Four Views on Archival Decolonization Inspired by the TRC's Calls to Action

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued 94 Calls to Action to"redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation." Four of these Calls to Action were directly addressed to Canadian museums and archives, with several other Calls potentially affecting archival practice. In this article, originally presented as a panel presentation at the 2016 Archives Society of Alberta conference held in Canmore, Alberta, four perspectives on archival decolonization as related to the Calls to Action are offered.

Introduction

Archivists are increasingly aware of the challenges of managing records that are of interest to Indigenous populations.[1] In part, this increasing awareness is on account of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), negotiated between representatives of those survivors of the schools who launched the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history and the federal government and churches who ran the schools. Signed in 2006, IRSSA established a $2 billion dollar fund that included provisions for compensation, commemoration and healing. Among its components was a Common Experience Payment for all survivors who could document their attendance at one of the named residential schools, an Independent Assessment Process to provide compensation for cases of physical and sexual abuse, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Indigenous negotiators of IRSSA were well aware of the archival dimensions of their task. It took decades for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, activists and academics to marshal the archival evidence that demonstrates that the residential school system was not just tainted by "bad apples" but was in fact genocidal: it was designed to eliminate Indigenous peoples.[2]

[1] Records of interest to Indigenous populations represent particular challenges for archives for two reasons. The first is that, as William Hagan suggested in *American Archivist* as early as 1978, Indigenous populations have been relentlessly studied by outsiders, who recorded information about Indigenous culture, history and communities, in some cases in the context of an established trust relationship, but more often as representatives of the crown or churches, or as employees of academic institutions or commercial organizations. In either case, these records have been transferred to archives without the informed consent of the Indigenous population. In other words, even when there was a trust relationship between, for example, an anthropologist and an Indigenous population, this trust relationship almost never extended to the future archiving of the records made in the context of this relationship. Secondly, Indigenous populations often are part of sovereign, self-determining nations with specific rights recognized through treaty relationships as well as under the Canadian constitution and in Canadian law.

[2] Canadian colonialism of the late nineteenth century through to the present fits the definition of genocide under international law. Rafael Lemkin, who coined the word genocide and originated the UN's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, located the crime in the intention to eliminate a people by any means, whether by extinguishing a culture through assimilation or by systematically murdering the population. Lemkin's original meaning of the term genocide is only imperfectly represented in the Convention's final text, but it remains present in Article II, which defines the crime of genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." Among the five actions listed in Article II is "Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." The commissioners of the TRC,

Moreover, in addition to the stated intention of the residential school system to "kill the Indian in the child," research revealed that the federal government's gross underfunding and lack of regulation of the system allowed a culture of abuse and degradation to flourish unchecked. The archival evidence marshaled through the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and in books by Jim Miller and John Milloy was foundational to the establishment and progress of the various class action lawsuits that eventually led to IRSSA. Concurrently, the experience of Indigenous activists with the legal system, through land claims and other Indigenous rights cases, demonstrated that control over archives gave the Canadian state great power in crafting historical narratives and silencing Indigenous perspectives.

It is not surprising, then, that IRSSA is steeped in a profound understanding of what Rand Jimerson, following Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, calls archives power (Jimerson). This recognition of archives power is especially evident in IRSSA Schedule N, which lays out the terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC was charged not just with leading the process of 'reconciliation,' but with building a large archive of colonial records from the churches that ran the schools and the government agencies that established and oversaw the residential school system. These colonial records would be contextualized, corrected and extended through the statements of residential school Survivors. The archive was to be established through a three-step process. First, the TRC was given the mandate to assemble as complete a set of records as possible of the residential school system. The Government of Canada and the various religious entities involved in IRSSA committed to identify these records, create digital surrogates and transfer the surrogates into the TRC's possession. Second, recognizing the biases and limitations of the colonial records, the Indigenous negotiators of IRSSA required that these records be supplement by statements from survivors collected and organized by the TRC itself. Finally, IRSSA required that the resulting set of records – millions of colonial records plus thousands of survivor statements – would be transferred to a new Indigenous-oriented archive that the TRC was to create as part of its mandate. IRSSA demonstrates the importance of archives power and a desire to harness this power for the advancement of Indigenous peoples.

The TRC has now completed its mandate and passed its archives to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), located on the Fort Garry Campus of the University of Manitoba. While most of its collections are digital, NCTR maintains a physical presence on campus, and looks to provide physical and virtual access to its holdings through many channels and methods. NCTR, however, is only part of the legacy of the TRC. Through its Calls to Action the TRC aims to influence the future of Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. Given the implicit and foundational acknowledgement of archives power in IRSSA it is not surprising that the TRC asks archivists to think about how their work is implicated in Canada's history of colonization, and what we can do to engage with the TRC's wider demand to decolonize Canada.

The four brief essays that follow explore how archivists might respond to these calls; that is, how they might harness archives power to advance reconciliation and decolonization. Originally presented at the 2016 Alberta Society of Archives conference in Canmore, on Treaty Seven territory and the homeland of the Stoney Nakoda Nation, the essays explore the implications of

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in speeches and interviews, characterized the residential school system as "cultural genocide", which is how it is characterized in the TRC's Final Report.

the Calls to Action for archives and archival work from different perspectives. First, Greg Bak, a historian and archival educator at the University of Manitoba, explores links between the calls and international documents like the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), outlining the breadth and depth of the calls for Canadian archivists. Second, Tolly Bradford, a historian, reflects on his experience as a contract researcher with the TRC, noting what he sees as some of the shortfalls of the Calls—and how archivists should be aware of these and be ready to engage with them. Third, Elizabeth Walker, a digital archivist with the City of Edmonton Archives, provides a specific example of how her archives is engaging with the Calls by, in this case, working to redescribe material in its collection relating to Indigenous people. Fourth, Jessie Loyer, an Indigenous librarian, informed by both her critical reading of the bias implicit in memory institutions like archives and her own personal connections to residential schools and inter-generational trauma resulting from residential schools, outlines the structural challenges of opening archival spaces to Indigenous voices and people, and also the importance of doing so in a good way that highlights relationship building, engaged listening and reconciliation in both spirit and action. Together, we hope these essays provide a mixture of practical examples and theoretical concerns that can help archivists, and archival leaders, think about their work, the process of reconciliation, and what "decolonizing the archives" means in their particular context.

An Archival Overview of the TRC's Calls to Action

Greg Bak (Associate Professor of History (Archival Studies), University of Manitoba)

There are, by my counting, a half dozen of the TRC's Calls to Action that are directly addressed to specific Canadian archives, or to the Canadian archival community at large. I will get to these shortly, but I wanted to start by considering the role of archives and other forms of social memory in the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), the United Nations' *Joinet-Orentlicher Principles* (UNJOP) and the role of recordkeeping within the Calls more generally.

It is appropriate to start my analysis with UNDRIP (United Nations, *Declaration*). Arguably, the single most significant of the TRC's Calls to Action is number 43:

> We call upon federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation.

This is perhaps the single most significant of the calls because it specifies that UNDRIP is intended to function "as the framework for reconciliation", a notion that is repeated elsewhere in the Calls at least six more times. Clearly, the TRC viewed implementation of UNDRIP as a key measure. Linking the Calls to UNDRIP allowed the TRC to provide a concise pointer to a lengthy and complex Declaration that combines three pages of preamble with a main text of forty-six articles, many with sub-articles. UNDRIP touches on virtually all aspects of the communal and individual lives, cultures and histories of Indigenous peoples. Each reference to UNDRIP in the Calls requires that we unpack its implications.

Fortunately, the text of UNDRIP is readily available on the Internet, as are multiple resources that make the Declaration easier to comprehend. One source that I have found particularly helpful is *Understanding and Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: An Introductory Handbook* by Brenda Gunn, issued by the Indigenous Bar Association. UNDRIP covers a lot of ground. The handbook breaks it down to ten high-level rights, each supported by multiple UNDRIP articles. The Declaration strongly emphasizes Indigenous self-determination in terms of government, culture and institutions, and the need for fully informed prior consent from Indigenous peoples before anyone can make use of Indigenous lands, resources and cultural expressions.

UNDRIP includes articles that recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples to their culture, religions and languages. A number of UNDRIP articles emphasize the importance of Indigenous ownership and control over representations of their own identity, culture and history. Although archives are not specifically mentioned in UNDRIP, it is easy to see how archival missions are implicated in, for example, UNDRIP Article 13:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature.

and UNDRIP Article 31:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures.

Such articles demonstrate, as Elizabeth Walker notes below, that the TRC's Calls to Action are relevant not only for archives that hold records of the Residential School system. UNDRIP Article 31, in particular, represents a particular challenge for Canadian archives, since it calls for Indigenous peoples to maintain and control these resources. Since many Indigenous-related records in Canadian archives are identified in our current system of mono-lineal provenance as being created by, and belonging to, sponsoring agencies of archives – think of traditional knowledge written into records of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, for example, amidst the Department of Indian Affairs records at Library and Archives Canada, or in the records of missionary activity held by religious archives – it is difficult to see how Canadian archives could satisfy the terms of Article 31 without seriously rethinking archival theory and archival mandates.[3] Moreover, through Articles 13 and 31, and others, UNDRIP clearly establishes that only Indigenous communities can determine the kind of social memory infrastructure they require. While Western-style archives might be useful for some Indigenous communities, others may combine or replace archives with oral traditions or symbolic representations through beadwork, textiles, sculpture, paintings, dance, ceremony or the landscape, or a combination of these or other systems of social memory. Part of the challenge of UNDRIP is recognizing that all social memory systems are culturally determined. Indigenous cultures may possess forms of

[3] Tom Nesmith's notion of societal provenance and Chris Hurley's notion of parallel provenance give us a good starting point for this work (Nesmith; Hurley).

social memory that are quite different from but no less valid than the standard western social memory infrastructure of archives, historic sites, galleries, museums and libraries. Moreover, as Jessie Loyer observes below, some Indigenous communities have adopted, adapted and fully integrated into their culture institutions such as archives, libraries and museums.

Implementing UNDRIP, then, will be challenging. Fortunately, the First Archivists' Circle's *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, written while UNDRIP was circulating in draft form, offer a thinking through of the implications for archives of UNDRIP principles around Indigenous self-determination and control over traditional cultural expressions. While the First Archivists' Circle's *Protocols* do not promise any easy resolution to these issues, they offer a practical guide to how archives might proceed. The *Protocols* are perhaps the best place for archivists to turn if seeking immediate actions that they might take to advance archival decolonization.

The description of UNDRIP as a framework for reconciliation by the TRC underlines the importance of the Declaration, including those articles that touch on the work of archives, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada to move forward in a good way. I will come back to UNDRIP when I discuss those Calls to Action that are addressed to Canadian archives. Before turning to these, however, I would first like to explore how the Calls, in general, are infused with concern for records and recordkeeping as mechanisms of transparency and accountability. These concerns make the TRC's Calls to Action a very records-focused document, even in those Calls that are not explicitly addressed to archivists and other record keepers.

The TRC's concern for records and recordkeeping is sometimes implicit (as in Call 1, addressing child welfare, which requires the monitoring and assessment of investigations of neglect) and sometimes explicit (as in Call 2, also on child welfare, which requires annual reporting on various aspects of children-in-care systems across Canada). The emphasis on recordkeeping for transparency and accountability is perhaps strongest in Calls 53-56, which require Parliament to establish a National Council for Reconciliation, charged with monitoring, evaluating, compiling data and reporting on various aspects of Indigenous life in Canada – particularly those disparities identified elsewhere in the Calls and in the TRCs various reports. It is also evident in the importance that the Calls place on the mission and mandate of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), as in Calls 71 and 72, which charge NCTR with continuing to research and collect data on student deaths in residential schools, or Call 78, calling on the federal government to fund NCTR $10 million over seven years.

As with UNDRIP, it is possible to see multiple ramifications for Canadian archives from the emphasis in the Calls on recordkeeping for transparency and accountability. Archives implicated in this work extend beyond those holding records related to the Residential School system. Since the TRC identifies the harms of residential schools as being diffuse within Canadian society, and since these harms play out in various national, provincial, territorial and municipal jurisdictions, as well as in private organizations, religious institutions, educational institutions and so on, it is difficult to imagine a sector of Canadian society, or of Canadian archivy, that does not have some responsibility for contributing to the fulfillment of these Calls.

Finally, there are the half dozen calls that are addressed to specific Canadian archives, or to the Canadian archival community at large. In addition to the three that I just mentioned that address the mandate and situation of NCTR (Calls 71, 72 and 78), there is one Call addressed to Library and Archives Canada (Call 69) and two addressed to the Canadian archival community at large (Calls 70 and 77). Call 77 requires "provincial, territorial, municipal and community archives to work collaboratively" with NCTR to identify, copy and transfer to NCTR copies of all records in their collections that are "relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system." Again, given the TRC's finding that the residential school system resulted in harms throughout Canadian society in addition to its devastating impact on Indigenous people it would be hard to imagine an archives that does not hold materials that might be considered relevant.

Calls 69 and 70 are substantially similar, though 69 is addressed to Library and Archives Canada and 70 to the Canadian archival community at large. These Calls make reference to UNDRIP and the United Nations' Joinet-Orentlicher Principles (UNJOP) (United Nations, *Joinet-Orentlicher Principles*). Call 70, which I will focus on here, specifically asks that the Canadian archival community determine the level of compliance with UNDRIP and UNJOP in our current practices, to produce a report on this analysis and describe a way forward to "full implementation of these international mechanisms as a reconciliation framework for Canadian archives."

Even in my brief discussion of UNDRIP above it is easy to see that the TRC has given us a mighty challenge. An example of "soft law" (Gunn 7), UNDRIP does not lend itself to a straightforward legal test for compliance. Moreover, the whole notion of compliance is fraught. Consider, for example, the range of interpretations of RAD that exist among Canadian archives that identify as RAD compliant. Now multiply that by the manifold dimensions of UNDRIP in terms of laws, lands, languages, cultures and religions.

Things are a bit more clear with regard to UNJOP, if not necessarily any easier. In this case it is helpful to turn to Volume 6 of the TRC's final report, which states UNJOP sets out "remedial measures that states must undertake to guard against impunity from past human rights violations and prevent their reoccurrence" (TRC, *Final Report*, vol. 6, 143). UNJOP is intended to validate the claims of victims and establish the undeniability of their violation. Archives are discussed throughout UNJOP as part of a societal guarantee against the deniability of gross human rights abuses.

Truth claims made in both the Calls to Action and in UNJOP refer not to the kind of ongoing historical investigations that Tolly Bradford discusses, below, but rather to the basic fact of human rights violation. Historians may continue to research and debate many aspects of the Residential School system, just as they continue to research and debate many aspects of the Second World War. UNJOP does not exist to limit historical research, except insofar as it would make it impossible to deny gross human rights violations, such as the fact of the Holocaust during the Second World War, or the fact of the intended and attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples through the Residential School system.

In Call 70 the TRC, citing UNJOP, calls on Canadian archives to be the ultimate bastion against the deniability of the harms inflicted through the residential school system. As with the idea of measuring our compliance with UNDRIP, this is a substantial task, and one that will require

years of attention to how we arrange, describe and provide access to our existing holdings, as well as the records that we acquire in the future.

The TRC's Calls require all of us to engage in archival decolonization. I hope that this all-too brief discussion contributes to an ongoing dialogue within the Canadian archival community of how we can move forward in a good way, working within the reconciliation framework described in the Calls.

Historians, Archivists and the Ongoing Work of Decolonization

Tolly Bradford (Assistant Professor of History, Concordia University of Edmonton)

In 2011, I was given an eight-month contract to research and write a historical report on the "Inuit Experiences" of Residential schools after 1955 when the federal government began funding and operating schools in the Arctic. Much of this report was eventually incorporated into Volume Two of the final report of the TRC: "The Inuit and North Experience." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The Inuit and Northern Experience* 71-186). In my research I consulted a diverse selection of primary source materials ranging from government reports and contemporary accounts by school teachers and inspectors, to media reports about the schools, to written memoirs and oral testimonies of former students. In particular, I made extensive use of the statements of former students recorded at TRC events throughout the north, and made available as videos on the TRC's website. These videoed statements provide powerful and personalized examples of how the residential experience shaped students in ways that even they did not always anticipate or want to admit.

Even as I incorporated a great deal of information from these videoed statements into my report, I felt my research was always only preliminary. To this end, my final report included an appendix with three-and-a-half pages of "notes on themes not covered by this report" (Bradford). For the most part, the issues I listed in my appendix tended to call for more understanding of "why" things occurred as they did: why teachers treated children as they did and why government officials designed policy as they did. While I retain hope that future research may take up some of these questions, I fear the TRC's own Calls to Action, because they tend to focus on research into "what" happened at the schools, risk shaping the research agenda on Residential Schools (and on colonialism in Canada more broadly) such that the issues I noted in my appendix – these questions of "why" – may not be addressed by academic and community historians, or will only be addressed by those historians willing to research "against the grain" of the Calls to Action. However, as I want to highlight here, the Calls to Actions do hint at ways archivists (as opposed to historians) are charged with being intimately involved in addressing these unanswered questions. In fulfilling this important role, archives and archivists must think broadly about what it means to decolonize their archival practice in ways that prepare them for this work.

<u>Unanswered Questions</u>

In looking into the reasons the government began supporting Arctic schools in the 1950s (established even while they shuttered southern schools), I came across a series of articles in *The Beaver* magazine from the period, 1953-5, commenting on what was called, "the dilemma confronting western man in his dealings with the primitive peoples" (Introduction to Mead 4).

While the series comprised a range of case studies, including one by Margaret Mead on the cultural changes faced by "primitive people" in the South Pacific, the series as a whole was framed as a commentary on how the Canadian state should bring modernity to the Arctic, and especially to the Inuit living there. As the editor's introduction stated, the articles were meant to "contribute to the discussion at present taking place in this country involving the fast moving developments in Canada's own northland"(Introduction to Mead 4).

The main contours of this series are outlined in Volume Two of the final report of the TRC report, although they bear repeating here (TRC, *The Inuit and Northern Experience*, 78-9). Not surprisingly, many "experts," including Mead, shaped by the ideology of the "vanishing Indian" (or "Eskimo" in this case), assumed that the "primitive" culture of people like the Inuit would inevitably be absorbed by the "dominant" culture of the "western man," and that change was ultimately necessary if these "primitive" people were to access modernity (Mead; Wallace; Hawthorn; Jenness). However, most interesting to me was that amongst this group of "experts" were important opponents to this assumption about inevitable and rapid assimilation. Donald Marsh, Anglican Bishop in the Arctic, suggested that the Inuit should be exposed to modernity and particularly southern education, but only in ways that would ensure they maintained their own lifeways and identity(Marsh). Significantly, federal minister in charge of the Arctic (and later premier of Quebec), Jean Lesage, seemed to share Marsh's opinion about Inuit education. Lesage, who had toured the north in the summer of 1954, advocated the extension of "modern" education to the Inuit, but only in ways that would be sensitive to Inuit cultural and economic needs. Lesage argued that the education of the Inuit should not "mean the loss of the identity of the Eskimos' culture" (Lesage 4). Lesage even specified that residential-style schooling was bad policy for the Inuit because it separated the child from parents and from his/her "traditional" lifeway and returning them to their community "ill fitted for the life he must lead"(Lesage 6). Instead, offered Lesage, government schools should be built near established populations, and in regions where populations were more dispersed, itinerate teachers, traveling between hunting camps, and supplemented by instruction over radios, could bring modern education to the Inuit (Lesage 6).

But the story does not end here. Only a few months after the publication of this article, Lesage seemed to have changed his mind. In the 1955 annual report of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Lesage, as departmental minister, repeated his concerns about residential schooling separating children from their parents and their culture (Canada, *Department of Northern Affairs*, 18). But he then explained that his ministry had decided on a policy of creating a large system of residential schools (called Hostels) in the north, built with the purpose of centralizing secondary education of the Inuit at a few key locations. From this point forward, Inuit teenagers would be flown from throughout the Arctic to schools at places like Inuvik, Chesterfield Inlet, and Churchill (Canada, *Department of Northern Affairs*, 19).

Why did Lesage change his mind? Why did he – despite his own concerns about cultural loss - choose to pursue a policy of residential schools in the north? Was it related to money? Pressure from cabinet colleagues? Or perhaps pressure from people in the north? Had the bureaucratic machinery in Ottawa already decided on residential schools long before the minister had made up his own mind up? What did the readers of the *Beaver* think about this policy, and its apparent change? And, what had prompted his initial, and apparently more sensitive and nuanced ideas

about bringing modernity to the Inuit, in the first place? Given the constraints of the report I was writing I did not have time to look at this more closely. This kind of nuanced discussion of policy, moreover, was not the main focus of a TRC report which tended to focus on student experience. Nor, do I think, was this kind of unanswered question in mind when the commissioners crafted their Calls to Action and thought about the place of history, and historical research, in the legacy of the TRC.

"Truth" and the Archives

As a scholar of the South African TRC has observed, commissions of truth and reconciliation, although very good at describing and recording the moral wrong doings of the state, or its representative (i.e. the "what" of the event), they are not good – or perhaps really interested – in exploring and explaining in great depth *why* things happened as they did – and if any of the structures that existed in the past (the forces that drove Lesage to change his opinions about residential schools) still exist today (Posel). Instead, both the South African and the Canadian truth commission tend to frame the causes of events as based in the rather distant past and as vaguely defined as "colonialism," or "racism," or "assimilation," and the state's determined desire to realize these goals. What we are left with is a focus on recording in great detail the "what" of the event – the trauma and the triumphs of students – but not enough discussion on the details of the "why." The TRC's own Calls to Action reinforce this attention to the "what" at the expense of calling for extensive research into the "why." Aside from one mention of community-generated research about the history of student experiences, the Calls to Action make no direct mention of "historical research," or the need for new research by historians into the social, economic, political, and cultural forces creating schools.

Only in Calls 69 and 70 does there seem to be a focus on the need to learn more about both the "what" over the "why" of the history. This Call demands that archives (unmediated by trained historians or researchers) must support, "Aboriginal peoples' inalienable right to know the truths about what happened and why, with regard to human rights violations" (TRC, "Calls to Action," 69.i) This is a significant and powerful role ascribed to archivists and archives, and supposes that the archives is a somewhat "neutral" space where truths are waiting to be found and historians are not needed to do any of the interpretation. While the dismissal of trained historians by the commission as intermediaries in this process is an interesting issue in and of itself, what this Call does indicate is that archivists are being tasked with the large and complex role of supporting research into what *and* why things happened. This is a task which, based on the story of Lesage, requires archives to manage and make available a range of voices from the past – those of students as well as those of the policy makers and teachers that operated the system. This requirement suggests that, in the wake of the TRC, archives and archivists need to think about their response to the TRC's Calls to Action – and the broader task of "decolonizing the archives" – as comprising at least a two discreet processes. On the one hand, it demands that we Indigenize the archives. This means both bringing more Indigenous voices into the collections and (re)describing the records, and making the archival space more accessible to Indigenous researchers and community members (needs noted here by both Jessie Loyer and Elizabeth Walker). On the other hand, it means that the archives must also continue to bring the researcher into contact with the voice of the "colonizer." Archivists must continue to work with – and also actively create and describe – the records of policy makers, teachers, and the state officials, and recognise that these records also play a vital role in telling this story of residential schools and

colonialism in Canada. Only when these records are placed alongside Indigenous voices, can we hope to learn something of the "truths" of the residential schools history: the reasons why Lesage, sometime between writing an article and creating policy, jettisoned his concerns about children, their relationship with their parents, and their connection to their culture, and chose instead to build a system of residential Hostels and Halls across Canada's North.

Decolonizing Description
Elizabeth Walker (Archivist, City of Edmonton Archives)

When the Archives Society of Alberta announced the theme of their 2016 Conference as *The Truth About Archives* I immediately thought of initiatives at City of Edmonton Archives that are inspired by the TRC Calls to Action. One project in particular came to mind: re-describing material in our holdings that relate to Indigenous people. At the TRC Roundtable I discussed this project in the hope that sharing our experience would help other archivists facing the same issues.

Background
The City of Edmonton Archives is a medium sized municipal archives with six archivists. Like many archives, we have a large backlog and descriptions that range in creation date from the 1960s to today. We are aware that many of our descriptions are problematic for a variety of reasons, and we have several ongoing projects to update them.

We are fortunate at the Archives to be part of the City of Edmonton which has engaged in reconciliation activities for several years. An example is the 2007 *Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord*, a principle-based relationship agreement (City of Edmonton n.pag). The City has an Indigenous Relations Office that works to develop formal and informal relationships with local Indigenous communities.[4] The office looks for ways to create a welcoming place to facilitate connections to the City and access to programs and services. There are also mandatory workshops for City staff on raising awareness and understanding on reconciliation. At the Archives we look to these City resources to inform our work, as well as the Calls to Action.

One topic of discussion at the ASA Conference was the belief of some people and organizations that the Calls to Action only apply to those that were part of the Residential School system or have Residential School records. At the City of Edmonton Archives we believe that we have a responsibility to respond to the Calls to Action because the Indigenous people of Edmonton and area are part of our community and, while we don't have Residential School records specifically, we do have both civic records and private records relating to Indigenous people.

The civic records in our collection which relate to Indigenous people are often, in the somewhat tongue in cheek words of City Archivist Kathryn Ivany, "correspondence shifting responsibility to other jurisdictions." The tone of these documents usually can be summed up as "we have an issue, it's your problem, come and deal with it." I find little recognition in these records of the scope of the problems Indigenous people faced within the city or of any concerted attempts to alleviate them.

[4] The website for the Indigenous Relations Office links to the *Urban Aboriginal Accord* and other relationship building documents.

The majority of our Indigenous related material is in private records donated over the past 70 years by Edmonton businesses, organizations and citizens. These are mostly from the settler perspective, often personal reminiscences, with little from Indigenous people or communities.

When the Calls to Action were published we had discussions on our response which led to the writing of the *City of Edmonton Archives TRC Calls to Action Guideline* (the City of Edmonton Archives equivalent of a policy and procedures document). The Guideline is currently being reviewed by the Indigenous Relations Office and will be made public soon. In it we express our commitment to reconciliation and engagement with local Indigenous people and organizations.

The Guideline also outlines specific actions. For example, one action identified in the Guideline is to research, create, and maintain an index to fonds and collections containing material relating to interactions between Indigenous people and the City at a formal level as well as material from our private donors relating to Indigenous history. This project is necessary as our finding aids are in several formats and differing levels of completeness. For example they are in our database, in typed books in the reference room, as well as on index cards (or all three and sometimes they contradict each other). Because of this, we don't have a solid understanding of the material or what biases or prejudices shaped them. We are starting with a wide open search and if we narrow our scope it will be documented in the index. The index is slated to be completed early in 2017 and will be made available on our website as well as in the reference room. This will be a long term project and will be updated as backlog and new material is processed.

The most concrete of our actions so far is updating descriptions relating to Indigenous people to address colonial, racist and offensive words. It was something we talked about but we hadn't made much progress until we received a complaint from the public. It was regarding image EA-114-4, a sketch of Indigenous women with the title "Ugly Customers at Smart's Store."[5] I would like to recognize that the researcher who made the complaint was hurt by this title. For this I am personally and professionally sorry. I am also grateful that they did complain and I have thanked them. The complaint was the impetus we needed. It spurred us to action and it allowed us to advocate for funding to hire a contractor to begin our re-description project. Going forward, we will build on this re-description project to change practice for future description. Please note, while we are changing these descriptions, we are keeping copies of the previous descriptions as they are part of the history of the records.

Re-Description Project

We started the re-description project with photographs. We had some digitized images in our online database but the majority were on printed photocards in the reference room. A survey found over 400 images that needed review. It was actually closer to 800 but that was reduced when we took out photographs of the Edmonton Eskimos football team (a larger issue out of the scope of this project!). We focused on two areas of description: photograph titles and terms used, particularly subject terms.

Photograph titles

[5] Image EA-114-4 *Ugly Customers at Smart's Store* can be found in the Archives online database: <https://archivesphotos.edmonton.ca/>

The contractor researched each photograph to try and determine where the title came from. Sometimes it was obvious, if it was written on the photograph itself for example. When there is an obvious creator title we left it. If it was not obviously creator generated we assumed it was archivist created and updated it[6] according to controlled terminology (to be discussed below). In the RAD field **Source of Title** we used "title supplied" and "title based on content of the image" to distinguish between creator and archivist titles.

When an item has a creator-supplied title (i.e. every instance of "title supplied") there is a note:

> Title Supplied means the title of the image was given by the creator of the work. Archivists keep those titles to provide context even though they may contain inappropriate or offensive language.

Using this process we are hoping to respect the record but contextualize it and hopefully lessen any harm caused.

Terminology

We developed a system that worked for our needs and drew up rules to follow. For example we debated on whether to use the term Indigenous or Aboriginal. In the end we compromised and used Indigenous as a subject term and Aboriginal in photograph descriptions and archivist created titles. Sources for terminology included the *Terminology Guide: Research on Aboriginal Heritage* (Library and Archives Canada n.pag.) and the *Indigenous Foundations* online terminology guide (University of British Columbia n.pag.). The contractor also consulted the website for The National Museum of the American Indian (n.pag.) to provide some descriptive background on photographers and photographs in our holdings that focus on people from regions in the United States.

At the City of Edmonton Archives we use the Library of Congress's Thesaurus of Graphic Materials (TGM) subject terms for photographs. Some of the terms are unsuitable due to differences between Canadian and American common usages (Reserves versus Reservation for example) so we created a list of exceptions. These new terms are documented and will be used consistently going forward. There are only two so far: Indian Encampments and Indian Reservations are TGM terms, we use Encampments and Reserves.

The project also undertook to identify specific Indigenous peoples (Métis, Cree, or Inuit for example) and use personal and place names in the original language where possible. An example is Image EA-160-1151 which has Hobbema Indian Reserve in the supplied title and we have added its current name, Maskwacis, to the description.

Status of the Project

The photograph descriptions are updated and all images are now scanned and uploaded to our online database. The project was completed in 3 months although some of that was laying the groundwork (working out procedures and setting rules, etc.) so future projects may take less time. Next we will update full descriptions of fonds and collections but for that we need to do a

[6] A record of original titles has been kept through the retention of the photocards.

review of our subject terms. We currently use the 29 terms from the *Alberta On Record* database (Archives Society of Alberta n.pag.). As there are a limited number of terms in this standard I hope to revisit the use of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Subject Headings (PAASH) which are currently being revived.

We have a lot of work to do and it is a challenge to find a balance between projects like this and all our other work. I would like to acknowledge how hard this can be for all of us. All archivists have a lot of projects competing for our time and resources and we all have backlogs and problematic descriptions. With regards to material relating to the Residential Schools and Indigenous people, not only are we dealing with emotionally charged material, we face an added complication in that many of us know the archivists who did the original descriptive work. We may even have done these descriptions ourselves. This has been an emotional journey for me and I suspect for many others. I had some difficult conversations at the City of Edmonton Archives and at the ASA Conference. But they are important conversations and I know that we're doing what we can and are making progress.

Roundtable Discussion

Topics raised in the Roundtable discussion included the importance of self-care and engagement with the local Indigenous community. On this topic I pointed out that there is not a single homogenous Indigenous community but many. In our relationship building we are going carefully and being open for dialogue without assumptions. Our past attempts at outreach, although well meaning, were somewhat condescending in that we were eager to show how we could help, without considering if our help was appropriate or even wanted. As we go forward we are following the advice of the City's Indigenous Affairs Office in how to approach building relationships. We are also taking part in events and workshops like the Blanket Exercise. This outreach will be incremental and long term but I think it is important that we have started our project, knowing that it is a process and will change as we learn and grow.

Ceding Space and Bearing Witness to Trauma in Memory Institutions

Jessie Loyer (Librarian, Mount Royal University)

My perspective is in the personal intersection of working in an information organization (albeit a library rather than an archive) and as an intergenerational survivor of residential school. My late grandmother Kathleen Steinhauer attended the Edmonton Indian Residential School. It left an indelible mark on the way she experienced affection and achievement, and those experiences affect me as her granddaughter; the TRC identified that descendants of survivors also experience intergenerational trauma.

Though I am not an archivist, my perspective is informed by the assertion that Indigenous galleries, libraries, archives, and museums are interconnected. The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums exists precisely for that reason (ATALM, para 1). The definitive differences between archives, museums, libraries, and cultural centres in Indigenous community and Indigenous thought are less relevant; there are fewer boundaries between these memory institutions for us because Indigenous knowledge is held in a variety of formats: on the page, through oral histories, in physical items, and on the land (Callison, Roy and LeCheminant,

1-4). This holistic sense of memory institutions informs my discussions about the power in archives, as a librarian.

The archive is never neutral. Our biases shape description and access, but also even what we consider for inclusion, for deaccession. It is in the way opening hours are structured, what kinds of objects and behaviours are allowed and encouraged in the space, and how security works. Our biases can be found in the kinds of education and credentials required for staff and the acceptable types of professional development that staff are encouraged to pursue. Those biases are informed by structural, systemic, and invisible prejudices, upheld by the homogeneity of people privileged enough to work in memory institutions: "there's a pervasive whiteness in librarianship…that is unbearable, paralytic, oppressive" (Nowviskie, para. 5). They make an archive a passively (and sometimes actively) hostile place for Indigenous people, especially when we search for records relating to our relatives who attended residential schools.

The inability of the government to release all the records relating to residential school is concerning. Not only because Library and Archives Canada exists as an arm of the federal government, which encouraged and enabled the school system, but also because they, like so many archives, are underfunded. The staff necessary to make this process transparent and efficient is simply absent. In order to safeguard and make accessible residential school history, archives need stable operational funding. Archival material allowed researchers to see the wider systems of residential school abuse. For example, archival work was invaluable for Ian Mosby to write about the nutrition experiments done to children in residential schools (Mosby, 145-172). The experiments would still have happened without the records, but the academically acceptable way to learn about them and to realize this was more than a single school's problem would have been erased. When Mosby's research came out people nodded in recognition – they had experienced these horrors, or they had heard about those experiences from others. The records validated and amplified the pattern of experiences.

Some of the concerns of salvage archaeology – that culture is threatened and without intervention, will disappear – can seep into archival work; archives have a responsibility to recognize and respond to Indigenous people who rightfully fear that donating materials to archives means they will lose access to these materials. Building a culture of stewardship of materials, rather than ownership, can help assure Indigenous communities that the history of cultural theft will not continue.

There is great trauma enabled and captured by the archive, but it can exist as a force for liberation. How can an archive be leveraged to enable social justice, particularly if it contains the records of horrors? Nowviskie positions archives within their legacy: we can "replicate colonial archival configurations and normative knowledge structures of the past. Or we can take it seriously and step back a bit, so that the people who rightly possess and articulate it may better direct us all—on their own terms—in systems-building for digital stewardship and the work of memory institutions." (Nowviskie, para. 6). This work of systems-building for stewardship requires actively choosing outreach.

Archival practitioners must focus on outreach efforts because the core of memory institutions are the people whose stories reside there. Nowviskie urges libraries and archives to re-enable agency

for the people whose belongings and experiences have become the collection (para. 8). There are two components to this work: considering the genocidal legacy that many memory institutions have enabled and creating a space for liberation in the archives; essentially both truth and reconciliation must occur internally. Understanding the legacy allows a memory institution to audit itself: what practices continue to prop up inequality, from access to description? Creating a space for liberation requires inviting those people historically barred from archives in and listening to what they want and what they need. Both actions are necessary because we are called to witness horror: residential schools were about adults abusing children, systematically, across the country. They ripped them from their families, they destroyed the culture and language, and they brutalized children in the name of civilization.

To re-centre this conversation on the importance of this work, I want to share some of the experiences of survivors, to remind us of who we are accountable to in the Calls to Action. These are stories that touch on linguistic colonialism, flattening culture into tokenism, dehumanization, cultural shame, and abuse.

Linguistic colonialism

> "David Nevin recalled seeing a young girl "savagely" beaten by staff for refusing to stop speaking Mi'kmaq, "this went on for—seemed like an eternity, and no matter what they did to her she spoke Mi'kmaq. You know, and to this day I, you know, that has been indelible in my mind and I think that's one of the reasons why when I went to school there I always spoke English, that fear of being hit with that strap, that leather strap." (TRC, *The Survivors Speak,* 50-51)

Putting culture on display

> On occasion, some of the staff at the Blue Quills school had the students put on what one former student called "little powwows."
>
> "Okay, everyone, want to see you guys dance like Indians," like, you know, like you pagans, or you people, you know, to go in the circle, and then she says, "Here's your drum, and here is your stick," and of course he sang though. I remember he's still a good singer, but they would laugh when he would bang that dust, that tin, steel dustpan, eh.
>
> But they had laughed at some of this, you know, make us do some of the things that was culturally done, eh, but to turn it around and make it look like it was more of a joke than anything else. It was pretty quiet when we would do those little dances. There was no pride. It's just like we were all ashamed, and we were to dance like little puppets." (TRC, *The Survivors Speak,* 58)

Dehumanizing

> "Frank Tomkins said that at the school at Grouard, Alberta, the staff once made a boy who could not control his bowels eat some of his own excrement. When he complained about this incident to his father, word got back to the staff member, who beat Frank. At this point, his father withdrew him from the school." (TRC, *The Survivors Speak,* 60-61)

Cultural shame

> "Florence Horassi said that at the residential school she attended in the Northwest Territories, she was made to feel ashamed of being Aboriginal.
>
> When I was in residential school, then they told me I'm a dirty Indian, I'm a lousy Indian, I'm a starving Indian, and my mom and dad were drunkards, that I'm to pray for them, so when they died, they can go to heaven. They don't even know my mom had died while I was in there, or do they know that she died when I was in there? I never saw my mom drink. I never saw my mom drunk. But they tell me that, to pray for them, so they don't go to hell." (TRC, *The Survivors Speak,* 104).

Sexual abuse

> "At the Beauval school in Saskatchewan, Mervin Mirasty was told to take a lunch pail to a priest's room. He had not been warned that boys who were sent on such errands were likely to be abused, as Mirasty was in this instance. When he returned, he felt that boys who knew what had happened to him were mocking him. "The boys looked at me, and some of the older ones, they were all smiling." He warned his own brother to never take the lunch pail to the priest. "And to this day, I don't know why he didn't listen to me, like, he, he went up there I guess the next day, or soon after, he come back crying." (TRC, *The Survivors Speak,* 156)

These are heavy stories. The testimonies need space carved out for them here in this article because these stories cannot be borne by the survivors alone. At the 2011 TRC event in Vancouver on creating a national research centre, those attending were reminded that when survivors offer testimony, they do not experience catharsis, but instead relive that trauma. It does not become easier for survivors to talk about what happened to them; it is painful every time. The Calls to Action are a call to bear some of the weight of these stories on behalf of survivors and their descendants.

The last reminders about centering humanity in addressing the Calls to Action come from another memory institution: museums. The Standards for Museum Exhibits dealing with Historical Subjects highlight ways to be cognizant that residential schools are of the past, but that living survivors and intergenerational survivors continue to experience the effects of trauma.

There are five standards, but three in particular provide guidance on connecting with community during outreach. First, that "museums and other institutions funded with public monies should be keenly aware of the diversity within communities and constituencies that they serve." (AHA, no. 3) Memory institutions must go beyond including diversity in strategic plans and actively think about how the entire community can be a part of the work. Though memory institutions are funded by public monies, too often the loudest, most privileged demographics take up the most space. Actively recruit Indigenous people to be board members; explicitly seek out Indigenous employees, and ask: what perspectives are missing in the collection?

Second, "when an exhibit addresses a controversial subject, it should acknowledge the existence of competing points of view. The public should be able to see that history is a changing process

of interpretation and reinterpretation formed through gathering and reviewing evidence, drawing conclusions, and presenting the conclusions in text or exhibit format" (AHA, no. 4). The myth that Aboriginal communities welcomed residential schools was pervasive for a time: though some individuals may have had a bad experience, the benevolence of residential school administrators allowed for widespread education. The reality is that in many residential schools, children were not expected to learn, but to work physical labour; the point of residential schools was not education, but assimilation (TRC *Honouring the Truth*, 1). What perceptions about residential schools can memory institutions challenge by laying bare the strength of the collection?

Third, that "museum administrators should defend exhibits produced according to these standards" (AHA, no. 5). For those in positions of power, articulating the controversies and concerns of patrons should be part of the accountability owed to survivors and researchers. There is no singular narrative told in the collections of archives, libraries, and museums, instead visitors must grapple with multiple voices, incomplete stories, and challenging subject material. Memory institutions need to provide the tools for visitors to make meaning from these divisive narratives.

Many non-Indigenous people want to help, but are uncertain of where to start. Let reading this be a call to action for you, to begin by reading the stories of survivors in the final report of the TRC and to connect with the communities of the territories where your collections reside. There are high stakes here; as Moe Mitchell, an organizer with Black Lives Matter, has said, "Your individual anxiety about possibly getting things wrong has nothing to do with my liberation." Do not be afraid; be bold.

There is no need to be a voice for the voiceless; instead, listen to those who are already speaking: activists and educators and knowledge keepers from the territories where you work have already been doing this work, for generations. Note who is not in the room when we talk about reconciliation and the work of the TRC, especially in archives. You need take time to create spaces that are not violent, but welcoming, to Indigenous people in order to begin to work together – our presence is key to this process; as Marie Battiste has said, there can be nothing about us without us.

This is an invitation. This is a call to action. ekosi

Conclusion

Archives power is evident throughout our brief essays, as it is in IRSSA and in the TRC's Final Report. Archives power includes the power to hurt through derogatory, colonial and hateful words, to give evidence, to raise awareness and share the burden, and the potential to heal through understanding the past – not just what happened but the reasons why. Archives, along with community memories and testimony, are pathways for researchers to learn about, and conduct research into, the Residential School system. Much more than this, they are also pathways for Indigenous people and communities to recognize injustice and begin to heal, and for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to begin the difficult work of reconciliation and decolonization.

Along with drawing attention to the power of archives, these essays make it plain that, through the Calls to Action, archivists are asked to do many things to harness this archival power, from making online and physical spaces more accessible and inclusive, to making descriptions more sensitive to the colonial past, to providing a pathway towards a decolonizing vision of Canadian history. The Calls require archivists make these changes within the framework of the UNDRIP and UNJOP. Underlying the Calls is the need to engage in outreach work, and, despite its costs and time commitment, to change the way archives do our work so that our institutions can become engines of decolonization not only within the world of memory institutions but within Canadian society at large. The Final Report and the Calls, like IRSSA before, are founded on a recognition of the role that archives have played as a technology of colonization, and the concomitant role that we must play in the long term processes of decolonization and reconciliation.

Archivists cannot do this alone. We must work together, as a community, and we must work with non-archivists, within the GLAM sector and beyond. Call 70 asks archivists to work together to evaluate our own performance within the framework of UNDRIP and UNJOP. The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) and the Association des Archivistes du Québec (AAQ) have come together to strike a task force that will examine the archival implications of the Calls. This work will succeed to the extent that it meets with the good will and good efforts of a broad set of archival institutions and individual archivists.

Critical to this work is sustained funding and sustained attention and discussion. Much of our work is done from grant to grant, often with a narrow focus, making it difficult to be strategic. Calls such as 68, 70, 72 and 78 describe the need for substantial funding to create systemic change. As a community, archivists can use the Calls as a lever for advocacy, whether on the level of individual institutions and practitioners or that of the archival community, through the Provincial and Territorial Councils, or through ACA, CCA, and AAQ. By sharing experiences and concrete examples of work in response to the Calls to Action, these essays add to this broad discussion, offering critical commentary and practical examples for how to engage in archival decolonization and give prominence to archives, and archival research, in public discussions about history and historical knowledge.

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