

BOOK REVIEWS

Displaced Archives, edited by James Lowry, Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2017, 228 pp., AUD\$242.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 472470 69 0

This is a fascinating book. In the wake of the weirdly named ‘migrated archives’ controversy which fed my news feeds, I was intrigued to read *Displaced Archives*. Of course, after having read this book my understanding is so much further enriched from my superficial approach to the seemingly remote problems of displaced archives. Even its title, ‘displaced archives’, shows the nuanced approaches offered to the problems of records throughout the ‘history of warfare, (de)colonisation and the succession of states’ (p. 2). Initially assuming that this was a topic to be approached as something of academic interest, I was swiftly disabused of this notion, as Australia has not only been a participant in war (think German PNG records, or the recent return of seized records of Japanese businesses in WWII), a colony of Britain but also a coloniser (again PNG) and a (continuing) coloniser of Indigenous populations.

Displaced Archives brings together essays from diverse authors of great individual and accumulated expertise. I profess awe at the complexities revealed. Essays range through a fascinating array of individual cases ranging from the Algeria–France dispute (Sheppard, chapter 2), the Indonesian–Dutch relationship (Karabinos, chapter 4), expatriate archives of Rhodesia (Lovering, chapter 6), African records spread throughout Europe (Mnjama and Lowry, chapter 7) and the more recently notorious Iraq and Kuwait records in the US (Montgomery, chapter 10). Many more instances of displaced archives are discussed between an opening essay by Charles Kecskemeti on the evolution of international law on archives (chapter 1), and a closing essay by Douglas Cox in which he argues for a continuation of the internationalising work of the International Council on Archives (chapter 12). Interestingly, within this closing chapter, Cox notes that the law often acts as a barrier when professional relationships, expanding appreciation of notions of joint heritage and the advent of digital copying (not hard-to-read microfilm) can perhaps achieve greater beneficial outcomes for archives in dispute.

At the core of *Displaced Archives* is the notion of ownership. And much of this is about disputed rights. Who has the right to seize records, and then who owns them? Which nation’s cultural heritage do they belong to? It’s all about power and politics – ‘displaced archives do not only highlight fault lines within national debates, they also speak to government accountability’ (Hiribarren, chapter 5, p. 82). The inalienable rights in records that result when a nation is established conflict with laws of warfare, which customarily allow seizure of records as part of military intelligence operations. What happens in the case of espionage during peacetime, or more recently, hacked records? What rules determined that records be sent back to the ‘mothership’ at the point of colonial independence? And is ownership really a matter of power relationships? This gets intertwined with notions of symbolic significance and sovereignty, with imagined records which might never have existed, with access rights and custodial nuance. Improved political or economic relationships between nations are identified as potentially more important drivers to sorting out disputed records than the law. Archivists as fierce defenders of their beliefs is illustrated in the story quoted by Cox – where ‘BNF curators . . . refused to hand over the manuscript that was housed in a locked box. Aides to the President were forced to break open the box minutes before the presentation ceremony’ (Cox, chapter 12, p. 209). Discussions about

archival practice are also raised. For example: records so badly described that Korean archives are effectively lost by being described in France as Chinese manuscripts (Cox, chapter 12, p. 209); interpretation of Indonesian records made difficult by unclear descriptions (Karabinos, chapter 4, p. 61); records seized and stored in warehouses lost until claims for storage costs alerted those currently responsible to their existence; or deliberate obfuscation of existence and location as with the Mau Mau records at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK (Banton, chapter 3).

The book acts as a testimony to the long-term efforts of many within the international community – particularly those associated with earlier times in the International Council on Archives. Here the work of Kecskemeti (chapter 1) and Auer (chapter 8) are exemplars, and their work is an important part of archival history. Fascinating to me was the long duration of some of the disputes. Archival plunder by Napoleon in an attempt to create an archive of empire was only returned to Spain as late as 1976 and some of the seized Vatican records from the period are still in the Archives Nationales of France because ‘the Vatican authorities are not prepared to cover the expenses for their transport back to Rome’ (Auer, chapter 8, p. 117).

In some essays personal feelings are palpable. Frustration in the case of Kecskemeti, something of disillusion in the cases of African archives in Europe as discussed by Mnjama and Lowry (chapter 7), and significant personal hardship documented in passing by Patricia Grimsted – ‘the well known “archival” spy’ (Grimsted, chapter 9, p. 133).

Beyond the discussions of physical possession, the essay by Gilliland (chapter 11) takes the reader to new territory. Can we reconceptualise the ‘realities of always-in-motion diasporas of records in which multiple parties have rights, interests and diverging points of view’ (Gilliland, chapter 11, p. 180)? This essay challenges archival practice to move beyond the notions of physical, into virtual territory, and to think in post-national terms. It invites reconceptualisation of the nature of ‘displaced records’ in line with emerging archival thinking about multiple, simultaneous provenance and notions of co-creation as well as issues of human rights and social justice. The essays in this volume interact with each other, cross-referencing authors. The challenge of reconceptualising the problems have been taken up by Cox in particular, positing an archival equivalent to non-refoulement, emphasising common and joint heritage, stressing access to records, and challenging archival and legal thinking to move beyond the notion of the original in a digital world.

The evidence of author interaction shows their high degree of involvement in the work, and the amassed expertise of authors is impressive. Each chapter contains a bibliography which leads interested readers to a wealth of further information on the topics and cases under discussion. An index assists access to specific topics.

James Lowry is to be mightily congratulated on this book. It is thought-provoking, interesting, enlightening and challenging.

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Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories, edited by Fiorella Foscarini, Heather MacNeil, Bonnie Mak and Gillian Oliver, Facet Publishing, London, 2016, 256 pp., £64.95, ISBN 978 1 783301 58 4

Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories provides a selection of papers from the 7th International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA 7), held in Amsterdam in July 2015. I-CHORA is a biennial conference hosted by a different institution each time; the most recent I-CHORA was held at Monash University, 28–30 May 2018.

The editors highlight that the theme of the 2015 conference, and the title of the book – *Engaging with Records and Archives* – is crucial not only for archival researchers and practitioners, but for all those who deal with records and archives, in whatever form. Eleven authors have contributed chapters based on their conference papers, discussing various aspects of engaging with records and archives.

The book is composed of two parts; the first, 'Rethinking Histories and Theories', contains five chapters and the second, 'Engaging Records and Archives', contains six. The first is opened by Jeannette A Bastian's chapter 'Moving the Margins to the Middle', a discussion of the notion of the 'archival turn'. Bastian calls for archivists to embrace a broad notion of 'the archive' and to engage with other disciplines' characterisations of archives. This is followed by Juan Ilerbaig's 'Organisms, Skeletons and the Archivist as Palaeontologist', which shows how the authors of the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (also known as the Dutch Manual) used metaphors and ideas from emerging natural history disciplines to explain the value and method of archival work.

For those following the development of the new Records in Context (RiC) standard by the International Council on Archives' Experts Group on Archival Description, Jonathan Furner's chapter provides interesting context, comparing RiC with other standards and data models in the archives, museum and library worlds.

The final two chapters in the first section are both concerned with silences. In 'Mapping Archival Silence: Technology and the Historical Record', Marlene Manoff explores the different meanings of 'archival silence', from missing original material and choices made about digitisation, to the impact of deletions and deliberate erasure. Elizabeth Shepherd fills a silence by providing biographies of Joan Wake and Ethel Stokes, two notable female archivists in England, in 'Hidden Voices in the Archives'.

The second part of the book, 'Engaging Records and Archives', is devoted to case studies around the theme of engagement. Stefano Gardini opens this section by charting how the material within the archives at Genoa was used, re-used, reordered and appended based on political and practical reasons, in 'The Use and Reuse of Documents'. In 'The Bumpy Road to Transparency', Charles Jeurgens provides a discussion of issues of access to the colonial Dutch East Indies' records in the late nineteenth century. There are some interesting parallels to be drawn between the issues of access and government transparency grappled with in this context, and the role of journalists, leaks and access to government information today.

In 'Archival Ethics and Indigenous Justice', Melanie Delva and Melissa Adams highlight how archives may cause further trauma and harm to marginalised communities through thoughtless policies and practices. They discuss a case study where the relationship between a Canadian religious archive and the local Indigenous community broke down after the archives' policies were followed in relation to providing access to the community. Delva and Adams show that existing frameworks may not consider the different needs of different groups, and in blindly following such frameworks, archives can do further harm.