CONTINUITY AND CHANGE --

RECORD CREATORS AND RECORD VALUES
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Shared Concerns and Responsibility for University Records and Archives

If I could change the title of my talk retroactively, it would now read, Change amidst Continuity –Record Creators and Record Values, to emphasize the fact that change -- from within or without and whatever size and shape it takes -- might cause havoc with archival theory and practice. To make this point, I will discuss my work with rediscovered Holocaust records of the Jewish Community of Vienna, Austria (IKG) and broader ramifications of that work.1 I will briefly summarize the history of the IKG and its archives as well as typical records produced over time. This thick description allows me to highlight the instability of two archival concepts, record creator and record values, showing how changes within the IKG and emerging symbolic values/functions of Holocaust related records impact archival work. While this is a special case, such changes and what they imply for archival work are more general. I will, therefore, end by discussing just two examples of changes -- in record creators and record values -- that are relevant to many university and research archives.

The history of the IKG
Let me begin by briefly summarizing the history of the IKG.
After a long history of settlements and expulsions, the Jewish community in Vienna started to grow by the late 1700 early 1800s largely due to decrees such as the Jew Decree of 1764 or the Edict of Toleration of 1782. To put that population increase in numbers: in 1800 there were about 1200 Jews in Vienna representing about .5% of its population. By 1856 there were 15,600 and by 1900 147,000 Jews constituted 8.7% of Vienna's population. This represents an almost 20 fold proportional increase in a century.

In 1849, Vienna's Jews were officially permitted to form one central community organization, the IKG, representing all Jews and Jewish religious groups in Vienna. The IKG eventually became a corporate body under public law, and began to provide religious, social and educational services and subsidized most Jewish associations.

The Jewish Community of Vienna was one of the largest in Europe and after 1918 represented over 90% of Jews in Austria. About 170,000 Jews, more than 10% of Vienna's population, lived in the city before 1938. The Jewish Community of Vienna was almost a Jewish Community of Austria then and, important for our talk, its archives were akin to a central Jewish Archives of Austria after 1918.2

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1 From June 2002 to June 2004 the author worked as historian (re: restitution and Jewish Community history) and as archivist for the IKG and its Holocaust Victims' Information and Support Center (Anlauffstelle). Being responsible for historical archival records, she designed a new IKG archival framework and infrastructure and laid the foundation for an eventual re-opening of the historical archives. The author processed, organized and supervised the microfilming of 95% of newly found NS archival material (ca. 330,000 pages) and 100% of newly discovered pre-1938 registry material (ca. 225,000 pages). These newly found records were the initial impetus towards re/creating IKG's archives. Together with two colleagues, she also inventoried all IKG historical archival holdings deposited in Jerusalem (about 350 laufmeter) and prepared microfilming of their NS records (approximately 800,000 pages). The author is a member of the Cataloging Working Group of the International Shoah Archivists Working Forum and participated at the First International Shoah Archivists Working Forum, New York, 2004.

2 For demographics see the IKG Taetigkeitsbericht 1933-36, Matrikenamt (report of registry department), table II, pp. 110-111; Statistisches Handbuch fuer den Bundesstaat Oesterreich XV Jahrgang, Table 7, p. 8 (Statistisches Jahrbuch fuer Oesterreich 1938,
What you see here are examples of synagogues and institutions that did not survive the NS period and you see the web portal of today's IKG. This is also the door to the one synagogue that was not destroyed, out of perhaps 130 houses of worship that used to exist in Vienna. Out of approximately 206,000 Jews in Austria as of March 1938 and according to Nuremberg Race Laws (1935), two thirds emigrated or survived. About 65,000 were assassinated. In April 1945, only 5,500 Jews lived in Austria, which means about 2.7% of its former Jewish population. In the year 2003, 6710 Jews were members of the IKG of Vienna.

The history of IKG archives
What about its archives? In 1816, the council of representatives for Vienna’s Jews voted to establish an archives in order to substantiate rights and privileges issued to them but routinely negated. But it took another thirty years for it to truly become an institutional archives. While stretching back into the 1600s, most records were kept continuously from the 1840s onward depicting institutional concerns of a religious community with increasingly vast educational and social functions. Next to uncommon registry material such as marriage contracts, the archives also kept track of e.g. all elections and political campaigns, assembled a collection of anti-Semitism materials, and kept the records of innumerable associations and foundations either controlled, administered, or financed by the IKG.

In the 1920s, the archives reorganized records and cataloged them by subject terms and individual names. IKG’s Historical Commission established in 1901 assisted in this as did other local developments in the archival field. Sigmund Husserl for instance suggested a Central Archives of Austrian Jewish Communities in the early 1900s, a Jewish War Archives was founded by the Viennese Zionists after war broke out in 1914, and various small archival journals founded in the 1910s and 1920s demonstrated interest in genealogy, Jewish History and archival issues.3 Fairly unique in Europe, the IKG archives was turning into a place for scholarship internationally. Its records offered a rare inside perspective about affairs internal and external to the community.

In May of 1938 the NS forced the IKG to relinquish its archives and library. The NS closed down the archives and, except for registry material, appears to have forgotten about it. It has not reopened since. No archival records management program existed during the NS regime. How and why records were kept under most difficult conditions in intervening years remains unknown nor was keeping an archives a priority for the IKG after May 1945 considering the enormous challenges to be faced in post-war

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3 Take here for instance the following publications from the 1910s and 1920s: Juedischer Archiv: Zeitschrift fuer juedisches Museum und Buchsen, Geschichte, Volkskunde und Familienforschung, Archiv fuer judische Familienforschung (under the auspices of the Jewish Museum in Vienna); Allgemeine Juedische Zeitung: Blatter fuer Ueberlieferungsgetreues Judaentum zugleich Juedisches Archiv.
Vienna. Before discoveries in the last six years, it was assumed, although not known, that archival records having survived WWII had been deposited at the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), in Jerusalem, in the 50s and 60s totaling about 350 linear meters (ca 1200 linear feet). It now appears that units of records were torn apart rather randomly after WWII and documents were deposited unsupervised in numerous locations unknown just a few years later. No inventories were created. Document disposal was not documented and weeding occurred unsupervised whenever records were considered deteriorated or irrelevant. Records and artifacts disappeared from offices and unsupervised depositories.

Currently, we know little besides hearsay how over one million pages ended up in an abandoned building and elsewhere: disintegrating, scattered, unordered, and incomplete. Over the last seven years, several astounding discoveries of records have filled gaps in existing IKG holdings, for example records from the NS-period, pre-1938 registry material and post-1945 documents originating, for instance, in the general secretary or dealing with real estate issues (including post-1945 restitution documentation) and the Victims Welfare Act (1947). Keep in mind that the IKG records recently discovered in Vienna and those deposited in Israel represent probably the largest European Jewish community archives still in existence. It is also the most extent collection from the NS period. Most other collections were never as large or were destroyed during the Holocaust, including much of the Central Jewish Archives of Germany.5

Facets of Records
Before 1938, the IKG produced a rather unusual mix of records: there are institutional records as the byproduct of daily institutional activities --- supervision of all prayer houses or of financial transactions for instance, and there are individual type records in terms of traditional registry records, membership lists and voting records in particular.

However, during the NS period IKG’s functions changed and therefore its records. The NS closed down the IKG in March 1938 and reopened it two months later as an NS approved, centralized, large corporate body under public law. The IKG had become an NS entity of sorts that the regime used to administer, organize and ultimately ‘dispose’ of Jewish assets, associations, and individuals. Records document IKG’s involvement in these different tasks including social welfare, emigration and deportation of some of the over 200,000 Jews. The IKG was eventually dissolved and replaced by a 'Council of Elders of Jews' which was an association and no longer a corporate body under public law.

4 In contrast to Germany where a central Jewish archives was founded in 1905, there was no move to establish a central archives for Austria. Perhaps there was no perceived strong need to do so as the IKG represented over 90% of Austria’s Jewish population. Since WWII, the IKG Vienna has not operated an archives physically or functionally, and records are scattered across localities and continents. Many IKG historical records were deposited at the CAHJP (Central Archives of the History of Jewish People) during the 1950s - 1970s. Since the late 1990s, IKG ongoing administrative records are stored at a depot. Contemporary and most historical registry records are at IKG’s registry department. A few documents and plans were deposited at Vienna’s public Jewish Museum in 1993.

Its tasks were to manage the few buildings and institutions left and to care for a couple of thousand Jews remaining in Vienna until the end of the war.

And in this, records clearly reflect a dichotomy at work within the NS regime: it had an absolute need to keep track of and account for individuals in a process, whose ultimate outcome, however, was to dehumanize, depersonalize and eventually destroy each one of them. See here for instance the numerous card indices and deportation lists, propaganda posters to elicit more funds from Jewish aid organizations, or records about retraining tens of thousands of Jews for emigration in professions such as agriculture, a career as butler, or lamp shade production.

The legacy of the NS regime has been long lasting in all aspects and in the aspect of records: the newly established Jewish Community after June 1945 was a religious organization with typical responsibilities for a now, very small Jewish population. But it was also responsible for returning and newly settled Jews, for Holocaust survivors abroad as well as for justice, compensation and restitution issues. Records, again, reflect this in terms of vast real estate restitution files, for example, and various types of Holocaust victims and survivor files. They differ from NS propaganda and official records because documents are internal representations of events from 38-45 and thereafter.  

**Record Creator – Record Group System**

First, as we have seen, the Holocaust had torn apart what otherwise would have been one continuous institution and its continuous archives. There were basically three separate legal entities that functioned as the ‘IKG’: before March 38, as NS organization carrying out NS programs from 1938-1945, and as IKG since May 1945 caring for a miniscule community with very different needs.

These entities are obviously related and legal heirs to each other but were of quite different focus, size, identity, organizational structures and tasks as well as taskmasters. To reflect this institutional discontinuity we used an archival record group system organizing records by institutional rupture and time period -- before, during and after NS rule.

This rupture also meant that the newly discovered records were of little functional use/value normally associated with institutional records. The Holocaust had not only destroyed an organic historical community but also its functional relationship to its records. In its destructiveness, however, the Holocaust had forged an unintentional and special relationship between the IKG and its historical records. Records in Vienna and Israel not only trace the mechanics of a genocidal regime but are frequently the only traces left of IKG institutions, activities, events, functions, and people. And they are valued for that.

This brings me to my second point: the regime and its repercussions continues to create new uses or meaning for these records. In our case, Holocaust records are beginning to be perceived as symbols.

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7 See here the important article by James O’Toole, 'The Symbolic Significance of Archives,' *The American Archivist*, v. 56 (Spring ’93) p. 234-55 in which he surveys how symbolic meaning can become ascribed over time.
Emerging Symbolic Significance for Holocaust Related Records
In supporting our work and plans to found an international research institute and collective archives, the IKG repeatedly referred to symbolic value and use of records. At its most basic, symbolic here means records acquired frames of reference larger than themselves – however vague that may sound at this point. Discussing iconic Holocaust photographs, Cornelia Brink writes that images have a reality as symbol based on “the significance attached to them by individuals or groups.” Such records are understood as condensing “complex phenomena and as representing history in exemplary form.”

It is not that Holocaust related records have always carried symbolic meanings for affected communities or the public at large. Yizkor or memorial books, deportation lists, emigration cards, photographs etc were previously used to impart knowledge, to assist in indictments, in gaining restitution, to enable research … All of these are administrative, legal and research functions common to institutional records.

That this was the indeed case, that Holocaust related (IKG) records were once considered to have usual institutional valences, can be seen in distinct appraisal decisions taken over the years. In the 1970s, an IKG historian, archivist, and orthodox Jew, processed IKG Holocaust papers deposited in Jerusalem. He routinely discarded individual financial receipts as long as financial balance sheets existed for that year - just as the professional literature advises and just as any good professional archivist would still do today. By 2002, working with similar financial receipts in Vienna, I never even considered appraising and weeding. The question of appraisal did not come up. It was self-understood that every slip of paper would be kept. Given the genocide, paper traces become precious and increasingly representative. Fragments are turning iconic, representing more than their limited content.

So what has changed in the last few decades to produce that shift? Or, more importantly: how do we as archivists detect a shift in record values and in our case an increasingly symbolic function or use – when no-one expresses this explicitly and when the professional archival literature, even journals specializing on the Holocaust, are not discussing it? As I have come to understand it, the ascribing of symbolic values to Holocaust records has emerged slowly for Jews and non-Jews alike. And it is a global phenomenon.

For instance:
(A) As Holocaust historian, I was asked by a Holocaust survivor to locate any slip of paper containing signatures of each parent lost --- such material traces have come to represent individual lives and reassure relatives that those gone, had once lived.

(B) At the IKG we would then discuss our moral obligation to return such symbolically perceived letters or objects to relatives of Holocaust victims – even considering this runs counter our professional obligation for preserving collections and provenance. We ultimately did not return them, but that is a different issue.

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8 Brink, Cornelia, Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps, p. 8 (online version), History and Memory, 12, 1 (2000), pp. 135-150.

9 In hindsight this was unfortunate. Processing NS related documents demonstrated in Vienna, what Ezechiel Zivier had argued already in 1905: individual financial receipts are among the most carefully kept records. They offer rare information about cultural, social, political and economic interactions – just think of cuneiform in this context. I also found that NS receipts include information about individual Holocaust victims who left no other archival traces.
(C) Notice also people's reactions, perhaps your own, to images of Holocaust records. Reactions, impact, and emotional responses go far beyond what you'd expect from the content depicted. The records and images are viewed, understood and treated as standing in for the larger context of genocide.

(D) But it is also the particular uses of and display techniques for photographs, objects, and records in museums, books, and elsewhere that contributed to these items becoming icons, de-contextualized objects standing in for something larger. A larger story about which more and more was published and discussed over the years so that people presume to know what's being evoked or commemorated and assume that an individual item is equal to the task at hand. The original task of conveying specific knowledge pales in comparison.

(E) And with Holocaust survivors having become the 'bearers of history' and the generation dying, functions of testimony, commemoration and evocation are taken to be a duty and are fastened onto objects, records -- which, after all, are the historical legacies of their experiences.10 Whatever other reasons, local and international there might be, there is little discussion of this shift in the literature and there is none concerning archival records. I have located only a few historians tracing such a shift toward symbolic or iconic meanings when discussing Holocaust oral interviews, biographies or photographs. At the 2006 Society of American Archivist Conference, Rosemary Horowitz, an associate professor of English, was the first to talk about this shift for Yizkor books. She traced how Holocaust Yizkor books once valued for informing survivors about each other and their disappeared communities are turning into testimonials. These are not so much valued for what they can tell about a community but for keeping a bygone community symbolically before our eyes. Ms Horowitz suggested that this redefinition will effect collection development and archival treatment of books now seen as artifacts.11

Indeed, the new symbolic understanding of Holocaust records affects archival work, in general, and in more aspects than Ms Horowitz was able to discuss. For myself, it has informed appraisal, particular access tools and displays, preservation decisions, discussion about returning items as well as the archivist’s interaction with record creator and users.

Let me summarize my observations until now:
- First, in the case of the IKG, catastrophic external factors transformed both record creator and, in the long term, record values.
- Second, the growing symbolic significance of Holocaust related records appears to be a global phenomenon.
- Third, transformations in a record creator can affect functions and values of records, of course. Therefore, these changes might be interrelated.
- And fourth, symbolic significance of records as well as changes in records creator affect archival work in many if not all aspects.

11 Horowitz, Rosemary's presentation during the session, Yizkor Books, Weblogs and Ethnic Cleansing: Grassroots Documentation and New Technologies, DC 2006: Joint Annual Meeting of NAGARA, COSA, and SAA.
General examples relevant for university and research archives
But how is this relevant for university and research archives except for specialized Holocaust archives? Let me introduce two examples to show how this probably applies to many of our institutions and not necessarily within the context of a genocide.

Registry Records
Example number one concerns registry records. Most of us know that the Genealogical Society of Utah, GSU, microfilms or scans registry records available in many of our archives. It then makes these accessible through its family genealogical archives. Many of our institutions, including the IKG, collaborate with the GSU in exchange for free microfilm or digital copies.
What many might not know is that the GSU is part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons. And for the church, registry records have symbolic, that means here religious value.

For the Mormons, data recorded in these records stand in for individuals. In a process more complex than I can describe here, data is extracted and baptized in temples. Baptism carried out over this data offers salvation to the souls, souls who are indestructible, souls who continue to mature after death and who are therefore able to accept or reject baptism even if they had died as an immature child. Baptism is supposed to happen only for direct ancestors of living members of the church and their friends. In reality, however, that policy is stated and interpreted rather generously to include almost every one.  

For Jewish organizations, baptism or Christian conversion via archival records and surrogates – while not believed in – is offensive. It smacks of forced conversion so hauntingly familiar in Jewish history and is particularly offensive when it concerns Holocaust victims who were killed precisely because they were Jews. Indicatively, Jewish opposition to this practice in the early 1990s centered on baptism of Holocaust victims via their registry records --- indicating again that these records, even their data, had come to represent the victims.

Jewish organizations signed an agreement with the LDS in 1995 removing formerly baptized Holocaust victims from the International Genealogical Index and prohibiting future random baptism. That was the condition under which the IKG permitted the GSU to microfilm its registry material for instance. As it turns out, though, recent information indicates that the LDS is not keeping its commitment. While wanting to make their registry records globally available, archivists better consider the symbolic value and use of registry records by the LDS (going beyond ‘normal’ uses of records) -- before they decide to collaborate with them. Baptism via data is likely to be

12 It should not be overlooked that particular members, saints in LDS, can receive revelations, i.e. truths, that are not necessarily codified or binding for other members.
offensive to many groups and individuals, atheists and agnostics included. The Armenian and the Russian Orthodox Churches have also protested, for example, and Jewish individuals are now calling on archives to insist on their copyright and withdraw record copies from the GSU.

**Ethnographic Records**

Example number two concerns ethnographic records. Many of our archives hold ethnographic field notes, research notes by faculty and outstanding researchers, recordings, images, and even artifacts.

Over the last 15 years, indigenous peoples across the globe managed to redefine record creators and the symbolic significance of museum objects and increasingly archival records. The record creator is not so much the researcher any longer as the indigenous collaborator involved in creating the records. Along with this, the relative power over such records is beginning to shift. Indigenous demands force archivists to consider the following questions. Who determines what is to happen with such objects and records? What is symbolic, sacred, or secret and what public access is permissible for such items or information? Which records should be returned? Which staff can work with such records at archival and other institutions? And when should items be allowed to decay ‘naturally’?

Australian indigenous peoples, for instance, presented a protocol for libraries, archives and information services in 2000 outlining what they consider appropriate access, description, and return of records, as well as appropriate staff handling such objects. In the US, the development began with a legal victory by Native Americans. Through the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, burial, sacred and cultural patrimony objects in museums have to be returned upon request. Currently, Native Americans are developing a protocol similar to the Australians for archival records and practice – a draft is already available.  

It behooves us all to think carefully about these issues and how we will get involved, react and readdress our practices. How will we handle such implicit donor agreements in comparison to agreements we usually feel comfortable signing – particularly against the backdrop of historical changes and internal politics within indigenous communities? Should we -- and how would we -- insist on universal access and our informed freedom to carry out our work unrestrictedly, and related issues? These radical redefinitions of record creator and symbolic values, and all that these entail, will affect all areas of our archival work.

This not only raises possibilities for collaborative approaches toward records and record keeping. We will also have to ponder benefits and costs of giving up uniform archival practices – because other ethnic and religious groups are sure to follow.

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Photo Credits:

*Jewish Kindergarten, XX. District, Osthmgasse 46 and Turkish Synagogue in IKG Tätigkeitsbericht 1933-1936*

*Beginning Processing, 06/02 and Name lists from NS Period* by USHMM

Registry record images, card catalog by Karl Nessmann/Susanne Belovari

IKG portal from its webpage, [http://www.ikg-wien.at/](http://www.ikg-wien.at/)

*Native American Archivists Roundtable Meeting* from its webpage,


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