

# Archives under Siege: A Concept and A Case in Point

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**Abstract:** There is no conceptual framework or archival literature addressing archives impacted by political violence and the special archival practices they need and the broader issues they raise. This article proposes the concept of ‘archives under siege’ as a possible framework to address these issues and discusses the author’s processing of Holocaust impacted archives of the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria, as an example.

## Introduction

I recently tried to explain to a friend who works as a physical therapist why I was writing this article. The article makes an argument for a new archival subfield to be called ‘archives under siege’ and includes a case study. I then realized that I could draw a useful analogy between our two professions. It is similar to a physical therapist working with veterans or civilians injured in a war, I suggested to him, in that I and other archivists deal with the archival debris of political violence. In contrast to his field, however, there had been no advice available professionally when I had worked with such records. And just as he – as he had explained to me - had to take into account stress, climate, nutrition, experiences and mental processes (i.e. exogenous factors) in figuring out tension and stretch of muscles when treating patients, archivists have to take into account context when processing and describing archival debris. An archives damaged by a hurricane might share certain features with an archives partially destroyed, displaced, or looted due to political violence. A fragment is a fragment, after all. But they will differ in that human agency had destroyed or distorted the records’ community/record creator in particular ways and those will continue to affect and distort the records, their content, meaning(s), and use, and thus our archival practices.

At the start of the project, I knew of no archival literature or conferences that conceptualized context dependent processing and description, in general, and in the context of political violence directed against a records community/its archives, in particular, - and that brought their discussions always back to processing practicalities, particulars and commonalities, so as to offer practical advice. Now, a few years later and with more time for introspection and research, I still do not see our profession addressing these issues explicitly. There are forays in event-based (Holocaust-impacted archives) or content-based fields (human rights archives) and implicitly, tangentially in the recent dialogue on ‘speed processing.’ But there is no overarching conceptual framework that pulls together fragmented efforts, there is no common language or even term to describe the archives and the archival issues they raise, and there are no historical or present day case studies whose analysis also might or – as my experiences would lead me to believe – will challenge and change archival theory and praxis.

In this context, the paper has two purposes. By introducing the concept of ‘archives under siege’ I want to start a discussion of whether it could come to define a broader field that would be useful and instructive. And by offering a particular case study based on my work with Holocaust impacted/related records and efforts to rebuild the Jewish Community archives of Vienna, I want to begin to outline the common ground found in particular incidences of violence and oppression across history and the archival problems and solutions to be elaborated thereupon.

## Literature Review

The question is always how to focus on a few relevant strands of archival literature and endeavors, tease apart their useful aspects (while remaining wary of their limitations), and combine them into new insights that bring us a step forward, be it in theory or praxis. Archives have long been targeted, destroyed, and pillaged, and this has been neither rare nor purely incidental to war, genocide, colonialism or prolonged human rights crises.<sup>1</sup> The two archival fields that I want to focus on in my discussion -- the long-standing field of Holocaust impacted/related archives and the new field of human rights archives -- are dealing with some archival aspects caused by political violence. But archivists are not necessarily talking to each other, they do not speak to the practical aspects (i.e. archival processing) in literature and conferences, and they thus fail to recognize features common to both fields and lessons they could draw from that.

The field of Holocaust impacted/related archives offers us three useful insights here. (1) It is premised on the significance and catastrophic impact that exogenous factors can have on record creators, archives, and archival work (i.e. the National Socialist regime and the Holocaust). (2) It has accumulated seven decades in practical archival experiences, experiences which barely surface in the professional literature, however. (3) And these experiences demonstrated the long-term consequences of the Holocaust on communities, archives, and archival work. Yet, the field remained self-referential: the definition of the Holocaust as unique historical process long precluded seeing commonalities to other genocides, for example, which is why combined Holocaust and Genocide Studies only emerged relatively recently, whereas the tremendously important, almost overwhelming archival work carried out remained largely invisible in the literature of the Holocaust and the archival profession overall.<sup>2</sup> Over the decades we have seen factual accounts of the destruction, rescue or salvaging of Jewish archives; historians and art historians' publications regarding displaced archives after similar literature on looted art; and most recently there have been a few archives conferences. The *First International Shoah Archivist Working Forum* assembled mostly Jewish community archivists or Shoah archivists working for Jewish institutions, and a number of German conferences have begun to analyze the fate of Jewish and other archives under the National Socialist regime. While the debate has broadened to the fate of other archives under National Socialism, it has remained largely restricted to the above archival topics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Diego de Landa (1524–1579) initiated an auto de fé in Yucatan in 1562 burning almost all existing Mayan codices (bound manuscripts or books) and then proceeded to write what became the authoritative, colonialist text on Mayan language, culture, and religion particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán, ca 1566*). Documents related to the slave trade and slavery in Benin were 'scattered and destroyed by some of the colonial powers on the eve of independence,' in UNESCO, *The Slave Trade Archives Project: Final Report*, (Paris: 2005); see here also the resolution regarding archives of colonization adopted by the Annual Meeting, ICA, Curaçao, November 2006. Throughout the last two centuries, many Polish archives were partially destroyed or stolen; see Daria Nalecz, Władysław Stepniak: *Legal, Political and Professional Aspects of Displaced Archives*, ICA Congress 2004. The International Archives for the Women's Movement was first taken by the NS, then by the Red Army, and some of the material was returned only in 2003, in Francisca de Haan, A 'Truly International' Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV, now IIAV): From its Foundation in Amsterdam in 1935 to the Return of its Looted Archives in 2003, *Journal of Women's History*, 16.4 (2004) 148–172. National Socialists programmatically destroyed, shut down, and took over Jewish and other archives, see here the proceedings of the [75<sup>th</sup> German Archival Congress 2005] *Das Deutsche Archivwesen und der Nationalsozialismus: 75. Deutscher Archivtag 2005 in Stuttgart*, (Klartext Verlag: Essen 2007). For more recent examples, see the diary blog of the director of the Iraq National Library and Archives, <http://www.bl.uk/iraqdiary05.html>, as well as the partial and deliberate destruction of the National Archives and manuscript collections of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, in: Sanja Zgonjanin, The Prosecution of War Crimes for the Destruction of Libraries and Archives during Times of Armed Conflict, *Libraries & Culture*, vol. 40, no. 2, (2005), pp. 128-144.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the founding of the Drew University Center for Holocaust/Genocide Study (1992), The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota (1997), or the Dutch Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (2002).

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Honigsmann, Die Akten des Exils: Betrachtungen zu den mehr als hundertjährigen Bemühungen um die Inventarisierung von Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, *Jüdisches Archivwesen. Kolloquium aus Anlass des 100. Jahrestags der Gründung des Gesamtarchivs der deutschen Juden* (2005); see [http://www.claimscon.org/archivist\\_forum/index.asp](http://www.claimscon.org/archivist_forum/index.asp) for material on the First International Shoah Archivist Working Forum, and subsequent material. For conferences and proceedings, see: *Das Deutsche Archivwesen und der Nationalsozialismus*

Adding to these insights and experiences, the new field of Human Rights Archives (1) expands our view to a wide array of situations of political violence across the globe; (2) focuses our attention on contemporary or recent human rights violations (and not historical events);<sup>4</sup> and (3) reinvigorates the idea of solidarity among archivists. Over the last ten, twelve years, conversations, a few conferences, publications, and various efforts culminated in formally establishing the ICA *Working Group on Archives and Human Rights* in fall of 2008. Even as the spring 2008 symposium *Human Rights Archives and Documentation: Transforming Ideas into Practice* defined ‘practice’ as its ultimate goal and was first in doing so, debates of archival practice were limited to privacy, access rights, preservation, and collecting issues. Being defined – as a field – by the content of records (i.e., documenting human rights violations) and therefore by an interest in the above kinds of issues, cannot completely explain, however, why context dependent processing and actual work experiences have not been brought up. Military records as well as archives of churches and organizations of the disappeared holding records of human rights violations, for example, have been targeted, destroyed, and plundered, and special archival practices are needed to re/process the papers. Moreover, in its slightly ambiguous definition – does ‘archives and human rights’ not also refer to archives threatened during human rights crises? – the field has attracted archivists involved or interested in dealing with the archival debris of such crises.<sup>5</sup>

We, thus, have two fields that deal with externally and human induced archival emergencies and that never recognized or chose to emphasize their commonalities. What creates this blind spot? Among other factors, stringent or fuzzy definitions of subject matter erect conceptual obstacles – which a concept of ‘archives under siege’ will hopefully address - whereas the invisibility of archival practices creates practical obstacles to recognizing commonalities across respective communities and archives. And it’s this second aspect that interests me here which, as I understand it, is rooted in two commonly held suppositions and an erroneous understanding of objectivity. If they hold true, our work is indeed not worthy of introspection and analysis. First, archivists are deemed invisible, since ‘objective,’ purveyors of records; they do not actively intervene in or influence context and content of records. This assertion is maintained despite a growing literature to the contrary, in the archival sciences and more broadly in the

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(2007); the one publication addressing at least archival access issues is by Hans Coppi, Winfried Meyer, and Iris Schwarz, *Elektronische Erschliessung archivalischer Quellen in Gedenkstätten: Beiträge des internationalen Workshops in der Gedenkstätte und dem Museum Sachsenhausen am 23./24. März 2001*, (German Book Book: Münster 2002); Germany’s Archives School at Marburg organized a first conference on *Jewish Archives and Archival Issues* (Kolloquium Jüdisches Archivwesen zugleich 10. Archivwissenschaftliches Kolloquium), <http://www.archivschule.de/content/321.html>. For an excellent bibliography on displaced archives, see the United States National Archives website: <http://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/bibliographies/archives-and-records.html>.

<sup>4</sup> The Holocaust was a major impetus for adopting the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in December 1948.

<sup>5</sup> The best overview of the development of the field has been published recently on the ICA website and is currently only available in Spanish: Antonio González Quintana, *Políticas Archivísticas para la Protección de los Derechos Humanos* (ICA: Paris 2008). The working group on Archives and Human Rights of ICA was established in 2003 at the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) in Cape Town, South Africa; see also Csaba Szilagyi et al., *Human Rights, Reference Information Papers 9*, (Open Society Archives: 2002). CHRDR Conference, *Human Rights Archives and Documentation: Meeting the Needs of Research, Teaching, Advocacy and Social Justice*, October 2007 (Center for Human Rights Documentation & Research, Columbia University Libraries, Co-sponsored by CRL/GRN); Peterson, Trudy Huskamp, *Final Acts: A Guide to Preserving the Records of the Truth Commissions* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press: Washington, D. C. 2005). Furthermore: Taller “Archivos y Derechos Humanos: actualidad y perspectivas,” *Memoria Abierta*, Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, 2007, [http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/encuentro\\_archivos/presentacion.php](http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/encuentro_archivos/presentacion.php); Justice et Droits de L’Homme, Colloque international organisé par l’Association française d’histoire de la Justice, l’Association des Archivistes Français et la Conseil International des Archives, 2006; ICBS, Adami, Tom A. and Martha Hunt, *Genocidal Archives: The African Context – Genocide in Rwanda*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, Vol. 26, No. 1, April 2005, 105-121; and the HRADP, Human Rights Archives and Documentation Project, The Global Resource Network, Center for Research Libraries, which also limits its attention to record content and their investigations.

history/sociology of science.<sup>6</sup> Second, processing and descriptive practices are considered unaffected by context and content of records (see e.g., general processing standards).<sup>7</sup> This assertion is partially invalidated, in recent literature on processing ‘normal’ records. Green and Meissner’s influential article *More Product, Less Process* (2005) refocused our attention on processing by documenting a long standing archival practice of applying different processing detail to different kinds of collections and theirs and other publications eloquently argued for a conscious approach in this regard.<sup>8</sup> Implicit to ‘speed’ processing is an understanding that (some) processing practices vary with record content and use.

### **The Concept of ‘Archives under Siege’**

Of course, my concern here is not with the ‘archives as normal’ practice but rather with the exceptional archival emergency – occurring frequently - and archival practices needed to address it. As we have seen from the literature overview, our fragmented subfields and efforts would benefit from an overall concept and field that (1) is flexible enough to cover cases throughout history and across geography, not being constrained by ideological blinders; (2) is stringent enough to describe a subset of archival situations which were brought about by political violence directed against a community and its archives and which are sufficiently like each other and sufficiently different from the rest of the field to merit a distinct framework; and (3) speaks to their particularities (e.g., the long-term impact of exogenous factors, specific records conditions, context dependent processing practices, or the archivist as explicit author), encourages solidarity among archivists, and provides practical guidelines next to conceptual or even theoretical insights that could be valuable for the archival field at large. Finding an appropriate term and pinning down and agreeing on the essence of these archives is always difficult (as indicated by the proliferation of terms and subfields).<sup>9</sup> The following is therefore a proposal to be discussed: a concept of ‘archives under siege’ to demarcate the field, and its definition and processing commonalities rooted as these are in particular record creator and record conditions and as fleshed out by a case study.

‘Siege’ from the French ‘siegier – to seat, to settle’ and from the Latin ‘sedere - to sit’ describes either a military/non-military blockade to achieve surrender or, more generally, persistent or serious attacks. As a phrase, ‘archives under siege’ does not imply a time or context specific phenomenon; it insinuates an

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<sup>6</sup> Berndt Fredriksson, Postmodernistic Archival Science – Rethinking the Methodology of a Science, *Archival Science*: 3 (2003): 177-197; Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory, *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance, *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 171-185; Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 14–36. For history/sociology of science, see: Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press – Science and Its Conceptual Foundation Series, Chicago: 1994), Andrew Pickering, ed., *Science as Practice and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1992), and Barry Barnes, *Interests and the Growth of Knowledge* (Routledge, London: 1977). There is no sociology of archives or history of science as regards archives. Given the lack of primary sources regarding historical archival work, it is questionable whether there ever will be a respective history of science.

<sup>7</sup> For a few articles describing traditional, standardized US archival practices see for instance, Fredric M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (SAA, 1990); Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Archival Arrangement – Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," *American Archivist* 27(January 1964): 21–41; David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21(Winter 1985-86): 14–27; Max. J. Evans, "Authority Control: An Alternative to the Record Group Concept," *American Archivist* 49(Summer 1986): 249–261; Michael J. Fox, "Descriptive Cataloging for Archival Materials," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 11(1990): 17–34; Steven L. Hensen, "'NISTF II' and EAD: The Evolution of Archival Description," *American Archivist* 60 (Summer 1997): 84–296; ICA/DDS (1996) and ISAAR (CPF), second ed. (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing, *American Archivist* 68. 2 (2005): 208–263; Christine Weideman, Accessioning as Processing, *American Archivist* 69.2 (2006): 274–283; McCrea, Donna E., Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana, *American Archivist* 69: 2 (2006): 284–290.

<sup>9</sup> Terms in use are displaced archives, plundered archives, looted archives, human rights and Holocaust impacted/related archives, threatened archives, destroyed archives, war and archives, genocidal archives, archives of colonization, and slave trade archives among others.

intentionally harmful external agency, and conjures up the long-term. Any siege will be detrimental to the besieged entity to some degree but, in this analogy, it will not be completely successful as long as there is any archival debris left. Archives under siege, then, are the residues of former archives, collections, and records shaped as these are through political violence, its processes as well as its consequences. The cataclysmic discontinuity in the community (record creator) and a peculiar crisis mode, moreover, continue to afflict both, community and archives, far beyond the originating events.

This history has practical implications for surviving records. Provenance, original order, and original titles will be and probably will remain unclear. Records will be complex, 'non-conforming,' rare, fragmented, in abysmal condition, and possibly scattered across national and international locations. Collecting activities will have ceased for a long period of time. The occasional rescue effort will have salvaged records over available collection documentation and access tools, which are still not considered records of primary value.<sup>10</sup> At the very best, surviving documentation will be fragmentary leaving processing archivists with inadequate information about previous record group systems, archival work, rights to and donations of records, and with little or no information about previous archivists whose institutional memory or publications could be invaluable in reprocessing/rebuilding the archives.

Processing archives under siege will thus be complex whether it concerns appraisal, arrangement, or description and preservation. Solutions will have to be innovative and the work requires experienced and well-trained archivists, ideally, who are confident enough professionally to dare break with archival traditions when needed. In-depth subject knowledge will be essential to analyze and describe oppressive practices and expose entrenched stereotypical views and language usages that are evident in records and contributed to the events in the first place. Depending on the case, the archivist might have a moral commitment or even obligation to survivors, victims, relatives, and the community under siege resulting in particular processing, descriptive, access, and preservation efforts. To give just two examples: (1) it is quite likely that all documents/records will be kept because their so-called secondary and symbolic values become more significant over time. Appraisal is not an option; (2) description and access tools might have to allow for easy searches *for* victims, survivors, and perpetrators next to mundane archival searches for information *about* individuals, institutions, and the everyday conundrums of history. With political violence having dislocated, reduced or destroyed the 'natural' local archival user community, descriptive practices ought to be oriented toward international users and non-experts (i.e., non-members of the original community). And the community is unlikely to have a professional archives or enough resources over the short and long term to guarantee normal archival working conditions. All this – the volatile past, missing collection documentation, unusual processing challenges and decisions taken amidst a context of wont – creates a mandate for maintaining extensive collection and processing documentation.

To see how both, concept and processing challenges, apply let us look at a historical community and archives under siege: the case of the Jewish Community of Vienna and its archives.

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<sup>10</sup> In a 1994 bomb attack against the Jewish community group, Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, in Buenos Aires 85 people were killed including archives and library staff. Archival documents were scattered by the blast and most indices, cataloging and finding aid tools destroyed. With institutional memory and staff largely gone, the USHMM has been supporting efforts to reprocess archival records.

## A Community and Archives under Siege: The Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria (IKG)<sup>11</sup>

Centuries of settlement, persecution, and expulsion slowly gave way to enlightened legislation in the late 1700s and, consequently, the tiny Jewish community of Vienna began to flourish. One of the rights gained in 1848 was the right to establish a central community organization, the IKG, to represent all Viennese Jews and their religious groups, and it soon provided ever more social and educational services and subsidized most Jewish associations. Quickly, one of Europe's largest and most successful communities emerged given the good work of the IKG and the *relatively* benign Jewish policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>12</sup> By 1937, IKG's 170,000 members constituted over 10% of Vienna's population. During the Holocaust, a third of Austrian Jews were assassinated (as defined by Nuremberg Race Laws and including non-citizens); two thirds emigrated or survived. By April 1945, only 2.7% of Austrian Jews still lived in the country. By 2009, about 7,000 Jews were members of the IKG, barely 0.5% of Vienna's population.

To document rights and privileges that were routinely negated, the temporary Jewish Council of Representatives (pre-IKG) voted to establish an archives of sorts already in 1816, which however only came to resemble an institutional archives around 1840.<sup>13</sup> Its holdings stretched back into the 1600s but continuous record keeping started in the 1840s. At first, 'archivists' were little more than part-time secretaries (working fulltime e.g., in the sheep wool trade), then full-time secretaries (or legal scribes) and eventually academics (mostly historians) working part-time in the library. Over the years, professional archival principles were applied inconsistently depending on staff and resources but arrangement, description and storage conditions had become standardized by the 1930s. Efforts to establish a Central Jewish Archives of Austria pre-dated Germany's Central Jewish Archives (1905) but quickly petered out, given the national complexities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, eventually, the geopolitics after 1918 when the IKG came to represent about 90% of Austrian Jews and its archives came to function akin to a central Jewish archives. Fairly unique in Europe, the IKG archives offered a rare *inside* perspective about internal and external affairs, e.g., Anti-Semitism.

Having annexed Austria in March 1938, the National Socialists (NS) shut down the archives (and temporarily the IKG), and Adolf Eichmann forced the IKG to renounce its title to its archives and library

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<sup>11</sup> The author worked as Holocaust restitution historian and archivist for the IKG and its Holocaust Victims' Information and Support Center from 2002-2004. She designed a new IKG archival framework and infrastructure and processed, organized and supervised the microfilming of the newly found records. Together with two colleagues, she inventoried IKG historical archival holdings deposited in Jerusalem (about 350 linear meters) and prepared the microfilming of their NS records by the USHMM as well as the microfilming of historical registry material by the Genealogical Society of Utah. Over the last four years, the author has presented and published about her work and research with Vienna Jewish Community records in Europe and in the United States. See here for example: '1816-1938 - 2008: The Vienna Jewish Community Archives', SAA 2008 Research Forum: Foundations and Innovations, SAA 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 2008; *Continuity and Change: Record Creators and Record Values*, Proceedings for the ICA-SUV, Annual Conference: Shared Concerns and Responsibility for University Records and Archives, Reykjavik, Iceland, 2006; *Adapting Archival Practices to the Human Rights Mission of Records: Challenges in Re-Constructing the Historical Archives of the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG), Austria*, Archival History Roundtable, Joint Annual Meeting of NAGARA, COSA, and SAA, Washington DC. 2006; *Rediscovered Historical Records of the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG), Austria*, British Association of Jewish Studies Annual Conference, University of Cambridge, Cambridge UK, 2006, as well as Belovari, *Construction of the IKG Archives Framework and its Instructional Manual (an internal archives work report, June 2002–June 2004)*, 140 pages, available at the IKG, the USHMM, and CAHJP.

<sup>12</sup> In 1800, about 1,200 Jews lived in Vienna, i.e. 0.5% of its population. By 1856, there were 15,600 and by 1900, 147,000 Jews constituted 8.7% of Vienna's population, an almost 20-fold proportional increase over a century. For demographics see the *IKG Tätigkeitsbericht 1933–36*, Matrikenamt, table II: 110–111; *Statistisches Handbuch für den Bundesstaat Österreich XV* Jahrgang, Table 7: 8 (Statistisches Jahrbuch für Österreich 1938).

<sup>13</sup> No in-depth history exists about the history of the IKG archives; see upcoming article by author in *Libraries & Cultural Record*. Also: Avshalom Hodik, Das Archiv der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien, Jerusalem - Vienna July 1977, *Archiv der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien - Aktenverzeichnis Signatur A / W* (CAHJP).

four months later. The archives has never reopened.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately to be shipped to Berlin for one of the nefarious NS museum and history projects, the archives was in fact forgotten and its precise fate remains unknown to this day. Of course, after May 1945, the IKG faced enormous challenges: resurrecting and maintaining an archives could not be a priority.<sup>15</sup> Everyone just assumed that salvaged archival material was deposited at the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, in the 1950s and 1960s - that is until records were recently discovered in Vienna. How these approx. one million pages ended up in various locations in the city and in bad condition, is still unknown. Apparently, record units had been torn apart somewhat randomly during and after the war and un-inventoried documents were deposited in unsupervised locations and soon forgotten. Records and artefacts disappeared; de-accessioning / destruction was not documented.<sup>16</sup> Still and in spite of it all: IKG records in Vienna and Israel represent the largest surviving European Jewish community archives and the most extent collection from the NS period.<sup>17</sup>

What, then, were some of the appraisal, arrangement, description, and resource problems I encountered when processing these newly discovered records – exacerbated as these difficulties were by limited time, resources, a tight schedule, and a community still haunted by the consequences of the Holocaust?<sup>18</sup> By the way: the history of the IKG archives was largely unknown to me at the time.

### 1. Appraisal

There is an incestuous relationship between political violence and record value(s). The worse the tremors and reverberations of violence, the more records are wrested from their original context and functions, a relationship that appears to be strengthening with the passing of time. Consequently, pages and fragments turn iconic. They represent more than their original content or function. Intent on obliterating every member of a group, the genocide itself recedes into history; as vivid memories pale, paper traces of targeted individuals begin to be understood as offering solace and commemoration to afflicted communities. To bear testimony, to commemorate, and to evoke become duties whose conduits are objects, records – which, after all, are the historical legacies of people’s actions and experiences.

Such records are understood as condensing “complex phenomena and as representing history in exemplary form.”<sup>19</sup> They become de-contextualized objects standing in for the larger context of genocide with people presuming that they know what was being evoked or commemorated and that the individual

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<sup>14</sup> Hodik (1977), p. 6. As the last pre-Holocaust IKG archivist, Dr. Moses was the only one with access to genealogical registry and archival material until 1943, having to answer ‘race’ and history inquiries by individuals and various NS offices. Dr. Leopold Moses and his wife were deported to Auschwitz in December 1943 where they died in 1944.

<sup>15</sup> The challenges faced by the IKG in post-war Vienna were enormous and it is understandable that decision makers thought they best deposit papers at the Central Archives of the History of Jewish People (CAHJP) in Jerusalem. At the time, record transfer to Israel was also to demonstrate confidence in the newly founded state, and reflected doubts that the tiny IKG would persist. For a history of the CAHJP and its collecting policies, see Denise Rein, Die Bestände der ehemaligen jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands in den "Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People" in Jerusalem, *Der Archivar*, 55: 4 (2002): 318–327. In the years since WWII, the IKG Vienna has not had an archives physically or functionally, and records are scattered across localities and continents. Since the late 1990s, IKG ongoing administrative records are stored at a depot; registry records are at IKG's registry department; a few documents and plans were deposited at the Jewish Museum in 1993.

<sup>16</sup> IKG records, which had become wet while in storage in Vienna, were discarded at CAHJP without documenting the process.

<sup>17</sup> With USHMM support, records in Vienna and Israel were microfilmed and are now available on microfilm in Austria, Israel, and the US. Marjorie Backmann, A Nation’s Lost Holocaust History, Now on Display, *New York Times*, June 2, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/02/arts/design/02holo.html?pagewanted=1>. See also: Honigmann (2005) and Ezechiel Zivier, Eine archivalische Informationsreise, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 44 (1905): 209–254.

<sup>18</sup> Belovari (2004).

<sup>19</sup> For Cornelia Brink, iconic Holocaust photographs have a reality as symbols based on “the significance attached to them by individuals or groups.” Brink, Cornelia, *Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps*, p. 8 (online version), *History and Memory*, 12:1 (2000): 135–150.

item is equal to the task at hand.<sup>20</sup> The original task of conveying specific knowledge pales in comparison. It is not that these records have always had symbolic meanings. Yizkor or memorial books, deportation lists, emigration cards, photographs etc had original administrative or secondary functions (e.g. to assist in indictments, to achieve restitution, or to enable research). As the records' functional relationship to their community (and thus their primary value) was eviscerated by the Holocaust, new secondary values emerged. During WWII, pre-1938 financial administrative records were used to expropriate. After the war, original deportation lists were used to locate survivors, identify victims, or assist in indictments and restitution. By now though, these and even records created long before or after the war – e.g., a 19<sup>th</sup> century drawing of a synagogue, a photograph of a 1928 Jewish kindergarten, and post-WWII victim and restitution files – are becoming symbols, transmitters of perceived duties. Although not discussed in the archival and Holocaust related literature, that metamorphosis affects all areas of archival work.<sup>21</sup>

It makes appraisal a moot issue, for instance. All records, even fragments, will be kept. As a slow and barely noticed transformation, it might come to even invalidate former appraisal decisions. For example: almost 40 years ago, an IKG archivist weeded individual financial receipts from IKG records in Israel in accordance with archival standards: cumulative financial balance sheets existed.<sup>22</sup> By 2004, I would not even contemplate destroying like receipts. Rare and iconic records will certainly also receive special care during processing – I'd pick up name fragments with tweezers to reassemble and preserve the identity of a victim or survivor. Description might focus on contextualizing items that are increasingly being used in a de-contextualized manner.<sup>23</sup> And, we discussed our moral obligation to return documents – photocopies lack the aura of the original – which, while we ultimately rejected this option, is an option worth raising.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Arrangement

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<sup>20</sup> The IKG loaned a volume of housing lists (indicating apartment assignments and subsequent deportations) for an evocative exhibit at the Freud Museum in Vienna; a disintegrating card index cabinet was exhibited evocatively by the Jewish Museum of Vienna.

<sup>21</sup> See here the important article by James O'Toole, 'The Symbolic Significance of Archives,' *The American Archivist*, v. 56 (Spring '93) pp. 234–55 in which he discusses how symbolic meaning can become ascribed over time. There is little discussion of this value shift for Holocaust objects in the literature and there is none concerning archival records. A handful of historians describe a change toward symbolic or iconic meanings when discussing Holocaust oral interviews, biographies or photographs; see Michael Rothberg, and Jared Stark, *After the Witness: A Report from the Twentieth Anniversary Conference of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale*, *History and Memory*, 15: 1 (2003): 85–96; Zachary Braitermann, *Against Holocaust-Sublime: Naïve Reference and the Generation of Memory*, *History and Memory*, 12: 2 (2001): 7–28. At the 2006 SAA Conference, an associate professor of English, Rosemary Horowitz, discussed the shift for Yizkor books but restricted her discussion to collection development and treatment of books; Rosemary Horowitz, *Yizkor Books, Weblogs and Ethnic Cleansing: Grassroots Documentation and New Technologies*, DC 2006: Joint Annual Meeting of NAGARA, COSA, and SAA, and correspondence with author.

<sup>22</sup> Processing NS related documents illustrated what Ezechiel Zivier (1905) had argued in *1905*: individual financial receipts are among the most carefully kept records and offer rare information about cultural, social, political and economic interactions. NS receipts include information about individual Holocaust victims who left no other archival traces, e.g., a receipt documenting the person having handed in winter coats, skis, or underwear during collection drives for 'Aryans.' Another example of appraising Holocaust related records based solely on their evidential function concerned records at the archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). A previous appraisal decision was to document AJDC organizing emigration during WWII, i.e. the primary value of records, by keeping office correspondence but discarding 'irrelevant' material such as attached ship lists. The secondary value of records was ignored (e.g., lists which included names, possible or actual emigration destinations, dates, fees, etc) and survivors cannot be tracked or documented; discovered by author while searching for Holocaust survivors in 1997/98.

<sup>23</sup> See John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (Pantheon Books, New York: 1982), for a discussion of de-contextualized and consciously contextualized uses of photographs.

<sup>24</sup> Holocaust survivors asked the author in her function as restitution historian to locate any paper containing signatures of parents killed – such material traces have come to embody individual lives. For the notion of aura, see also: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).



Any arrangement system has to take into account the history of the record creator. IKG's institutional continuity was violently interrupted; its functions distorted; and although related and legal heirs to each other, each of the three IKG entities had a distinct focus, size, identity, organizational structure, as well as tasks and taskmasters. As we have seen above, the IKG before 1938 accumulated an unusual mix of institutional and individual records (e.g., petitions for subsidies and registry documents). The NS closed down the IKG in March 1938, reopened it as a corporate body under public law shortly thereafter, and forced it - as a pseudo-NS entity - to administer, organize, and 'dispense' of Jewish assets, associations, and individuals (emigration and deportation). Records reflect this. In late 1942, the IKG was dissolved into an association, the 'Council of Elders of Jews,' which managed the handful of buildings and Jews left in the city. Reestablished in May 1945, the IKG then struggled to care for its miniscule community in the aftermath of a Holocaust and its culture - responsible as it was for returning and newly settled Jews, for approx. 140,000 survivors abroad, and for obtaining indictments, compensation, as well as restitution (e.g., real estate restitution and victim files).<sup>25</sup>

The relative irrelevance of provenance, original order and original title further complicated decisions about arrangement. IKG records were in disarray: context/original order at the point of discovery had been destroyed and was unknown at the point of record creation. The systematic persecution had resulted in flexible and arbitrarily changing administrative IKG units and personnel, a process that is still not well understood. This meant that salvaged records had to be laid out page by page based on similarities/differences in appearance as well as subject matter for which a large workspace became essential (60 or 70 piles per presorted topic, e.g., social welfare). By studying the papers carefully, affinities became apparent in terms of administrative numerical systems, signatures, stamps, handwriting, type of paper, color, or subject matter, for instance. Where possible, I separated documents by administrative unit or topic - to be able to retrace my steps, I added them at a right angle to previous pages in a pile. I reprocessed each pile at least twice to verify connections, to find further subgroups, or to merge piles. Only then did I assign time period and record group system codes. Outliers were kept and dealt with separately.

To address these two difficulties and international non-expert users, our descriptive and bilingual record group system divides IKG records into three time periods and three archives: before, during, and after NS rule (indicated by Roman numerals). Each record unit is then described by an abbreviation for office (e.g., *HIST* for 'Historische Kommission und Archiv / Historical commission and archives'), topic (e.g., *DEP* for 'Deportation und Haft/Deportation and Imprisonment'), and type of material when necessary (e.g., *KAR* for 'Kartei/Card Index').<sup>26</sup> In this way, the record group system also functions as a controlled vocabulary or first level descriptive tool. The system was explained, dated, and microfilmed before the content of each box.

'*Creating*' Records: 'Non-conforming' and complex as these records are, they rely on archivists to directly intervene in the given content and meaning of the records to make them 'speak.' In the summer of 1938, the IKG opened an office supplying potential emigrants with foreign currency to pay for visas, entrance permits, and transportation; without it people could not leave the German Reich. The office's alphabetical card index of about 36,000 cards includes personal, emigration, and financial data for each potential emigrant; cards of family members were pinned together. However, about 10% of the back pages listed individuals apparently unrelated to the person on the front page - a hypothesis I confirmed through research into other primary sources. Some pages had been crossed out.

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<sup>25</sup> For IKG's institutional history see Peter Boehmer (editor), Susanne Belovari, Lothar Hoelbling, Peter Melichar, Ingo Zechner, *Das Vermögen der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien und der jüdischen Organisationen 1938-1975*, Internal Interim Report, 3rd version (Feb. 2004) and previous versions.

<sup>26</sup> Record units containing material from several periods have a combined period code, e.g., I-II. In designing the system, the author drew on Hodik's 1976 inventory and a spring 2002 classification draft by Dr. Hodik and Dr. Shoshana Jensen. Hodik (1976) used hierarchically arranged natural language descriptors for record creating office as well as topic.

Earlier on, I had processed documents indicating that Jews suffered disproportional from paper shortages. To save paper, IKG officials might have used the cards' verso once the first case was closed (front page). Yet: how do you provide access to ca. 3,000 cards, which cannot be found in an alphabetical search (of the front pages), which are hard to even recognize on the microfilm, and whose information was partially not deciphered and could not be entered into a database? The solution was to create a paper sub-index of relevant back pages that allow searches by last name. To do so, we microfilmed the complete index including all back pages, photocopied relevant verso pages, cross-referenced these with the name on the front (to enable future discoveries of relationships), alphabetized, titled '*Addition to...*,' and microfilmed it, and explained the process in a bilingual, dated note.

### 3. *Description*

The community's fate informed all aspects of description. It had to be context specific, address external users with personal ties to the community and non-experts (non-members) living abroad using the microfilms, and it had to expose discriminatory language and oppressive practices intrinsic to the events themselves. Therefore, our record group system and texts are in English and German (no diacritics) because the microfilm will be used in the USA and Israel; specifically developed tags contextualized each microfilmed image; I documented processing and uncorrectable sorting errors, and I varied descriptive detail depending on type of record or likely search knowing that further records might be discovered and our knowledge might change. Original titles were not sacrosanct primary access tools.<sup>27</sup>

By definition, IKG's name card indices (totaling 170,000 cards of victims and survivors) are summaries that once indexed and ordered office records. Codes usually cross-referenced to otherwise inaccessible case files. It is in the nature of these complex records to become undecipherable over time: they are encoded, possibly tainted by intentionally opaque NS terminology, and their administrative locus and function is usually unknown. Take here the alphabetical and numerical emigration card indices labeled 'Index of Those Willing to Wander Around' - a linguistic twist to normalize persecution and expulsion of Austrian Jews. As for all indices, this index needed a long note explaining misnomer, its history and use, its complex numerical code system and numbering errors even though, at the time of writing and microfilming the indices, no one understood the code's purpose. Only later in Jerusalem did we discover that the codes in Austria were access keys to emigration files deposited in Israel (ca. 150 boxes). Inaccessible for decades without its index, the files contain probably the most extensive record of Austrian Jews in 1938/39.

*Virtual Order:* Original order might be unhelpful. When record creating office and access tools are destroyed, only a virtual order might enable searches *for* victims, survivors, or perpetrators. For example: as a prerequisite for applying for Victim's Welfare, 1,6000 post-WWII declaration of deaths were originally filed by administrative number. With the numerical index missing, researchers usually living abroad need to search 1,600-microfilmed applications to locate the applicant or person declared dead. Maintaining the currently meaningless original order, we included names, dates, file number, cross-references, etc in a spreadsheet so that researchers can search by name, locate the file number, and then the file. The list was microfilmed before the 1,600 files.

### 4. *Lack of Resources*

Political violence never truly ends. A targeted community and archives will endure its consequences over decades indicative of being 'under siege.' Resources for archival work will be limited: to obtain archival

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<sup>27</sup> A number of tags orient microfilm users to e.g. front/back pages, beginning/end of a 'family card unit,' and other contextual units.

boxes, we bartered photocopy paper; in exchange for their restoration, we loaned 'iconic items' for exhibits; microfilming was chosen over digitization given projected, limited IT staff and resources; working conditions were not optimal, the workload tremendous, which is why archivists are unlikely to be professionally active or able to write up their experiences.<sup>28</sup>

## A Few Next Steps

Traditional archival processing practices center around certain shared standards: arrangement by provenance reflected in numerical classification systems, description in terms of brief, standardized and equal description of records, and brief bulk physical processing. These practices are driven by a notion that records reflect unbiased and definite truths and that archival work facilitates their evidential role in an unbiased, unobtrusive and invisible fashion. Work with archives under siege appears to teach a different lesson. Archival and extra-archival conditions (e. g., institutional history, political violence) very much influence the condition, content, and meaning of records and different practices might be needed to convey this to users. This article hopefully illustrated the need for collaborations across subfields and for a literature to address theoretical and practical aspects. It began to address both by introducing a more inclusive concept and framework and by illustrating particular processing challenges encountered in one case study. The article will hopefully prompt (1) discussions about the proposed concept and field as well as encourage (2) historical and present-day case studies, (3) the analysis of context bound processing and the archivist as explicit 'author,' (4) discussions of possible impacts on general archival theory and practice, and (5) assistance to archivists working with archives under siege.

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<sup>28</sup> Holocaust impacted archives are fortunate in that several subject based organizations collect archival records and support archival work internationally, e.g., the CAHJP (founded in 1939! to save Jewish records), Yad Vashem, and the USHMM. Without USHMM support, the IKG project would have had to be postponed and perhaps indefinitely so. As of 2009 and with additional funds now available, microfilmed IKG records are being digitized.

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