheartening. It is hard work, heavy work. Archivists in this environment must be aware of the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives that make up the archive and the community and must be willing to engage in difficult dialogue and come up with creative solutions to problems that occur. Archives in this framework are not static but continually evolving institutions.

Stacy Wood, Kathy Carbone, Marika Cifor, Anne Gilliland, and Ricardo Punzalan approach the role of archives and archivists as they relate to human rights abuses, reconciliation, memory work, and marginalized communities within the context of traditional archival principles, such as respect des fonds, and practices, specifically description. They acknowledge that 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." They present as a case study the ethnographic photographs of the Philippines taken by Dean C. Worcester in the early 20th century. Worcester was an American member of the Insular Government, a provisional colonial government in the Philippines. The dissemination of his collection to various institutions in the United States and Western Europe, and the conflicting attributions of creation and ownership therein, underscore the problem with traditional ideas of provenance and description. First, no one knows whether Worcester himself took all of the photographs; one source cites that he demanded that those beneath him in the chain of command turn over their photographs to him. He himself bequeathed his images in his possession to several institutions, while his children, collectors of his images, and one of his colleagues all had images in their possession, and each of them distributed the images to different places with different attributions. And
this doesn't even take into account the nameless native Filipinos who are the subjects of the photographs. As Wood et al. conclude:

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.  

To summarize, the role of archives in the context of memory and identity in marginalized communities, the documentation of and prevention of human rights abuses, and international law is complex and varied, but all are crucial in our global society. Randall Jimerson underscores its importance in a single phrase: "A Responsibility for Tomorrow." He goes on to say, "the weight of the archivist's responsibility surely lies more with the future than with the past. It is the promise of future usefulness that justifies the archival enterprise." The world's archives are privileged to hold the stories, narratives, records, documents, knowledge, opinions, and ephemera of the past; the archivists that work with them have the power to shape the future. Appraising and describing, advocating and facilitating, and providing access and education can help ensure that every story is told, and every voice is heard.

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NOTES
3. Ibid, 60.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, 256.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid, 265.
12. Ibid, 388.
17. Ibid.
19. Ibid, 86.
21. Ibid.
25. Ibid, 313.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, 314.
28. Ibid.
32. Ibid.