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Archives and Human Rights, eds. J. Boel, P. Canavaggio, A. González Quintana, ISBN: 978-0-429-05462-4, Routledge, London–New York 2021, pp. 352, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429054624[1]

Archives and Human Rights explores the significant role that archives and archivists play in defending the universal human rights to truth, justice, and reparation. This two-part volume, which was published in English in 2021 as part of Routledge's expansive Approaches to History series, provides an historical overview of archives' role in documenting crimes against humanity since World War II as well as in-depth case studies from specific countries. Although of greatest interest to archivists and other information professionals, *Archives and Human Rights* will also appeal to historians, social scientists, legal scholars, and activists who focus on human rights and transitional justice movements.

On a practical level, the volume is open access, which extends its potential reach, particularly for archivists who may not have access to academic scholarship through their institutions. French and Spanish editions were released in 2023, which expands the book's audience beyond English-language readers[2]. The compilation is edited by Jens Boel, Perrine Canavaggio, and Antonio González Quintana, each of whom has served in leadership roles in the ICA's Section on Archives and Human Rights (formerly the Archives and Human Rights Working Group), which sponsored the publication[3]. The editors are therefore recognized experts in the topic of archives and human rights, and they have assembled an equally distinguished team of nineteen contributing authors who have experience

[1] All views expressed in this review are the author's own and do not reflect the views of the National Archives and Records Administration nor any agency or office of the United States government.

[2] For the Spanish edition see: *Archivos y derechos humanos: Una perspectiva mundial*, eds. J. Boel, P. Canavaggio, A. González Quintana, Gijon 2023. For the French edition see: *Archives et droits humains*, eds. J. Boel, P. Canavaggio, A. González Quintana, Bayonne 2023.

[3] International Council on Archives. Section on Archives and Human Rights, https://www.ica.org/ica-sahr-international-human-rights-day-press-release/ [access: 8.10.2024].

researching or working in all four geographical regions represented in the book (Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America).

Archives and Human Rights begins with a foreword from Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a message from David Fricker, the ICA president. Both emphasize the critical role that archives play in preserving the evidence of human rights violations necessary to hold perpetrators accountable, bring justice to survivors, and help societies confront painful pasts. Boel, Canavaggio, and González Quintana expand on these themes in the introduction, where they clarify that the book focuses on records documenting crimes against humanity and other "massive human rights violations" that have occurred since World War II (p. 1). As they explain, international recognition of the rights to truth, justice, and reparation emerged in the postwar era as repressive, authoritarian regimes around the world fell and societies sought peace in the aftermath. Archives "entered the contemporary political and historical scene" like never before when truth and reconciliation commissions, courts, survivors, and activists sought documentation of crimes committed under these regimes, and archivists enabled access (p. 3). The editors acknowledge that these events played out differently in different societies, which the book's case studies demonstrate. Yet across contexts, archivists and others who work with records documenting human rights violations have shared experiences, which the editors highlight in the hopes that the book "can serve as a tool and as an inspiration for future endeavours to use archives in defence of human rights" (p. 7).

The editors dive deeper into these themes in Part 1, *Archives and Human Rights: A Close Relationship*, where they trace across six chapters the intertwined histories of public archives and the concepts of individual liberties, democracy, and universal human rights. Emphasizing the role that public records have played since the eighteenth century in enabling individuals to exercise and defend their personal rights as citizens in democratic societies, the editors demonstrate how access to public records became linked in the late twentieth century with the collective right to know the truth about past events and with democratic principles of government transparency and accountability. Here the editors draw on multiple United Nations (UN) reports to show how the international community increasingly recognized archives' role in pursuing transitional justice in societies recovering from widespread human rights violations and in fighting impunity for officials involved in repressive regimes. Of particular importance

to these efforts have been regimes' security and intelligence records, but the editors also highlight how records of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses can document human rights violations as well. The growing need to protect and preserve records documenting human rights violations, regardless of their origin, along with the need to provide archivists with guidance on managing those records, ultimately led to the ICA to develop guiding documents such as "Archival Policies in the Protection of Human Rights" (2009) and "Basic Principles on the Role of Archivists and Records Managers in Support of Human Rights" (2016), although the editors note numerous areas where more work is needed.

Part 1 overall works well as a summary of the complex legal and historical developments leading to archives' role in defending human rights, and will be an excellent resource for readers who are new to the topic. The extensive bibliography at the end of the section points to the depth of international scholarship about archives and human rights published in the past twenty-five years and provides readers with ample sources for pursuing specific subjects or reports further. The bibliography will be particularly useful for introducing readers to publications in languages other than English, such as Ramon Alberch i Fugueras's 2008 work, *Archivos y derechos humanos*, which discusses some of the same cases (e.g., the opening of the Stasi Archives in Germany, the politics of remembering the Spanish Civil War) that Boel, Canavaggio, and González Quintana feature[4].

However, the individual chapters of Part 1 are not always well integrated and read more like discrete essays than component parts of a larger analysis. Part 1, Chapter 4, *Archives and the Duty to Remember*, is an example. This chapter touches on the relationship between archives and memory; the difference between memory policies (i.e., "policies for dealing with the past") and archival policies; and the implications when records of human rights violations are subjected to politically charged public memory policies (p. 54). But at only two-and-a-half pages, this chapter does not adequately address any of these weighty and consequential topics, and a lack of transitions leaves it awkwardly sandwiched between the discussion of archives' role in truth commissions and restitution

[4] For a review of *Archivos y derechos humanos* see A. Ferrer, *(Ramon Alberch Fugueras) Archivos y derechos humanos*, "El profesional de la información" 2008, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 471–472, https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2008.jul.17 [access: 8.10.2024], which is published in Spanish. Alberch i Fugueras also contributes a case study on Colombia to the current volume (see pages 263–276).

efforts in Part 1, Chapter 3, and the discussion of international archival policies and principles stemming from this role in Part 1, Chapter 5. It is not until readers delve into the case studies, which offer concrete examples of the connections between human rights records, collective memory, and politicization of archives, that these topics are clarified.

Examples and analysis are more seamlessly incorporated into "Proof," the first chapter of Part 2, *Case Studies*. Author Trudy Huskamp Peterson explores records' role in supporting claims for compensation due to harm from state action. She delves specifically into post-World War II compensation laws and regulations in select countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and North America, detailing the different types of documents required for compensation claims to proceed in these contexts and the myriad challenges that claimants often faced in accessing necessary documents. Peterson's chapter provides useful background for understanding the sixteen case studies that follow, which are grouped by region: four case studies from Africa, two from Asia, five from Europe, and five from Latin America.

Although unique in their coverage and content, most case studies focus on national-level developments in a single country and begin with a brief historical overview of massive human rights violations and transitional justice efforts in that country. The level of detail in these overviews varies, with some authors (like Graham Dominy in his case study on South Africa) tracing decades of political and social developments in their country of focus, and others (like Adel Maïzi in his case study on Tunisia) foregrounding the laws and policies directly impacting the archival issues they discuss. Both approaches are valid, given the complexity of summarizing decades of history for an international readership; as Alberch i Fugueras comments in his case study on Colombia, "putting an armed conflict like the Colombian case into context in a few lines is a complicated task" (p. 263). Moreover, each case study offers notes and a bibliography, which are helpful for readers who want additional historical information.

After contextualizing their case, authors then describe specific bodies of records documenting human rights violations in their country of focus, how those records have been used in transitional justice systems or public reckonings with repressive pasts, and the myriad challenges that archivists face – from preservation and access issues to legal ambiguities and political persecution – in managing the records. Dagmar Hovestädt's chapter on Germany's Stasi Records

Archive, which has been open for over thirty years, represents one of the earliest cases discussed, while Maïzi's chapter on Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission, which published its final report in 2019, represents one of the most recent cases. But all authors discuss the continuing ramifications of the events they highlight, and in cases where transitional justice or archival work is ongoing, authors note areas for future development.

The geographical arrangement of Part 2 encourages comparisons within instead of across regions. Considering the case studies in the context of their region can certainly be beneficial for understanding shared regional experiences. A prime example are the three case studies focusing on former communist countries in Europe: José M. Faraldo's examination of centers of remembrance in post-communist Europe (including the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, which may be of particular interest to "Archeion" readers); Marius Stan and Vladimir Tismaneanu's discussion of the Romanian security archives; and Hovestädt's aforementioned study of Germany's Stasi archives. Taken together, these three chapters offer a fuller picture of political and historical developments affecting archives and human rights in Eastern Europe than if they were read separately. The case studies from Latin American countries, which did not necessarily transition from totalitarian regimes to democratic ones, also shed light on the fact that no transitional justice model is universal and each country's experience is unique.

However, considering the case studies only within the context of their region overlooks the multiple similarities and themes relating to archives that emerge across cases, regardless of geography. For example, regarding the specific bodies of records that authors discuss, many focus on records that truth commissions collected and created. Commissions' differing mandates affected the scope of these records. As Maïzi describes, Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission had a broad mandate to access public and private records in the country, regardless of existing access laws, and to collect information from governments, NGOs, survivors, and witnesses in other countries as well. The records gathered ranged from textual documents and audiovisual files to objects and DNA tests, and they laid the groundwork for prosecutions carried out by Tunisia's justice system. In contrast, as Stan and Tismaneanu, Aluf Alba Vilar Elias, and Ruth Elena Borja Santa Cruz describe, respectively, truth commissions in Romania, Brazil, and Peru had mandates to uncover the historical abuses of previous regimes, but

for the purposes of official acknowledgment and collective healing rather than judicial prosecution. In Romania's case, the commission primarily conducted historical research in existing repositories to produce their final report, while the commissions in Brazil and Peru both held public hearings and took oral testimonies in addition to conducting archival research. As Elias writes, these differences reflect how "every national working experience of truth commissions around the world has its own particular way of trying to find a path to justice to reconcile a traumatic past with a peaceful present, be it via the legal framework or through hearings that expose the versions silenced by violent repression" (p. 291).

Other authors focus on the serendipitous discovery of repressive regimes' records, often thought to be lost or destroyed. Henri Thulliez describes how Human Rights Watch researchers in Chad discovered thousands of documents of former dictator Hissène Habré's political police in an old government building. Vincent de Wilde d'Estmael explains how records of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia were found in the house of a former regime official. Kirsten Weld recounts how an investigation into an explosion on a Guatemalan military base uncovered millions of records of the former state secret police in an unfinished warehouse. In these cases and others, the recovered records injected new life into efforts to hold people accountable for human rights violations and to bring justice to survivors. These discoveries, however, were of analog records that had survived years of environmental exposure and neglect. Today's born-digital records are much less durable, which raises the question (unaddressed in this book) of whether similar serendipitous discoveries of repressive regimes' records will be likely in the future.

The practical realities of managing records feature strongly across case studies. Demands for access from survivors, transitional justice courts, historians, and others spurred archivists in some countries to conduct large-scale digitization projects. De Wilde d'Estmael discusses how the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, an NGO dedicated to documenting Cambodia's history under the Khmer Rouge, collected and digitized many records that have facilitated judicial trials of former regime officials. Likewise, Peter Horsman describes how the Gacaca Archive Project in Rwanda, a collaboration between the country's National Commission for Fight against Genocide, NGOs, and international universities, faced thousands of requests annually to access the disarranged and

poorly described court records in their custody. Rather than processing these records manually, which would have taken decades, the Gacaca project chose to digitize the records, which they accomplished in fourteen months. Weld describes how Guatemala's Historical Archives of the National Police digitized nearly twenty million pages of security files, backing them up on remote servers abroad and making them available online through a partnership with a US-based university. Digitization initiatives of this scale, of course, required significant staff and technical resources. Guatemala's historical police archive, for example, had nearly 150 staff members at its height. However, as the Rwandan and Cambodian examples demonstrate, partnerships with NGOs and international organizations have helped address resource concerns and ensure that digitization initiatives move forward.

Yet, many records documenting human rights violations contain highly sensitive personal information and thus require archivists to exercise caution in providing access, as Borja Santa Cruz, Horsman, and Dominy describe in their case studies on Peru, Rwanda, and South Africa, respectively. Balancing privacy and access has been critical to protecting survivors' confidentiality and safety while ensuring that the truth about past crimes and abuses is made known. In Peru and Rwanda, tiered access to commissions' records has been implemented, with courts and other transitional justice bodies able to access the full records, and historians and other researchers able to access anonymized versions. In South Africa, some sensitive commission records are dually controlled by the National Archives and the Department of Justice, which cooperate under information access laws to release records. These cases reveal the diverse legal environments in which human rights records exist and record custodians operate. They additionally show that collaboration between archives and other organizations with an interest in these records is often crucial for archivists to provide access while still protecting privacy.

Building on this theme, case studies also highlight how a lack of cooperation between stakeholders can impede access. Multiple authors describe the complicated process of accessing records of former security and intelligence forces, often because the records are maintained by successor law enforcement agencies and are exempt from public access under national security laws. Gilles Manceron and Gilles Morin describe how the French military continues to classify records relating to the Algerian War, which impedes access for family

members of missing Algerians who were imprisoned or abducted by French forces. Similarly, Alberch i Fugueras recounts how conflicting information access laws in Colombia allow intelligence agencies to classify and retain records that could shed light on the country's decades of armed conflict. Maïzi discusses how government agencies in Tunisia refused to provide the country's independent Truth and Dignity Commission with records of police officers who were involved in torturing civilians. In cases where security archives were finally opened, as Stan and Tismaneanu describe in Romania and Mariana Nazar discusses in Argentina, political buy-in from top government officials, influenced by years of sustained citizen advocacy, was often a deciding factor in breaking the access impasse.

Political will can be fleeting, though, and the politicization of archives, particularly as part of debates over collective memory, is another key theme across case studies. Karl Gustafsson describes the backlash in Japan after Chinese archives submitted documentation of the 1937 Nanjing massacre, which challenged Japan's official account of the event, for inclusion in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. Faraldo discusses how political actors in Central and Eastern Europe have used former secret police records to denounce their political enemies as Soviet or police collaborators, even when there is little evidence to support the accusations. Rather than bringing "much-desired national concord", Faraldo writes, the opening of state security records in this region "has given rise to controversy and, indeed, continue[d] to stoke the fire of paranoia" (p. 215); his discussion of political developments in Poland will be of particular interest to "Archeion" readers. Weld describes what is perhaps the most extreme case of archives' politicization covered in the volume: a newly elected administration's "procedural coup" against Guatemala's Historical Archives of the National Police (p. 315). Archives staff were fired en masse and in some instances driven out of the country; records were restricted from public access; and foreign institutions safeguarding record copies were threatened with legal action. As Weld writes, "if ever it was possible to sustain the premise that archival access and management were not fundamentally political, Guatemala conclusively demonstrates otherwise" (p. 317). Situations like these have led to skepticism in many cases that government-operated archives or museums can be independent from political manipulation and thus properly preserve and provide access to human rights records.

Finally, authors across case studies explore the interplay between oral and textual sources as used in investigations and reconciliation efforts. In Cambodia, as de Wilde d'Estmael describes, documentary evidence of the Khmer Rouge's abuses was essential to prosecuting senior regime officials, given witnesses' difficulty in remembering precise details in the decades since the regime's fall. Documents lent "credibility" to witnesses' statements and enabled prosecutors to confront perpetrators with irrefutable evidence of their crimes or collusion (p. 180). In Guatemala, where the government claimed that files documenting past military abuses had been lost or destroyed, a UN-backed truth commission relied primarily on oral testimony and forensic evidence when investigating human rights violations; in turn, the Guatemalan government dismissed the commission's final report because it was not "substantiated by documentary evidence" (p. 311). Elias describes how Brazil's National Truth Commission placed greater weight on oral testimonies than government documents in their investigation because the documents were "compromised by belonging to the context of the military regime" (p. 294). Yet, survivors' and witnesses' oral testimonies ultimately became part of the truth commission's records, which were archived by Brazil's National Archives. The act of archiving conferred further legitimacy and authority to these testimonies, which Elias calls the "document-effect" (p. 294). These differing responses to oral versus written sources reflect broader conversations in the archival profession about what constitutes an archive and bias toward written documents, which multiple authors have explored in recent years[5].

The overall effect of the case studies in Part 2 is that of a photograph: just as a photograph only captures one moment in time, the case studies in this volume offer merely a snapshot of the role that archives were playing up to 2021 in investigations of and discussions about human rights violations in a particular country. The situation in many countries, as the authors acknowledge, was in flux at the time of writing, and new developments may yet occur. This is not a limitation of the book, merely a by-product of exploring work that must always be defended and will never be complete. As the editors write in the conclusion, "The disasters continue, the »¡nunca más!« repeated so often seems like a vain

[5] See for example: J. Bastian, *Archiving Cultures: Heritage, Community and the Making of Records and Memory*, New York 2023.

and illusory cry in face of these ongoing crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations" (p. 320). When paired with other recent scholarship about archives and human rights – like "Comma's" Volume 2020, which was also sponsored by the ICA's Section on Human Rights and Archives[6], and the 2024 compilation *Documentation from Truth and Reconciliation Commissions*[7] – a fuller picture of the role that archives continue to play in defending human rights will undoubtedly emerge.

As the editors acknowledge in their conclusion, one weakness of *Archives and Human Rights* is its minimal coverage of cases involving archives and records that document colonial crimes, with the case study on France and the Algerian War being the primary one included. Other reviewers have noted the absence of case studies from the United States and Canada[8], although they may have overlooked Peterson's (admittedly brief) discussions of compensation cases in these countries. Incorporating a standalone case study from the United States or Canada would not only have expanded the geographical coverage of the text and opened the door to further discussion about colonial archives[9], but also

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6 See journal "Comma" 2020, issue 1–2, https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/toc/coma/2020/1-2 [access: 8.10.2024]. Notably, A. González Quintana was an editor for this issue.

7 *Documentation from Truth and Reconciliation Commissions,* eds. P. Svärd, B. Ibhawoh, London 2024, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032618623 [access: 8.10.2024].

8 A. Howard, *Review of Archives and Human Rights,* American Archivist Reviews Portal, 2023, https://reviews.americanarchivist.org/2023/09/05/archives-and-human-rights/ [access: 8.10.2024]; A. Pucciarelli, *Review Archives and Human Rights*, "Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies" 2023, vol. 10, no. 1, article 6, https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol10/iss1/6 [access: 8.10.2024].

9 A case study on Indian boarding schools in the United States, for example, could have explored recent work to document the US government's role in funding and operating these schools, which were used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream American society and culture. Native American activists and academics, tribal leaders, NGOs, and boarding school survivors and descendants have led these efforts. See National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. US Indian Boarding School History, https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/ [access: 8.10.2024], and NIBSDA: The National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive, https://boardingschoolhealing.org/nibsda/ [access: 8.10.2024]. Although the US government launched an initiative in 2021 to research the history of federal Indian boarding school policies and their impact, calls for a federal truth and healing commission are ongoing as of September 2024. See U.S. Department of the Interior. Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative [access: 8.10.2024]; National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. S.1723/H.R. 7227: Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, https://boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission/ [access: 8.10.2024].

offered an opportunity to further explore the role of international NGOs and multinational businesses in documenting human rights violations, as many of these organizations are headquartered in North America, and their archives are likewise stored there[10]. Incorporating a case study from the United States or Canada also would have exposed readers to prevailing conversations around archives and human rights that are occurring in North American archival contexts. These conversations, driven by scholars like Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, largely center on affective aspects of archives and ethics of care, which attempt to move beyond a rights-based approach to archives that "ignores the realities of more subtle, intangible, and shifting forms of oppression"[11].

Overall, *Archives and Human Rights* is a powerful work about the transformative role that archives and archivists can play in defending human rights. While it highlights archivists' unique circumstances in different countries, the book also sheds light on archivists' shared experiences across contexts. Authors' discussions of developments in Poland and Eastern Europe will particularly appeal to "Archeion" readers, but the book's broad geographical coverage will engage readers in international conversations about archives as well. The book is written at a level appropriate for undergraduates, and case studies, which can be read independently, are excellent resources to incorporate into undergraduate- or graduate-level classroom discussions. As the editors state, "The writing of history

[10] For example, select papers of the United Fruit Company, which the editors mention in connection to human rights violations in Latin America, and its successor, Chiquita Brands International, are held at universities in Canada and the United States. These records document the company's financial ties to paramilitary groups in Colombia that committed human rights violations. See University of Toronto Mississauga Library. About the United Fruit Company Papers, https://collections.utm.utoronto.ca/collections/united-fruit-company [access: 8.10.2024]; Baker Library Special Collections and Archives. Harvard Business School Library. United Fruit Company Photograph Collection, https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/11/resources/517 [access: 8.10.2024]; M. Evans, *The Chiquita Papers: Banana Giant's Paramilitary Payoffs Detailed in Trove of Declassified Legal, Financial Documents*, The National Security Archive, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB340/ [access: 8.10.2024]; S. Delouya, M. Torres, V. Calderón, S. Akbarzai, *Chiquita Found Liable for Financing Paramilitary Group*, CNN, https://www.cnn.com/2024/06/11/business/chiquita-banana-liable-paramilitary-group-colombia/index.html [access: 8.10.2024].

[11] M. Caswell, M. Cifor, *From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives*, "Archivaria" 2016, vol. 81, Spring, p. 23–43, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0mb9568h [access: 8.10.2024]. For additional examples of scholarship in this vein, see Special Double Issue on Archives and Human Rights: "Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information" 2014, vol. 14, issue 3–4, https://link.springer.com/journal/10502/volumes-and-issues/14-3 [access: 8.10.2024].

has always been a battlefield, but only archives can ensure that the historical debate can take place on an informed basis" (p. 6). *Archives and Human Rights*, in turn, ensures that the essential relationship between archives and the defense of human rights is recognized and the ways that archives "help in building sustainable and peaceful societies" are understood (p. 322).

Rose Buchanan

National Archives and Records Administration (USA)
rabuchanan77@gmail.com