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## Review: Archives and Human Rights

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*Archives and Human Rights*. Edited by Jens Boel, Perrine Canavaggio, and Antonio González Quintana. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. xxi + 330 pp.)

*Archives and Human Rights* is a powerful book that dramatically conveys the importance of archives to more than historical research. This work uses case studies to reveal the significance of archival records as evidence supporting human rights, particularly in transitional justice work. The authors accomplish this by building off existing work in the field and providing new perspectives via selected case studies.

The editors successfully crafted a well-organized and well-written work with contributions from 22 authors from around the world. Two main parts clearly define the book's emphasis on theory (Part 1: "Archives and Human Rights: A Close Relationship") and practice (Part 2: "Case Studies"). Part 2 is organized geographically and includes four case studies related to Africa, two with Asia, five in Europe, and five from Latin America. This structure helps readers see commonalities between similar contexts (such as the transitions occurring in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism). It also reflects the ability of each case study to stand on its own. Readers interested in a particular country or event can quickly determine which case studies are of interest. All case studies begin with necessary historical context that enables the reader to engage the main themes of each chapter.

Themes of the text include preservation, digitization, and privacy and confidentiality, all of which revolve around the main theme—access. The editors highlight the importance of access in the introduction writing that archivists "should play an active role in defending basic human rights, in particular by enabling access to documentation on human rights violations" (p. 3).

A particularly valuable contribution of *Archives and Human Rights* is its analysis of privacy and confidentiality issues related to access. Chapter ten provides a case study unpacking East Germany's secret police (Stasi) records and the transitional justice process which took place during German reunification. The author of this chapter, Dagmar Hovestädt, highlights the tension between privacy and confidentiality on the one hand, and access on the other. She notes a balance between "two opposing legal concepts ... transparency of government action while maintaining the privacy of those subjected to this action" (p. 222). The agency holding Stasi records decided to enable "access for individuals to their own data ... [while also protecting] this data from public access" (p.222). Thus, while access is key, recognizing the need to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the subjects of human rights violations is also of utmost importance. This chapter is one example of *Archives and Human Rights* powerfully conveying the value of records in holding regimes accountable for human rights violations.

Some chapters neglect to adequately consider the value of records created during, not just used by, transitional justice proceedings. However, chapter five, "The

Gacaca Archive: Preserving the Memory of Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda,” by Peter Horsman, stands out in its focus on records created by investigatory bodies. This chapter also contributes an important perspective on the value of material created as part of a “series of highly oral activities” (p. 159). Thus, Horsman effectively communicates the complex issues surrounding records created during transitional justice activities, something lacking in other chapters.

An additional weakness is a lack of archived websites that would support future accessibility of cited sources. The well-documented nature of the text is evident in the significant number of endnotes for each chapter, many of which cite material produced or accessed online. The web addresses cited are likely to become inaccessible due to link rot leaving future readers potentially unable to examine important documentation. Such an oversight is concerning considering the text’s focus on access. It also detracts from one of the book’s purposes which is to “serve as a tool and as an inspiration for future endeavors to use archives in defense of human rights” (p. 7). Reliable access to the sources used in this book is essential for its future relevance.

Despite its weaknesses, all archivists, regardless of experience level, will benefit from reading this text. It can also edify lawyers, government officials, historians, museum professionals, and those active in cultural memory work (especially those engaged in transitional justice work). While the experience of many archivists who read this book will not mirror the drama of the included case studies, readers are still challenged to consider how the material in their care can be used to support human rights. All readers gain insight into the power of archives—contributing to a greater cultural awareness of the importance of such records.

*Archives and Human Rights* is a valuable text that provides an effective exposition of the power of archives to support human rights, especially during periods of transitional justice. The editors communicate a helpful, forward-looking perspective writing that, “Archives of human rights violations are not only a tool for looking backwards. They help build society’s future” (p. xix). *Archives and Human Rights* presents a vital perspective on how archivists, and others, should consider their role in building a better future.

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