Navigating the Archival Archipelago

Politics of Record-Keeping at the ICRC

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ABSTRACT

How should we understand the politics and practice of record-keeping in a humanitarian institution? What institutional dynamics does the operation of an archive reflect? Disrupting the assumption that archives are static spaces, this paper explores how archives (defined as both the site and material) are entangled in the operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). By attempting to analyse the archive as an entity through sources it holds about its creation, interviews with archivists and staff at the ICRC and observation in archival spaces, this paper illustrates the possibilities of an ethnographic approach to archival politics. By reconstructing the history of the archives through the imprints of archival labour, the ICRC's archives are conceptualised as an archipelago - with the boundaries of its constitutive islands constantly shifting. By navigating through the archipelago, we see competing institutional concerns unfold within and between the islands. First, the ICRC's confidential approach and its implications for record-keeping are explored through the emergence of 'archival anxieties' – shifting from archivist to researcher. In contrast, the imperative force of communication on the circulation of photographs within the archive islands is examined. Through this ethnographic and historical exploration of the archival archipelago, one can see the implications for ongoing debates about institutional memory and history which unfold beyond the ICRC. These dilemmas continue to have implications for the state of flux within the archival archipelago, attempting to stay afloat in the age of compounding humanitarian crises.

SANJNA GIRISH YECHAREDDY

Sanjna is a researcher, archivist and poet. She received her bachelor's degree in International Relations and Quantitative Methods from the University of Edinburgh in 2020 and a master's degree in Anthropology and Sociology from the Geneva Graduate Institute in 2024. Her work builds on a range of experiences in various archival spaces - from the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh, the Archives at the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bangalore, the UN Archives & Library and the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva. Sanjna's work weaves Anthropology, History and Archival Studies and embodies a creative approach to academic thinking and writing.

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Acknowledgement

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1   At the end of two years of this thesis journey, I am left with one thought - intellectual pursuits require an equal measure (if not more) of patience and the often-cited 'passion' for research. This patience (which I have struggled to inculcate) has taught me humility in the face of expected and unexpected happenings – illness, grief, financial uncertainties and every other kind. I have learnt how to see these happenings as a constant backdrop shaping my research rather than casting them as obstacles to 'overcome' in the research process. At the most challenging points of researching and writing academic work, one tends to believe researchers suffer and triumph in isolation. For me, the purpose of an acknowledgement section is to take a step back from this isolating tangle of one's life and reflect on how I got here while thanking the many figures who have shown me how to reconfigure my compass at various points.

2   I begin by thanking Venkat Srinivasan at the Archives at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore, India, where this project's seed was carried from and brought to Geneva. Thank you for enabling me to arrive in Geneva and for shaping the archives at NCBS to be a space where I could return to write, read and reflect long after I 'officially' left my position to start my studies. This cocoon has nurtured my work in myriad unexpected ways, and I am surprised at how much of this place I always carry with me.

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4   When I read Kabul Carnival cover-to-cover by Dr Julie Billaud for the class on feminist ethnography in 2019, I was only beginning to understand what Anthropology was. At that point, I could not have predicted that a master's thesis in Geneva under your supervision was on the cards. Thank you, professor - for showing me how to be a fearless ethnographer, for holding a space every month where we could navigate the vulnerabilities which came with our messy drafts, and for your ceaseless encouragement to materialise through writing, what was once only a set of disconnected ideas.

5   In addition to my co-supervisors, my gratitude extends to the many professors who have taken an interest in this project and been generous with their time and insights. A special thank you to Dr Gregoire Mallard, Dr Aditya Bharadwaj, Dr Francoise Grange Omokaro, Dr Davide Rodogno, Dr Monique Beerli, Dr Lee Douglas, Dr Gretchen Bakke and Dr Liat Kozma.

6   Every conversation has continually shaped this project, and I am grateful to have learned how to be a better researcher from each of you.

7   Without the support and encouragement of archivists at the International Committee of the Red Cross, who tolerated my presence for prolonged periods and guided and, most importantly, inspired this project, it could not have taken shape. A very special thank you to Fabrizio Bensi, Daniel Palmieri, Valerie Hashemi, Nils Melzer, Nicole Martins-Maag, Jean- Michel Diez, Isabelle Marian, Coralie Soret, Charlotte Mohr, Sonia Crenn, and Sabine Kreis. Thank you to Hermine Diebolt and Alex Renault at the UN Archives & Library for their constant dose of cheerful encouragement and endless patience as I tried to find my way through difficult times. The sense-making process with archival objects unfolded over many months alongside my visits. Thank you to Amrita ma'am for supporting all my translation efforts and reminding me how far I've come from my initial forays into learning French in 2016 to working with archival documents.

8   In this final portion of the acknowledgements section, I take the liberty of being saccharine.

9   To Ishita Bhatia, Poorvi Parakh, Snigdha Agarwal Sreenivas, Izel Guven, Eunsong Cho, Alexandra Conroy, Aditi Mishra, and Malavika Anil Kumar—who have tolerated endless chattering about archives and bad excuses of absence on days when I choose to live under a rock—I am grateful you still choose to surround me in a bubble of warmth and support.

10   To LSM, for being the epitome of kindness and love, and for never making me feel you were too far away.

11   Finally, to my family, I often feel frustrated that you don't understand or engage with my work. Too often, I let this feeling obscure the actual meaning of unconditional support and acceptance. Thank you for everything, big and small. To Nimi Ajji, who is watching over me as I type this - please include the news that your granddaughter *finally* finished her master's thesis in your daily gossip sessions with your new other-worldly friends.

1. From The Humanitarian Trail to the Archives

Figure 1: Children playing in front of the monument of an angel protecting a refugee mother and child
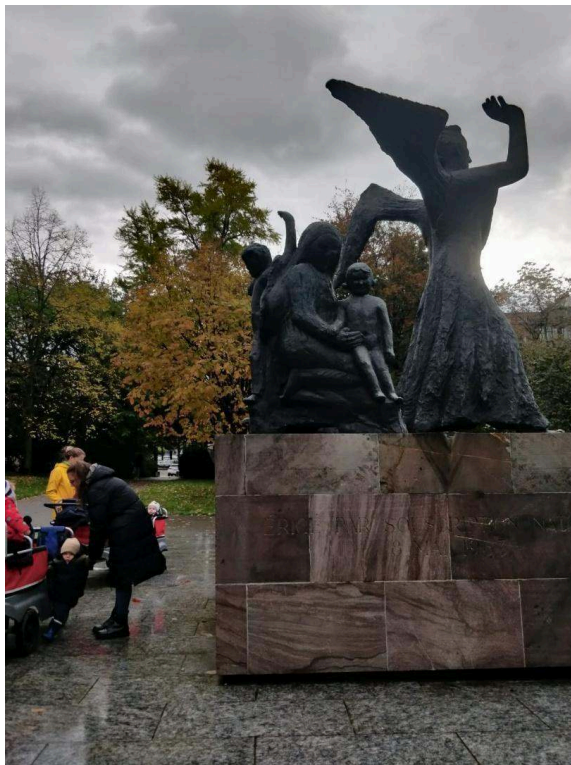
Source: Author

1   I met X on a feminist walking tour of Geneva organised by a student initiative on campus. A former delegate of the ICRC, she now organised various walking tours of the city. In our first meeting after the tour, I asked her about who was responsible for placing the plaques and busts of the ICRC founders around the city. She told me that the family of each founder had advocated with the Canton and the ICRC for a plaque to commemorate and provide visibility for their family's legacy. In the case of Henri

Dunant, these efforts were led by Roger Durand, the president of the Société du Henri Dunant who single-handedly negotiated with the Canton and not the ICRC. Towards the end, every founder except Theodore Maunoir had received a bust. HC then explained her involvement in creating the Humanitarian Trail of the Red Cross, a project initiated with the International Museum of the Red Cross and the Société du Henri Dunant. The trail was conceived as an 'open-air museum' and intended as a self-guided walking tour around various key places that marked the ICRC's history in the city. Within Old Town, the trail wove around the plaques and busts, and the rest of the tour revolved around the headquarters.

2 The seemingly harmonious origin story of humanitarianism with multiple heroes seemed difficult to sustain in practice.

3 'I am tired of telling the histories of the same old men' she remarked.

Arriving at the Archives of the ICRC

4 Working at the Archives at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) during the waves of the pandemic, I found a place to anchor. As an archive of science in contemporary India, the archives at NCBS hold the personal papers of scientists. On most days, there was no separation between my home and here. Most days, I arrived at the archives before breakfast to open its doors to visitors, and left after dinner. In addition to my work with the material, I spent time writing, reading, and becoming acquainted with the wider bubble of the research institute in which the archives were ensconced. Through the steady, repetitive acts of organising, classifying, numbering and describing material, I picked up the bare bones of the archiving process. I found a sense of belonging doing these tasks which seemed to others to be a little esoteric at its best and incredibly boring at its worst. Outside the door of the archives hung a large poster which read 'Find, Tell, Share Stories'. I soon began to learn how stories animated the archives. These stories were the loudest in the various letters, photographs and ephemera of scientists that had been donated to the archives. However, through careful uncovering, I learned about the space of the archives at NCBS itself, starting with why it was built at the site of a defunct biology laboratory. Soon, these stories grew - around families of scientists who had found material in their cupboards one day and decided to donate it, around staff who helped us keep the space free of pests and told us about the everyday happenings of the institute, around visitors who were thrilled at stumbling across a particular object and spent hours recounting a tale, around other archivists who had moulded the space in particular ways long before I arrived. When I arrived in a new city, overwhelmed with the challenges of tethering to a completely new place, finding another archive was seemingly the most obvious thing to do. So, I sought familiarity within yet another archive to counter unfamiliarity.

5 At the Grand Morillon Student Residence, I often saw a flag with a red cross from the bridge waving placidly in the wind. Soon, spotting the symbol of the cross across the city became a sort of exercise – on trams, billboards, and posters scattered around Cornavin. Between the Institute and the Residence, this circling the headquarters of the ICRC remained inescapable, constant and perpetual – its presence firmly imprinted in the everyday.

6 I understood the many layers of this urban presence when I encountered the Humanitarian Trail of the Red Cross created by HC with the International Museum of the Red Cross and the Société du Henri Dunant. The trail spanned effectively had two

parts – the first was constructed around various plaques and busts in Old Town, and the second revolved around sites related to its present headquarters in Nations. The trail in Old Town began with the bust of Dunant. In October 1888, Rue Sous-la-Treille in Geneva was renamed Rue de la Croix-Rouge. The Municipal Administration Report for 1888 notes that this renaming was 'at the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross and on the twenty-second anniversary of its founding'.[1] Before one begins the uphill walk up the road, a bust of Henri Dunant can be spotted – partially hidden underneath the trees and relatively minuscule compared to the massive statue of Henri Dufour towering over the intersection. Entering the Parc des Bastions, one encounters a range of plaques and busts – placed on specific buildings where founders were born, lived, or gathered for key events that marked the forming and evolution of the ICRC. In a corner of Parc des Bastions, a sculpture by Jacques Probst shows a large angel protecting a wounded soldier and a refugee mother with her children which was presented to the city by the ICRC as a monument to Dunant commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the ICRC. On a cloudy day, daycare staff wheeled children in buggies to this site and watched over them as they played in the dirt in front of the angel. Within a three-kilometre radius of Old Town, each founding father rested in isolation and separation, watching over central Geneva's consistent but never too loud humdrum. Upton writes how statues and monuments form the 'ubiquitous setting of our everyday lives', cannot be fully understood as single entities, and need to be examined as part of assemblages within a particular place where they mutually reinforce each other's presence.[2] The humanitarian trail represents an institutional effort towards creating this assemblage. It renders the statues visible and sensible in relation to each other – signifying that the ICRC has always shaped what 'peace' has meant to Geneva. Following the physical markers of the ICRC's history in the forms of the statues, busts and plaques, one confronts the question of how the ICRC gives form to its own origin stories and where the basis of these stories lies.

7   In many ways, archives are a cradle for understanding the origins of institutions – where stories become intertwined with 'recorded evidence', persistent storytellers and the constructed categories of 'institutional memory'. We turn to the archives to understand which origin stories (or even which strand of a single story) circulate within an institution. What connects the various statues, busts and plaques is that they find their basis in a document or record, preserved in an archive. The archives of an institution allow us to see where origin stories are tethered, how they materialise in various sites within and beyond the institution and, in turn, how they shape the very spaces of the archives they emerge from. The archives as a space, though fuelling this movement around stories, often obscures into the background. Situating ourselves within the portal offered by archives allows us to see particular institutional dynamics at play.

8   The ICRC's General Public Reading Room has no windows. No sunlight illuminates the moment one opens a box to riffle through documents. Instead, a kind of vacuum slowly sets in where the passage of time is not felt. Upon entering, one cannot leave the vicinity of the reading room without being accompanied by an archivist possessing an access badge and one must then prepare to set up camp in the reading room with adequate water, food, and supplies. However, this tiny basement room is far from a place of stasis and has its own story. It exists today as a space where anybody from the public is permitted to enter to view a portion of records – an act which was not possible until 1996.

9   This paper emerges from reflections and sustained observations about objects, people, and ideas circulating within and beyond the archives. The public reading room of the archives is not the only space inhabited by archival records. At the present headquarters in Geneva, one can access to various degrees in principle documents, photographs, films and other archival objects in the reading room described above of the General Public Archives, the library, the audiovisual archives, archives of the central tracing agency and the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Navigating between these places is difficult without help as they sometimes remain hidden in view from each other. After repeated visits, the need to understand these spaces became inescapable. This paper explores how the archives of the ICRC came to be and the process of their creation. I ask what reasons are behind the emergence of multiple spaces of archives, the processes that created them, which competing institutional logics shaped their formation and why archives are essential to situate within the broader politics of humanitarianism.

10   If the statues, plaques and busts showcase the birthplace of the ICRC within Geneva, the evolution of the wider 'Red Cross movement' takes the distinctive, recognisable appeal of the Red Cross far beyond. The term 'movement' describes the emergence of various actors, including the ICRC, the International Federation of the Red Cross Societies (created in 1919, formerly known as the League, abbreviated as the IFRC) and the National Red Cross Societies. At various points, the IFRC's evolution and the expansion of national societies have intersected, diverged, clashed and intertwined with the ICRC. Rather than indicating homogeneity, the usage of 'movement' indicates a disparate spread of actors who, at various points, converge and diverge in their interpretation and practice of the humanitarian principle. Wiley et al. cast the Red Cross movement not as a single, cohesive entity but rather as an 'arcuate delta' where the main body bifurcates into numerous distributaries, or channels, which follow their course, at times converging, at other times diverging.[3] I aim to expand these attempts at grappling with the spatiality of the movement to show that even within Geneva and the headquarters, thinking about spatiality enables us to theorise the lesser- examined aspects of record-keeping and its relationship to bureaucratic structures. Through this, I show how various sites holding records within the ICRC can be understood as an archival archipelago.

11   In the following chapters, I intend to lead the reader through a rendering of the form of this archival archipelago and its subsequent evolution. I construct this form based on weaving insights from ethnography and archival research. In the first chapter, I elaborate on what it means to conduct an ethnography of the archives and the possibilities which emerge when this ethnographic approach is brought into conversation with archival research to study the sociality of an archive.

12   In the following chapter, through a historical reconstruction of the archives of the ICRC since its construction, I show how they emerged as islands. I recast the Foucauldian concept of the 'carceral archipelago' to show the existence of an archival archipelago within the ICRC. Archiving often involved intricate and laborious processes of tracing, finding and consolidating records from various entities across the movement to create the archives and relied heavily on the ability of the archivist to navigate and negotiate the politics of constantly shifting structures of the ICRC and the broader Red Cross movement. In this manner, the archivist-cartographer emerges as a central actor in this chapter. I develop the notion of institutional cartography to show the crucial role that archival labour played in sustaining these islands.

13 The next two chapters stem from this reconstruction and delve into the specific dynamics of islands and the relationship between them. By focusing on two kinds of archival objects – documents and photographs – I reveal how the islands that evolved around each other were driven by competing institutional logics of confidentiality versus communication. Chapter Four concentrates on the operation of confidentiality and how it led to the emergence of archival anxieties. These anxieties, rooted in the very construction of the archives, shifted their loci from archivists to researchers as they continued to move through the island. Tracing these manifestations of archival anxieties allows us to witness the staggered evolution of access policies to the islands and the implications of the 'public opening' of the archives. Chapter Five takes a different structure to explore the relationship of photographs to the archival archipelago. It shows glimpses of archival decision-making at two moments in time – the Second World War and the Biafran War. By comparing the function of photography in these two phases, as evidence versus communication material, we see how the ICRC viewed the role of photography within its operations. This, in turn, affected the extent to which photographs were seen as 'archivable' objects – causing them to be dispersed widely and not being brought into the islands.

14 The final chapter provides concluding reflections on the current state of the archival archipelago. The growing literature on the ICRC has often played into the ICRC's sophisticated institutional attempts at 'communicating' their histories, leading to the ICRC dominating historiography of the Red Cross movement.[4] Asking why this is the case leads us to examine how notions of history and institutional memory have always been entangled within the structures of the ICRC. I show the existence of contesting voices and interpretations around the purpose of an archive. These differences underlie a state of flux, which is crucial to acknowledge not just for the future of the archival archipelago but for how we proceed to think about the evolution of humanitarian action.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ville de Geneva, *Compte-Rendu de L'Administration Municipale de la Ville De Genève, Pendant L'Annee 1888*, Genève : Jules Carey. Available on: https://archivescacm.geneve.ch/assets/archives/cra/1888/pdf/cra_1888.pdf

2. Dell Upton, Monuments and Crimes, *Journal 18,* June 2009: 9.

3. Neville Wylie, Melanie Oppenheimer and James Crossland, "The Red Cross Movement: continuities, changes and challenges." In *The Red Cross Movement*, p 9, (Manchester University Press, 2020), 16.

4. David Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross.* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25.

2. Ethnography in/of Archives of Humanitarianism

Figure 2: Self-portrait of an ethnographer in the archives

Source: Author

On a grey day with heavy rain I sat in the reading room, discretely attempting to hide my repeated coughs. I asked myself why I felt the need *not* to cancel my appointment despite a growing, uneasy feeling that I was heading towards another round of sickness.

There was only one other visitor in the reading room that morning. In front of me was a woman I had first caught sight of at reception. We made no conversation as we were escorted into the reading room, where we began our work silently. I briefly spotted the word 'Biafra' as I glanced at her documents. Around 11:30 am, the

woman started packing her things. Feeling my head turn heavy and sensing an opportunity to leave without requesting the archivist to escort me separately, I asked to leave along with her. She asked me where I worked on our way out, and I mentioned the Graduate Institute. '*I know you; M told me about you*', she replied. I recalled that M was another researcher I had briefly met once in the ICRC reading room. '*I'm sorry for not responding to your email; I feel terrible.*'

It took me a while to register that I was speaking to the same woman whose work I read before my first visit to the archives. I wrote to her shortly after my visit, explaining how her work encouraged me to explore the ICRC's collections. 16 months later, with no contact, we were at the archives. I went home, and a fever set in. My appointments were subsequently cancelled.

Extract from the diary entry of 12/04/2024

Very likely my final visit, at least for now.

'Archives fever' is nothing like what Derrida or Steedman describe. Encounters which come full circle rarely happen over email.

The Archives as the Field

1   'The archive' as a concept has morphed enough to be now both materially and symbolically complicated. The differences in usage of the term in the singular or plural —the archive versus archives—reflect diverging approaches between historians and archivists. While historians focus on the site of the archives and issues of power, memory, and identity in 'the archive' (whichever archive they choose to locate themselves in), archivists look towards the many interventions on the objects travelling through the space, transforming the original archive into archives.[1] It is essential to acknowledge this divergence in our attempts to bridge it via our usage of the plural of 'the archives'.

2   It is challenging to grapple with archives without at least a brief conversation with Derrida. Derrida's analysis of the archives is tied to the term's etymology, derived from *arkheion*, which refers to the dwelling or home of the ruler or 'archon'. By arguing that an overarching control over the interpretation of the texts is exercised by the archons, from which order is derived and enforced, Derrida cast the archives as a place of 'absolute commandment'.[2]

3   Derrida's work represents an abstraction about the archive, representing one end of the spectrum of archival thinking. In contrast to Derrida, for Steedman, the archive is an actual place whose realities shape the knowledge emerging from it.[3] The archives become 'a place of longing and appropriation, where a world, a social order - may be re-imagined by the recurrence of a name in a register, through a scrap of paper or flotsam'.[4] This emphasis on the materiality of the archive, both in terms of its space and content, remains inescapable and influences how we work with the notion of the archive.

4   In the contrast between Derrida and Steedman, we see the perennial, ongoing tension between archives as a 'thing/place' versus archives as a 'metaphor'. Rather than remaining stuck at the poles of this binary, an ethnographic approach to the archives opens possibilities to move past this seemingly stubborn constant contradiction. An ethnography of the archives enables an understanding of how the material and social realities of the archives move far beyond the spaces of dingy basement storage rooms of archives, which is necessary for a broader critique of the concept to emerge. Such an approach can enable us to potentially unsettle two dominant tropes of archives. Firstly, it challenges the idea that archives are obscure entities within organisations that are

separate and removed from the politics of institutional governance. Secondly, it unsettles the notion that archives are static repositories where material 'appears', is preserved, and rests - waiting to be 'discovered'. An anthropological approach humanises the archives and shows the need to analyse processes by which different actors conceptualise, construct, operate and extract from archives. These processes fundamentally shape how narratives are generated using sources from the archives.

5   Ethnography enables us to weave insights from archival sciences and ground them in an archive's material and social realities. Archivist Eric Ketelaar puts forth the notion of 'archival activation' to show how records are dynamic objects in motion that move through space and time and accrue meaning along the way.[5] Each use of the record constitutes a separate activation, which influences subsequent activations. He writes that 'every interaction, intervention, interrogation and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record'.[6] It is not just the meaning of the record that changes with these actions. If we understand the infrastructure of any physical or digital archive as responding to the decisions taken by various actors, the activation of the records also transforms the archive. Ethnography then aims to illustrate how these activations take form and materialise, especially at the stage of constructing the archive. This approach is exemplified by Caswell, who weaves archival sciences and ethnography to trace how photographs of prisoners at the Tuol Sleng before their execution by the Cambodian Khmer Rouge were subsequently archived and how this transformed the nature of the photograph.[7]

6   For this paper, the exercise of tracing the activations of the record through the creation of the ICRC's archives blurs the boundaries between ethnography and historical reconstruction.

7   Verdery, in her ethnography of the archives of the Romanian secret police, writes that to 'do ethnography in an archive is to question the premise of one's practice'.[8] Questioning one's premise as an ethnographer of the ICRC's archives encourages us to re-conceptualise where the field lies and what fieldwork entails.

8   The concept of 'the field' has already been sufficiently troubled and unsettled within anthropology. Through this unsettling, we can begin to 'redraw the field' around both the concept and site of 'the archives'. Moving between the public reading room and the library in the initial days of my fieldwork, it became apparent that records existed in more spaces which met the eye within the headquarters and beyond. The field then became a concentric circle – centred around the spaces of the archives and emerging from the movement between the physical spaces of the archives, the various spaces within the headquarters of the ICRC, and the city of Geneva. Through historical reconstruction and ethnography, I show how the shape of this field changed through time through expansions and contractions. This exercise then involves ethnography both *in* and *of* the archives of the ICRC.

9   The idea of an 'encounter' in anthropology has been repeatedly visited. As Talal Asad argues, anthropologists since colonial times began sense-making from the point of encounter with the native other or the present-day subject.[9] Similar explanations are written about the process of producing history, which rests on the moment that a historian 'stumbles' on an important document that reveals unseen, groundbreaking insights. Retrieving and tweaking this notion of an encounter, we see how several factors shape the probability of occurrence and unfolding of an encounter with either a person or a document. The process of fieldwork then pays attention to the sociality of two kinds of interactions – with archival objects and actors animating the spaces of the

archives and the entities of the ICRC beyond the archives. To further elucidate my method, I explain what form these interactions took.

10 Firstly, my interactions with archival objects revolved around documents and photographs. As a visitor to the archives, I was expected to follow the standard norms of placing requests for material I was searching for, extracting information I needed from these archival records and making sense of them outside the spaces of archives. In November 2022, this exercise began first with the photographs from Biafra, located in the offices of archivists who sit in the space of the library. To understand these photographs better, I moved to locating the various places which held archival material. This eventually turned into a quest to find records which documented the history of the archives and how the archives came to be. When Stoler encourages us to read 'along the grain' of the colonial archive, she points to the need to orient ourselves to the affective dimension of colonial rule.[10] I interpret the 'grain of the archive' as referring to the ethos and intention behind its construction and operation. However, before one can grapple with the grain of the archive, one needs to be able to locate the grain and reconstruct it, when its composition is not apparent. I attempt to 'read the archives' through these sources it contains to see how much the archives reveals about itself. This reconstruction exercise is not comprehensive or exhaustive by any means as there was no set of folders which systematically revealed decisions taken on the archives. Excavating archival decisions across the BCR 229 and BAG 070 series involved trying to grapple with scattered or incomplete records, reflecting the incompleteness and inconsistency of the grain. However, the intention is not to attempt exhaustiveness but to trace the beginning of an approach to reconstruction. As the material designated as 'public' within the ICRC's archives can be digitised by the researcher via photography, a large portion of my time was spent photographing various materials. A fellow researcher in the reading room noted, 'We become human photo-copying machines in this archive reading room'. Through these digitised versions of the documents extracted, I translated them from English to French, enabling this reconstruction exercise.

11 However, it would be incorrect to portray this reconstruction and sense-making exercise as occurring in isolation, without being influenced by actors revolving in, out and around archives. I did not stumble on these documents as a lone researcher working in the archives. At every stage, various interactions shaped how I was signposted to particular groups of documents and how I proceeded to interact with them. The most crucial of these interactions were with archivists. In the case of the ICRC, many archivists I met had worked there for over 20 years. The reconstruction exercise of the archives became more textured through conversations and interviews with archivists. The constraints they faced in decision-making, how they saw their work, and reflections on their relationship to the institution - shaped what I began looking for in documents. Anthropologists working on the politics of humanitarianism have shown us how to humanise humanitarianism. How various actors perceive, translate and embody the ideals of 'being humanitarian' is crucial in examining how humanitarian action is undertaken. Most notably, Malkki writes about Finnish Red Cross workers and their motivations to pursue humanitarian work and how they perceive distinctions between the local and the global.[11] In a similar vein, Billaud has written about how delegates interpret the confidentiality principle in the face of uncertainty and confusion regarding prevailing situations on the ground.[12] An ethnographic approach to archives allows us to see archivists as actors influencing the

operation of bureaucracies within the headquarters of humanitarian aid agencies. How they perceive their work has contributed to the broader humanitarian ambitions of the ICRC and influences how they saw their work within the archives.

12   While I draw heavily from interviews with archivists in the following chapters, moving between the spaces of the archives, the headquarters and Geneva resulted in interactions with many actors entangled in the everyday politics of memory. I met trainees in the library and archives, volunteers of Swiss Red Cross societies who visit schools to carry out story-telling sessions on Dunant, delegates speaking in public forums unaware that the ICRC had an archive and staff members who recounted how they had been moved to tears 'by what they saw in the archives'.

13   These interactions with actors and objects collectively appear as points in a map, guiding us through the archives in its archipelagic form, transitioning between islands and showing us its myriad dimensions. The following chapters and the interludes between chapters illustrate how the archives of the ICRC came to exist and how we can conceptualise the archives as islands, forming an archipelago.

FOOTNOTES

1. Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) Is A Foreign Country", *The American Archivist*, 74 no. 2 (2011): 601.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Archives Fever*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.

3. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 35.

4. Ibid.

5. Eric Ketelaar, "Time Future Contained In Time Past: Archive Science in the 21st Century", *Journal of the Japan Society for Archival Science* 1 (2004): 25.

6. Ibid.

7. Michelle Caswell, "Archiving The Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and The Photographic Record", (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

8. Katherine Verdery, *Secret and Truth: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*, (Central European University Press, 2014), 22.

9. Talal Asad, "Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter" in *The Politics of Anthropology: From Colonialism and Sexism Toward A View From Below* edited by Gerritt Huizer and Bruce Mannheim, (Berlin: De Grutyer Mouton, 1979), 85-94.

10. Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

11. Lisa Malkki, *The Need To Help: Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

12. Julie Billaud, "Masters of Disorder: Rituals of Communication and Monitoring at the International Committee of the Red Cross", *Social Anthropology 28*, no. 1 (2002), 96-111.

3. Evolution of Archipelago & The Archivist-Cartographer

Figure 3: A selection of posters in the archives. The first image is a poster near the public reading room which reads 'Be careful! You are entering the knowledge sector'.

Source: Author

I was taught that the purpose of a classification system is to see how the archives are organised. I learnt how to draw tree diagrams to visualise how fonds and sub-fonds were supposed to be organised. *It helps you see everything that exists, how it is laid out and helps you zoom into what you're looking for. You are learning how to correctly write the address of the home for each document listed within the classification system.*
Naively, on my first visit to the reading room, I asked the archivist to see the inventory of documents related to the Biafran War. I was told that to see the inventory, I should know what I was looking for. *How would I know what to look for if I did not know where to look or know what documents existed?* Soon, I would come to learn that the reading room of the ICRC is populated with multiple inventories. And more exist in the offices of the archivists.

1 After 12 months of visiting archives, the classification system was eventually printed out and explained to me – a gesture much appreciated. I wondered why every researcher was not given this explanation, the minute they entered the archives, no matter what they were looking for. Upon understanding the classification system, it was evident that each set of inventories was a product of their time – intending to map

the terrain of the archives. They rested quietly in the reading room, waiting to serve their purpose. To know which map to begin reading, and to eventually reach the documents you're looking for, one must befriend the archivist-cartographer.

Conceptualising the ICRC's Archives As Islands

2   Revolving around the ICRC, it becomes evident that archival objects and records presently exist at various physical sites within the headquarters. The library (which operates as a public space), houses the *ancien fonds* consisting of material related to the founders of the ICRC. The audiovisual archives, entirely digital since 2016, are currently housed in the premises of the library, with some physical material in the offices of the archivists. What was commonly referred to as the 'ICRC's archives' – consists of documents related to the decision-making bodies of the committee and its operations. In 1996, the ICRC opened a portion of its archives to the public – creating the 'general public archives' and associated spaces of the current reading rooms in the basement of the building opposite the Carlton headquarters which receive researchers. The archives of the various prisoners of war agencies are regrouped into the archives of the Central Tracing Agency and Protection division. They are now part of the ICRC's archives and classification system but are governed by separate access policies. Finally, some archival objects and records are loaned to the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. As a museum of the entire Red Cross movement, it also maintains its separate collections.

3   These divisions further manifest across many lines – where the material is stored in the headquarters, how it is organised, whether it is inventoried, who gets to access it, which archivists are responsible for this material, and where they sit. None of these are apparent in the first instance when a researcher enters the reading room. Rather, these differences appear visible when one moves between these various spaces and the archivists' offices in different parts of the building. I was left with the overwhelming question of how this arrangement of archives came to be and began trying to pull apart this question along its many axes. From repeated visits, a sense of separation in these spaces' everyday operation became somewhat apparent. No doubt, the archivists knew of each other. Still, their work was localised to the records they managed which appeared scattered across the institution. Each space with archival records and objects appeared as islands, with their characteristics and eccentricities. The organisation of the spaces occupied by archival records and objects reflected wider dynamics around their organisation and use.

4   Within archival sciences, there is a shift away from the records life-cycle model which sees archives as a final resting place for the record. Rather, scholars such as Frank Upward[1] and Sue McKemmish[2] have put forth a continuum model which emphasises how records are created as a by-product of human activity, extracted from their context while being used, organised at a later stage into archives of some form and then used by varying actors to construct collective memory. A record is embedded in a dynamic process and while its content seems fixed, it is constantly being contextualised and re-contextualised at every stage. If this movement-oriented approach to records is adopted, the spaces of archives rarely appear as they are. Rather, they are constantly shifting form and shape according to the records making their way through them – performing an important function of regulating their movement through an organisation. A growing number of scholars in archival sciences have taken a

Foucauldian route to describing how the spatial arrangement of archives has a certain 'ordering effect' on how interactions unfold within an archive.[3] Focused on but not solely limited to the occurrence of surveillance, this strand of theorising offers us a useful starting point. Instead of recycling the lens provided by the panopticon, I want to extend a line of thinking building on an alternative Foucauldian notion of the carceral archipelago. Foucault's original conception of the term was used to refer to the spread of disciplinary techniques in Europe[4] and has since then been used to refer to a set of interconnected carceral spaces and practices, including prisons, police, detention centres, segregated cities, reservations, and enclosures.[5] The evolution of this term has captured how 'a politics of security has figured centrally in the policing of imperial borderlands and ambiguous frontiers'[6] I use and modify this term to put forth the notion of an archival archipelago. Scattered between different sites, the archives of the ICRC exist, are managed and regulated as islands of an archipelago.

5   How the ICRC managed its records and began thinking about constructing an archive occurred against the landscape of unfolding conflicts since the First World War. Adopting and modifying the concept of the carceral archipelago for the archives allows us to understand the securitisation of record-keeping within a humanitarian institution. However, before analysing the entirety of the archipelago and its disciplining implications, we need to ask how each of the islands came into existence. One of Derrida's most valuable contributions to thinking about archives is not the notion of 'archives fever'. Rather it is his elaboration of the process of 'archivisation', where he explains that the structure of the archive determines what can be archived, leading to the shaping of history and memory by these technical archiving methods.[7] However, the idea that the structures of the archives appear to remain the same needs to be challenged.

6   Suppose we cast each site/space within the ICRC at present as an island – the library, the general public archives, the audiovisual archives, and the museum as 'islands'. In that case, there is a need to see both how this came to be and if there are further ways of conceptualising these as islands. Treating the 'archive' ethnographically requires questioning how the archives' structures came to exist as they are. To do this, this chapter ties this 'island-thinking' to the exercise of reconstructing a history of the archives itself, allowing us to see what drove the emergence of islands in the first place and how they can be understood collectively as an archipelago.

7   How should we approach this exercise of producing a history of an institutional archive? In our efforts to 'find the archives', through sources in the archives, we are somewhat at a loss. There is no systematic documentation of decisions and actions taken regarding the archives. The limited documentation which exists remains scattered. Though there has been a plethora of scholarship which theorises omissions in the archive, the silence around the question of how an institutional archive was constructed casts the archives as ahistorical entity.

8   Additionally, it shows the continued obfuscation around what an institutional archive does. It perpetuates the idea that the archives have remained untouched by institutional decisions and unchanged in form since its construction. It allows us to conceptualise the archives shaped by people and actors who moved through the ICRC with ideas about how record-keeping could aid in humanitarian operations. By asking who has built the ICRC's archives and what drove them to do so – we can begin conceptualising how this reconstruction can take place with the sources we have and the gaps they embody.

9   Faced with the dilemma of how to respond to the erasure of documentary sources, Hartman develops the notion of critical fabulation. She attempts to 'jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorised account and to imagine what might have happened, been said or happened'.[8] Though I do not mimic Hartman's style and experimentation with festivity, her point about imagination in the lack of an authorised account opens different ways of reflecting on activities in the space of an archive. Inspired by Hartman's call to reimagine the act of reconstructing histories, I do so by attempting to understand an institutional archive through the lens of the often-invisible archival labour.

10 While the category 'archivist' only emerged in the late 70s as a role, archival labour was undertaken by several individuals working within the ICRC, even without the formal adoption of this label. I use the term archivist to refer to those performing archival labour, even when this was not used as a term of self-identification. Archival labour is rarely understood and routinely rendered invisible by institutions. By understanding who undertook this archival labour and what challenges they faced, we see how archivists navigated their position within the ICRC to construct archives which took the form of islands. I show that the work of archivists could be understood as a form of institutional cartography. Amidst the backdrop of the shifting conflicts, this form of cartography was necessary to map the changing institutional arrangements and structures of the ICRC and how they evolved. This was crucial to see both how the archives would fit into the operations of the ICRC and how documents would be channelled, re-directed and consolidated at the archives. How this evolved influenced how the boundaries of islands were drawn by the archivists. This chapter answers the following questions: who carried out this institutional cartography? What were the considerations that drove this process? How did they navigate these institutional structures? What caused the boundaries of islands to shift and evolve? To answer these questions, it is necessary to reconstruct the shapes of the archive as it emerged through different points in time and examine the sources, we have on hand to do so.

11 Despite the close interactions of an archivist with documents, few archival imprints appear on written records as a reflection of archival intervention. This occurs alongside the rarity of archival decisions being recorded in documentary form. Searching for records in the archive, about the archive, was possible because of the public archivist who aided me in this search. I was directed towards the BCR 229 series and the BAG 070. It is necessary to place these series within the present classification structure of the archives before we examine the legacy of these classification systems. Within the current classification system, the archives are divided into 7 fonds – A (Comité), B (Service Généraux), C (Agence et Protection), D (Délégations), O (Organismes de co-ordination humanitaire), P (Archives Privée) and V (Varia). Every fond has varying number sub-fonds – A has 8 sub-fonds, B has 16, C has 15, D has 5, O has 12, P has 22 and V has 10. These sub-fonds are indicated by a combination of alphabets adjoining the letter of the fond and are further organised into series indicated by numbers. Several folders organised thematically constitute each series.[9]

12 Following this classification system, we see that the BCR 229 series fits into the fond titled Service Généraux and the second sous-fond titled 'CR' or Croix Rouge (1918-1950). Alternatively, the BAG 070 series fits into the same fond and the fifth sous fond titled 'AG' or Archives Générale (1950-1997). This explanation enables us to visualise the entire structure. Despite the location within the same vast fond, tracing the non-consecutive sub-fonds and series that hold records of archival decisions would be

entirely possible without the archivists whose knowledge of particular series through creating inventories enabled me to locate these series.

13   The BCR 229 series revolves around the Commission des Archives et Bibliothèque (hereafter referred to as 'the commission') and contains correspondence, reports, inventories and minutes of the commission. After this commission ceases operation, the next traces of archival decision-making appear in the BAG 070 series. Here, the documents take on a more administrative nature with mostly memoranda and reports, scattered with some correspondence. While the volume of documents with the BCR 229 series is comparatively vast, for this chapter I focus solely on the minutes of the commission. Studying the minutes animates the commission in insightful ways: one can see different opinions, discussions, debates and disagreements on decisions regarding the archives take form. The proceedings of the commission also give us certain time points to work with, enabling us to construct a timeline of sorts for the evolution of the archives by supplementing it with documents in the BAG 070 series. The documents in the BAG 070 series extend until 1975, which is the upper limit of public access as determined by the most recent round of declassification in 2015.[10] Post this period, I rely on interviews with archivists to show key moments which have shaped the present. As noted previously, this linear approach has limitations because sources are not uniform between the two series. The gaps in this timeline are acknowledged, accepted, and illustrative of the possibility of the sketch of the archipelago becoming more fine-grained with the discovery of new sources.

Origins and Operation of the *Commission des Archives et Bibliothèque*

14   The First World War brought deep transformations within the ICRC, which had been operating for 50 years before the outbreak of the war. Among structural changes, the number of staff exponentially increased both within the committee and in the newly formed *Agence internationale des prisonniers de guerre* (International Prisoners of War Agency), going from double-digit numbers to the thousands.[11] In the years following the end of the First World War, the ICRC continued its expansion in the 1930s—in China, Latin America, and Ethiopia—until the outbreak of the Second World War.

15   The Second World War led to further unprecedented expansion of the ICRC beyond Europe. With a larger scope of operations, decision-making abilities and operations had to be expanded beyond the small set of committee members. In the interwar period, the ICRC had taken to constituting internal commissions around specific themes, each dealing with a specific problem.[12] It is within this context that a *Commission des archives et bibliothèque* (henceforth referred to as 'the commission') was also instituted under the presidency of Max Huber. The commission had its first sitting on 30 November 1942 and its last meeting on 10 May 1946. Effectively, the commission operated after the start of the Second World War in September 1939 and continued until after the war ended in 1945. The archives of the ICRC were thus constructed amidst the tumult of the Second World War.

16   While it is likely that some deliberation on the archives took place before the commission was instituted, the first sessions of the commission represent concerted, directed efforts towards formulating a plan to create an archive. Here, it is essential to ask where the documents related to the founding of the ICRC were housed, before the creation of the commission, given that the ICRC was founded in 1863. The answer leads

us to see how the bibliothèque or library predated the creation of the commission and was created by one of the 'founding fathers' of the ICRC - Gustave Moynier. Moynier had a personal interest in creating a centre for written works revolving around the Red Cross. He began collecting essays on philanthropic and charitable activities, treaties, military manuals and works by members of the Committee and attempted to create a library that was accessible to all, which eventually grew to include key documents related to the founding and operation of the ICRC.[13] This Moynier collection came to be known as the *ancien fonds*. Moynier maintained a library from 1864 to 1910 and conceived of it as a crucial component of the Committee's office in Geneva. At the end of the First World War, the ICRC moved its office from Rue de l'Athénée to the Promenade du Pin and subsequently to Villa Moynier in 1933.[14] In this manner, and despite its public nature, the library was already operating as a 'quasi- archive' due to its housing the *ancien fonds*. Villa Moynier became the site of the commission's first set of meetings and subsequent visits. The commission was tasked with overseeing how constructing the archives and consolidating the library could proceed in parallel, although after the initial meetings, its sole preoccupation became the archives, which transformed into a more significant task at hand. The decision to continue housing the *ancien fonds* in the library and the parallel construction of the archives illustrates how the archives grew around the library but eventually were separated into separate entities. This set of decisions around drawing the boundaries between the library and archives, with the former still holding a portion of archival records, shows the beginning of the creation of the islands.

17   The question of who constituted 'the commission' and its composition directly shaped the archival labour it undertook. Beginning with the head of the commission, we see that how the president viewed the 'value of the archives' played a direct role in how archives were able to weather winds of change. Alongside his training as a lawyer, Huber was known to have an extensive interest in sociology and history and these interests likely influenced his vision for the archives.[15] Max Huber assumed the presidency of the ICRC in 1928, ceded in 1944 due to ill health, and assumed an ad interim role again in 1945.[16] The commission was instituted in 1942, towards the end of his presidency, and operated throughout the tumult created by leadership transitions amidst the Second World War. Huber participated directly in the proceedings only once in 1943, as seen in the minutes.[17] By outlining plans for producing historical volumes on the ICRC and urging the committee to align its work with producing these volumes, he infuses the connection between the archives and the need for a historical consciousness into the commission's work. In this manner, he urged the commission to see their work not only as administrative but also as contributing to a wider institutional identity.

18   Despite Huber's limited participation in the meetings, the commission saw a revolving cast of members from the upper echelons of the ICRC – including Martin Bodmer, the vice president of the ICRC and Paul Eric Martin, who served as the president of the Commission des Archives until after the end of the Second World War. Additionally, Jean Pictet – a close associate of Huber - played a very important role in shaping the archives in the latter meetings and communicated the commission's operations. The commission also saw the involvement of Paul de Gouttes and Etienne Clouzot – two individuals who successfully occupied the Secretary of the Committee position. Both Gouttes and Clouzot were involved in creating the Bulletins (the publication which was considered the predecessor of the International Review) and making them accessible to

the library,[18] which allowed synchronicity to emerge in the commission. This experience in handling and working with documents enabled Clouzot to take the lead in discussions related to document conservation, where he sought recommendations for document preservation from the League of Nations office in Geneva.[19]

19   Examining the issue of decision-making vs operationalising archival labour, it is necessary to consider how record-keeping work was feminised in various ways. In addition to the above members of the commission who were also committee members of the ICRC, Rénée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer became the first female committee member in 1918 and took an active part in almost every session and proceedings of the commission. While Frick-Cramer's presence in the commission was facilitated by her higher status as a committee member of the ICRC, the only other women who took part in the commission were Marion Jung and P. Vaugnat. It is necessary to contextualise the participation of women in this commission within the broader landscape of changes occurring in the ICRC during and after the First World War. During the war, two-thirds of the International Agency staff were women employed in activities such as typing.[20] The ability of non-committee members to take part in proceedings reflects a particular opportunity created by the Second World War which allowed for other staff designated as 'collaborators'[21] to take part in administrative matters within the headquarters. However, the presence of women as collaborators in this commission was in part due to the gendered assumptions underlying archival and record-keeping work. The perception of archival and record-keeping work as mechanical, servile, invisible and 'fit for women' was not unique to the ICRC's context in this period[22] but present within this organisation as well. However, this opened a narrow window of opportunity for women to 'work their way up' through hierarchies by deftly navigating these roles. This was illustrated by the trajectory of Marion Jung, who proceeded to become Head of the Archives Division after the commission's proceedings ended in 1946. By 1950, Jung left the ICRC to become one of the first archivists at UNESCO.[23] In my searches so far, I have not encountered further biographical information on Marion Jung and Ms. Vaugnat, including the latter's first name. Further extensive searches within personnel files would likely yield more information about these women's lives.

> Figure 4: Visualising the women of the commission: sketches of Rénée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer and P. Vaugnat
>
> Source: ICRC Library, AF 4321, Album from the Conference Diplomatic, Genève 1929 [24]

20   Examining the feminisation of archival labour points to how gender and institutional hierarchies remained intertwined. Many early commission meetings revolved around whom to hire as collaborators and conversations on budgeting for additional personnel. Members of the commission routinely debated the issue of not just competence but also the 'trustworthiness' of collaborators asked to do the tasks set by the commission.[25] However, most individuals hired to undertake the tasks rarely appeared in the commission's meetings, as their presence in the minutes is not reflected. Their work and progress were largely reported through the women who participated in the commission. A rare instance of a collaborator's 'voice' is documented in a report by Marie-Madeleine Riser, found in the library. Working in 1948 under the supervision of Marion Jung, the report was presented for a 'diplôme de bibliothécaire-secrétaire' and outlines her experience working in the library.

21 The dynamics of who was part of the commission are crucial to understanding how the commission approached the challenges of conceptualising and building the archives.

Archival Labour as Mapping and Carving of Archive Islands

22 What form did the tasks, actions and challenges the commission faced take? How can we understand the action undertaken by the commission members as a form of institutional cartography which influenced the emergence of archive islands?

23 The commission confronted two principal problems, both characterised by an immense volume of records that far transcended the abilities of the small commission and its collaborators. The first problem revolved around dealing with records that already existed at the headquarters and ordering and classifying them. This involved creating a classification system into which records of different natures could fit. The second problem revolved around how to source and consolidate records and involved attempts to find and redirect material back into the archives. As both these tasks were protracted challenges, the commission dealt with them throughout its proceedings. Both these challenges required an understanding of how the institutional structures of the ICRC were rapidly changing and being reworked in the aftermath of World War I and during World War II, as well as the ability to navigate these structures by those undertaking this work.

24 To address both of the above problems, collaborators undertook tasks of identifying the location of documents, deciding what to exclude, destroying duplicates, counting, tabulating and creating summary reports of groups of documents, and regularly reporting on progress during the meeting of the commission. The interplay of the factors of space (in terms of where records could be consolidated and where records were scattered), the creation of classification systems (in terms of how to bring records into a single system), and the limited ability of the commission to manage the volume of records influenced how the islands emerged.

25 As explained above, when the commission began operating, the intention was to situate both the archives of the committee and the existing library at Villa Moynier, while separating the functions of the two. The *ancien fonds* continued to be housed as part of the library (a practice which continues today), while the records of the committee members of the ICRC were moved to other rooms in Villa Moynier to be inventoried and classified. Additionally, the question of managing the First World War records of the International Agency emerged. The commission faced the task of consolidating the records of the Agency, which existed in a scattered state, as they had been moved from Musée Rath to the Ecole d'Horlogerie years before the commission was constituted.[26] In addition to the International Agency, the commission also debated how to incorporate into the archives the records of L'Agence de Bale operating in 1870 and L'Agence de Trieste in 1877, predecessors of the International Agency.[27] The records generated by the International Agency were unique and different from the committee's documents. The index cards generated to trace each prisoner of war created a unique repository filed and organised differently to facilitate easy recording, search, and retrieval of information. This was the case for the previous agencies where the records generated followed a unique structure designed for practical usage at the time and already existing with a classification system. Creating inventories for these records constituted a different kind of exercise. In turn, it posed a particular problem for commission

members who had begun building a specific classification system for all other records generated by the ICRC.

26   While members of the commission noted the unique nature of records kept by the Agency, the proceedings reflect debate on whether to destroy a particular set of documents to manage volume, how to merge these records into a single classification system, and whether to store and classify these separately. A handful of meetings witnessed the presence of delegates from the Agency in these deliberations.[28] The issues debated revolved around whether to separate the records from the Métropole headquarters where the Agency operated or store them with the Agency and how to channel delegates' records back to the headquarters. The hesitancy to merge records into a single archival classification system and space also reflects a particular institutional dynamic between the committee and the Agency. While the ICRC considered itself 'the head', the operational actions were semi-autonomously carried out by the Agency, effectively acting as 'the body.'[29] This separation was one of the earliest expressions of the tensions between what came to be seen as 'the headquarters' and 'the field'. This tension between the decision-makers and decision-implementers away from headquarters would only grow as the ICRC expanded its membership and operations. Eventually, a conclusion was reached that these records should not be moved or merged into the existing classification and should be retained in separate premises. This decision by the commission effectively set a precedent and created a separate island for the Agency's records, which evolved in its own way despite subsequent efforts to merge in later years. The archive islands mirrored institutional tensions in this manner.

27   Even without considering the volume of records generated by the International Agency and its predecessors, managing the volume of records before the commission far exceeded the capacity of the collaborators. While the commission routinely recognised this to a certain extent when reporting on progress in each meeting, there was an underlying underestimation of the time and labour involved in dealing with the monumental volume of records. Here, one can imagine that this estimation also emerged from the fact that the 'collaborators' hired by the commission de archives to carry out the actual tasks did not participate in every meeting. Instead, their progress was reported by a member of the commission (in most cases, Ms. Jung, as seen in her appearance in the meetings), and this gendered hierarchisation likely affected the commission's ability to accurately understand the nature and extent of work.

28   Tabulating, counting, and summarising these documents were tasks which had to be carried out manually by the collaborators, with the assistance of typewriters. Here, it is interesting to observe the traces of discussions that emerged in the commission about the role of machines in aiding these tasks. The commission routinely called on the assistance of dactilographes[30] or typists. Additionally, the successor of the International Agency operating to assist prisoners of war amidst the Second World War—l'Agence Centrale des Prisoners de Guerre (or the Central Agency)—had begun using Hollerith machines. Thomas Watson made these machines available in 1939 and ordered the European headquarters of the I.B.M. to provide the Red Cross with Hollerith machines and the necessary personnel.[31] In the proceedings of the archives commission, Max Huber makes a single reference to the 'Watson Machine' in the only session he takes part in.[32] However, this reference is made in the context of including this detail in historical volumes, rather than proposing a tool which could assist in record-keeping work.

29   More broadly, the commission's ability to carry out the above tasks is profoundly affected by its operation amidst the unfolding hostilities of the Second World War. The ICRC found itself responding to the displacement caused by the war while having its operational base displaced within Geneva as the war progressed. As a result, the ICRC found itself moving and shifting operations between various buildings. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, the Geneva authorities made a certain number of premises available to the ICRC, including those of the Hôtel Métropole. However, in September 1945, after the cessation of hostilities in the war, the Genevan authorities asked the ICRC to vacate the premises of Hôtel Métropole. The ICRC finally moved to the Carlton by the end of 1946.[33] These moves from Villa Moynier to the Hôtel Métropole and then to the Carlton caused further displacement and scattering of records, directly affecting the commission's ability to consolidate records at a single site.

30   The end of the Second World War created a moral crisis caused by a vacuum of leadership and a financial crisis. There was an exodus of staff and collaborators from within the ICRC in the aftermath of the war, which had ripple effects on the work of the archives. The ICRC established a Directorate to manage the administration and everyday operations of the ICRC, despite this Directorate having limited weight in the decision-making abilities compared to members of the ICRC.[34] Against the backdrop of these organisational changes, Jean Pictet assumed the position of Director of Delegations, bringing various divisions under his control. In the last session of the archives commission on 10 May 1946, an Archives Division was created. The minutes of the final session, chaired by Jean Pictet, consist of a series of decisions, bringing the deliberations on the archives, spanning more than four years, to a close.[35]

31   Reconstructing this first phase of the archives shows us how the archives are shaped by the tensions generated in efforts to cohesively unify and centralise records in the face of several factors, including changing institutional landscapes, the displacement of records between different sites, lack of manpower and turnover of people doing this work. At the end of the commission's operations, the islands took form around the library (housing the *ancien fonds* alongside secondary material such as publications), the archives of the committee (still in the process of consolidation) and the archives of the Agency and its predecessors (effectively separated from the committee). As we proceed, we see that the boundaries of and between these islands are constantly being shaped and reshaped as they progress. The process of tabulation and summarisation of documents was a process which never reached a state of full completion, especially as the classification systems continued to shift and change, leading to a state of perpetual reorganisation within the archives. Against this landscape of constant flux, the archivist was continually required to create inventory maps and ways of navigating and finding records within the ICRC's structures. The archivist-cartographer became a figure, perpetually engaged in these tasks but fading steadily into the background after the commission dissolved. Despite the crystallisation and emergence of the 'Archives Division', the following sections show how the islands continued to expand and contract, morphing and evolving in the process.

Archival Decision-Making in the Aftermath of the Commission

32 Following the BCR 229 series revolving around the commission, there is no systematic recording of archival decisions. As explained previously, our search for recorded traces of archival decision-making moves to the BAG 070 series. Broadly, this series contains orders, circulars, and a few occasional letters that are exchanged. Compared to the BCR 229 series, these form a comparatively smaller body of documents though the BAG 070 series covers a period of nearly 20 years—from 1952 to 1974. Additionally, there is little deliberation around archival decision-making in this series. Rather, they take the form of certain staff members communicating decisions that have already been formulated. Nonetheless, by piecing together insights from letters or authored notes, it is possible to continue reconstructing the timeline to anchor the evolution of the islands at certain key moments.

33 From the commission, only Jean Pictet and Vaugnat continue to make an appearance. Following the traces of the existing gendered hierarchy, no further biographical information about Vaugnat was found in this series. In 1950, a new filing plan called the 'Pictet Plan' was adopted.[36] The filing plan comprised both thematic and geographic referential numbering. It applied to the whole institution until 1972 and to the Archives Division until 1997.[37] The adoption of this plan allowed some synchronicity to emerge between the filing plans and the archives' classification systems.

34 The adoption of this plan reflects the active role Pictet continued to play in shaping the archive islands. In 1954, Pictet and Huber exchanged correspondence about transferring the latter's presidency files to the archives.[38] This correspondence revolved around Huber requesting Pictet to make decisions on what to keep from these papers and to exercise his discretion in destroying the rest of the documents.[39] Pictet then proceeded to work with Vaugnat to integrate these files into the archives' existing classification system after dealing with the confidential documents. Pictet's involvement in this process is perhaps a lone exemplar of the effects that leadership had on negotiating access to documents on behalf of the archives, aiding archivists in the process, and the impact of a sustained interest in shaping the archives. This has not always been the case within the ICRC, where the leaders' interest in the functioning of the archives waxed and waned.

35 Under Pictet's leadership, the push towards centralising archives was carried out to stabilise record-keeping practices after the war. Actions to consolidate records extended beyond Geneva, as seen in correspondence sent to Far East delegations encouraging them to examine their records from the Second World War and decide what to send back to Geneva.[40] The letter notes 'that an inventory be made and sent to us (the archives), accompanied by suggestions for keeping part of the records, their destruction or possibly the transfer of any portion to Geneva'.[41] Consolidation also occurred by creating channels for mail to move back to the archives.[42]

36 In the above ways, introducing the Pictet Plan ushered in a new wave of reorganisation efforts. These efforts to reorganise the structure of the archives were not a one-off event. Instead, they continued in ways that also necessitated the creation of new inventories in line with changing structures. These inventories can be understood as constantly tracing and responding to these changes, reaching a state of completion only to be confronted with modifications in light of changes to the wider classification plans. The burden of making these modifications often fell on the archivist. This is

reflected in a report by Vaugnat written in October 1951, who continued to work as an archivist after the commission under the directorship of Pictet. In this report, she recalled attempts to 'reunify in the face of constant organisational change' and the need to redo inventories because of the implementation of a new classification system. [43] What is interesting here is that the same report invokes the image of 'future historian', infusing these tasks with a sense of broader purpose, similar to Max Huber's views during the proceedings of the Commission des Archives.

37 Towards the end of the report, Vaugnat writes: 'Le but de ce bref rapport est d'informer les personnes qui s'intéressent a l'histoire du CICR - non encore écrite - que la tache de ce futur historien sera grandement facilitée par la consultation de ces inventaires (archives et documentation) établis selon les règles méthodiques et chronologiques et pour lesquels j'ai apporté tous mes soins.'[44] There is no further detail about who this figure might be - discussions around the production of the official volumes of history during the Commission des Archives indicated that this figure would be either a committee member, delegate or staff of the ICRC. Nonetheless, Vaugnat's statement invokes a sense of the archives' commitment to producing history about the ICRC. This idea is not routinely reflected in the other documents in this series. Finally, it also poignantly reflects how archival labour relied on a kind of care – towards records, institutions, the people who inhabited them and the purpose of the archives. This dimension of care involved in archival labour was not always recognised and still is continually undervalued within institutions.

38 Amidst these attempts at reorganising islands, the boundary between the archives of the secretariat of the ICRC, members of the committee and the archives of the International Agency (along with its predecessors and successors) continued to evolve. The decision by the archivists of the Commission des Archives to separately manage the archives of the International Agency continued to have ripple effects, further expanding the separation. In the aftermath of the Commission, it was decided that the Archives Service would no longer deal with the archives of the Agency and instead focus solely on records generated by the committee.

39 During this time, the archivists carrying out the above processes of reorganisation of the archive islands also began interacting with the archives of other organisations in Geneva and their archival practices. While there are few references to certain members of commissions, such as Etienne Clouzot interacting with the League of Nations (as seen above) regarding the preservation and conservation of material, the minutes of the commission did not reflect a sustained collaboration. The interactions reflected in the BAG 070 series take place around colloquiums about documentation practices to which ICRC archivists were invited to take part.[45] In the attendees' reports, there is a sense of hesitancy about the usefulness and extent of applicability of insights from other archives. A perception of how the ICRC's archives were different in both structure and form was also primarily characterised by the organisation's operating principle of confidentiality.

40 Amidst these attempts at looking outward to other organisations within Geneva, there are deliberations on what modernising the archives might look like for the spaces of the archives. Amidst the correspondence in this series, brochures from various Zurich-based vendors manufacturing archival and record-keeping equipment were also included. Although it was unclear what was purchased, they help us visualise what the ICRC was likely considering in terms of specialised equipment for the archives.

Figure 5.1: A selection of pages from brochures of archives equipment found in the BAG070-3 files

Source: ICRC Archives, BAG 030

Figure 5.2: A selection of pages from brochures of archives equipment found in the BAG070-3 files

Source: ICRC Archives, BAG 030

Figure 6: A selection of pages from brochures related to archival equipment

Source: ICRC Archives, BAG 030

41   If gendered hierarchies existed in record-keeping work, these brochures render their textures visible. The continued feminisation of record-keeping work reflected how the boundaries between the spaces occupied by 'secretarial' work and 'archival work' continued to change. The category of the 'archivist' began to emerge with an increasing turn towards professionalisation within the ICRC, which began in the late 1960s.

42   The competencies and criteria required for an archivist expanded from secretarial work to include making sense of and interpreting documents, furthering a differentiation from what was considered secretarial work. Correspondence and files from the Personnel Department from this period contained deliberations on hiring archivists, although most candidates considered were men. Here, a clear preference for expertise as a historian is expressed.

43   Interestingly, this expertise directly implied prior involvement in the production of the official volumes of the history of the ICRC.[46] Weaving narratives from archival documents through their interpretation to create an official narrative becomes interwoven with the 'true archivist' role – a category used in correspondence to describe candidates' competencies.[47]

44   Due to the ICRC's current document restriction period, the last imprints of archival decisions can be traced through publicly available documents until 1975. The next declassification period would likely yield many other documents allowing us to see how archival politics evolved, especially around the growing calls for transparency around the ICRC's operations. This period of constant reorganisation in the aftermath of the commission shows us how the islands expanded and contracted, leading to a shift in the boundaries of the islands.

Present-Day Cartography of the Archival Archipelago

45 In one of my last visits to the ICRC archives, Mr. X drew a diagram of the organisational hierarchy to show the positions of various staff and their divisions. He told me how he had been working in the archives for 30 years, and every couple of years, the archives and library continued to be moved and shifted under different divisions—with their current place under the Law and Policy Division. Through interviews, it became apparent that archivists at the ICRC had been working here for at least 20 years. Facing a lack or embargo of documents related to the archives since 1975, interviews with archivists with reflections on their trajectories through the archives become a rich source of material on the continued evolution of the archives. There is much scope for broader life history interviews to begin exploring the role archivists play in shaping the politics of humanitarian organisations. The interviews I conducted only began to scratch the surface in this regard.

46 Throughout their tenure, archivists have witnessed the evolution of the archives and the broader institutional structures of the ICRC. In these conversations, two events were routinely referenced. The first was the opening of the archives to the public – effectively creating the 'public' archives in 1996. The second was the decentralisation of the archives in 2011. While the implications of the opening of the archives are discussed in the next chapter, the decentralisation of the archives presented peculiar challenges that influenced how we think about the archival archipelago.

47 Archivists explained how decentralisation emerged due to the adoption of an electronic filing system in 2010. While the archivists were responsible for assigning metadata and bringing each document into the folds of the filing system established by the archives, this changed with decentralisation. Subsequently, the 'burden of archiving' was no longer on the sites of archives (even in its island state) but on individual staff members to archive their documents. For the archivists working here for many years, the advent of this electronic filing system and decentralisation resulted in a significant shift. They noted the loss of information, the creation of substantial gaps in how much was being archived and a dissolution in archival expertise. In this manner, decentralisation became a turning point - with a clear before and after. When asked how the archives have changed, archivists recalled how delegates routinely visited them before undertaking their mission to understand previous decisions made in the region. However, in recent years, a high turnaround rate of 'the expatriate' delegate coupled with the electronic filing system has contributed to a steady decline in the internal use of the archives.

48 In the face of these shifts, archivists often employed the term 'business continuity' to explain the functioning and role of the archives to the higher echelons of the ICRC to justify expenditure and resource allocation to the archives. This term is fascinating when connected to the existence of islands. As we have seen how the islands came to exist, what is noteworthy here is that the continuity emerges not in the space or sites of the archives but in the work of archiving. As noted earlier, the archivist's work in moulding the islands in response to organisational change was perpetual. Embedded in these perpetual tasks was the creation of inventories - used to take stock of documents to be archived and enable a user to find these documents within the archives. The standards of what constitutes an inventory have changed with the emergence of the discipline of archival sciences and the resulting technical expertise needed to build archives. In its simplest form, the essence of an inventory operates as a list. However,

reading the inventory as a form of map allows us to see how the act of consolidating documents in a single site, from geographically far-flung conflict zones, relied on this essential act. In casting this micro-process of archiving as institutional cartography - we see that it was not just relevant to the archives and the ICRC. Keeping up with the ICRC's structural changes was no mean task given that its operations morphed with each conflict it embedded in.

49   While continuity through organisational change was needed and desired, the ways to do it were not always clear. Inventorying documents—one of the many tasks involved in sustaining archives—was needed to keep up with these changes. Undertaking this historical reconstruction, we see that consolidating records in a single site, in a single place, was always a difficult task, giving way to the underlying forces which gave rise to the islands. The inventory map created and sustained these islands, allowing for localised records management. In many ways, the expansion and contraction of islands and the emergence of the archipelago mirrored institutional changes of the ICRC while trying to keep the blueprints of the previous forms of the organisation. The archivist's role is not just that of a map creator but also that of a locator of the earlier versions of these inventory maps. However, this role is rarely power-neutral as mapping is intertwined with memory-making. As Cook writes, archivists have evolved from being supposedly impartial custodians of inherited records to becoming intervening agents who set record-keeping standards and, most pointedly, who select for archival preservation only a tiny portion of the entire universe of recorded information.[48] This 'archival appraisal' process allows for exercising a certain kind of power. Kaplan writes that archivists are significant players in identity politics, whether they are conscious of it or not. [49]Archivists appraise, collect, and preserve the props with which notions of identity are built. In turn, notions of identity are confirmed and justified as historical documents, validate with all their authority as 'evidence' of the identity stories constructed in this way.

50   However, the archivist-cartographer's role is not limited to building identity. As 'keepers' of the archival archipelago, they are vital actors shaping the bureaucratic structures of humanitarian entities. Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin argue that humanitarian interventions are inherently ambiguous. While establishing 'humanity' as an object of care leads to protective measures, it simultaneously justifies elaborating new governing techniques to contain the potential threats it represents to the nation-state or global peace.[50] The archival archipelago forms a vital component of these governance structures, entangled within the translational structures of the ICRC. The effects of 'disciplining' organisational structures and entities between the headquarters and fields constantly unfold within the ICRC. The existence of its archives in its archipelagic form both mirrors these disciplining efforts and reflects how these efforts give rise to fragmentary, island-like entities within the headquarters. The following chapter on confidentiality further explores this carceral dimension of the archival archipelago by examining confidentiality.

FOOTNOTES

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3. Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection," *Archival Science* 2 (September 2002), pp. 221–38; Lilly Koltun, "The Architecture of Archives: Whose Form, What Functions?" *Archival Science* 2 (September 2002), pp. 239–61.

4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). The carceral archipelago as a concept first appears in this book.

5. Sabrina Axster et al, "Colonial Lives of the Carceral Archipelago", *International Political Sociology* 15, (2021), 415.

6. Ann Laura Stoler, Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 108.

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8. Saidiya, Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008), 11.

9. I explain this classification system based on a printed version of the cadre de classement given to me by an archivist during my visits. I was not able to find a digital version of the same or any explanation of this in a publication.

10. Valerie McKnight Hashemi, "A balancing act: The revised rules of access to the ICRC Archives reflect multiple stakes and challenges", *International Review of the Red Cross* 100, no. 907-909 (2018): 386.

11. Daniel Palmieri, "An institution standing the test of time? A review of 150 years of the history of the International Committee of the Red Cross." *International Review of the Red Cross* 94, no. 888 (2012): 1278

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13. Ismaël Radboud et al, "Reflections on the development of the Movement and international humanitarian law through the lens of the ICRC Library's Heritage Collection." *International Review of the Red Cross* 100, no. 907-909 (2018): 145.

14. Ibid.

15. Dietrich Schindler, "Max Huber–His Life." *European Journal of International Law* 18, no. 1 (2007): 82.

16. Palmieri, "An Institution Standing Test of Time", 1287

17. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 65, 2 September 1943.

18. Ismaël Radboud et al, "Reflections", 157.

19. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 73, 29 February 1944.

20. Palmieri, "An Institution Standing The Test of Time", 1287.

21. The designation of 'collaborator' is different from the designation of 'delegates' used to refer to committee members who were mandated to undertake various missions within and beyond Europe.

22. Jessica Lapp, "Handmaidens of History", Archival Science 19, 2019: 220.

23. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-002, Letter to Mme. Jung from M. Amman, 15 January 1952.

24. ICRC Library, AF 4321, Album from the Conference Diplomatic, Genève 1929.

25. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 48, 5 May 1943.

26. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives, Extrait du Compte Rendu pour l'année 1921 de la bibliothèque publique et universitaire.

27. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 23, 4 November 1942.

28. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 89, 17 October 1945.

29. Palmieri, "An Institution Standing the Test of Time", 1278.

30. ICRC Archives, BCR 229 PV: 61, 2 September 1943.

31. Monique Katz, "Quand des machines travaillaient pour la Croix-Rouge?" *RICR* 453, September 1956, pp. 507–511.

32. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 65, 2 September 1943.

33. Archives of the ICRC, "CICR : du Métropole au Carlton et ses différents lieux historiques genevois", Notre Histoire, 25 October 2016, https://notrehistoire.ch/entries/0wBe7Dk0WmZ

34. Palmieri, "An Institution Standing the Test of Time", 1287.

35. ICRC Archives, BCR 229 Commission de Archives PV: 98, 10 May 1946.

36. Hashemi, "A Balancing Act", 134.

37. Ibid.

38. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-005, Archives de Max Huber returned to CICR, 14 April 1954 to 14 February 1961.

39. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-005, Letter from Max Huber to Jean Pictet, 14 April 1954

40. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-02, Circular Letter to ICRC Delegations in the Far East, 15 June 1953.

41. Ibid.

42. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-02, Règles relatives à l'enregistrement et au classement du courrier, 1950.

43. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-02, Rapport de M. M. Vaugnat Sur Le Secrétariat Du Comité De Réorganisation Des Archives, October 1951.

44. Ibid.

45. ICRC Archives, BAG070-06, Correspondence between the International Institute of Labour Studies and P. Vibert, March 1963.

46. ICRC Archives, BAG070-09, Letter by JP Maunoir, 27 January 1974. The letter talks about why Bourgeois makes an ideal candidate for the position of archivist because of his involvement in the first volume of the history of the ICRC.

47. 63 Ibid.

48. Terry Cook, "We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are': Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future", *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, Vol 2: 175.

49. Elisabeth Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity", *American Archivist* 63, 127.

50. Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin, "Humanity and Government" in *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care* (Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

4. Confidentiality and Shifting Archival Anxieties

Figure 7: Compactors photographed during a tour of the ICRC's archives

Source: Author

Un extrait d'une note à l'attention de M. Le President Ruegger par E. de Bondeli
Objet: Archives Confidentielles, 30 May 1952.

Vous avez exprimé, il y a quelques semaines, le désir que les archives confidentielles du CICR soient rassemblées une armoire-forte, tout en demeurant à portée de main des personnes appelées, soit à les consulter, soit à les utiliser comme instrument de travail.

Je me permets donc de vous indiquer que c'est la aujourd'hui chose faite.

Un meuble métallique, à serrure de sureté, a –d'accord avec M. Siordet– été place dans la salle de bains attenante à son bureau et toutes les archives confidentielles du CICR y sont actuellement groupées. [...]

Il est prévu, en cas d'événements graves (invasion par exemple) que tous les dossiers se trouvant dans ce meuble devront être immédiatement brûlés.[1]

> A few weeks ago, you expressed the desire that the confidential archives of the ICRC be put together in a safe, while remaining within easy reach of the people called upon to either consult them or use them as a working tool.
> I would therefore like to let you know that this is what has been done today.
> A metal piece of furniture, with a safety lock, - in agreement with Mr. Siordet - was placed in the bathroom adjoining his office and all the confidential archives of the ICRC are currently grouped there. [...]
> It is expected, in the event of serious events (invasion, for example), that all files in this cabinet will be immediately burned.

Confidentiality as a Modus Operandi

1 Part of my work in an archive involved giving tours to people who visited the archives. We often put our spin on these tours to show what an archive did – showing the opening of the compactor in storage rooms with boxes neatly stacked inside the shelves helped visitors visualise and imagine the extent of what an archive held. It took me many visits to the archives of the ICRC to finally get a chance to view the compactors in the basements on a similar tour given by archivists. Through the tour, I also learnt that the compactors were not the only homes for documents, as documents were routinely housed in safes. Asking where the safes were located was not a question with a straightforward answer - understandably. Instead, as the extract illustrates, the sometimes seemingly bizarre location of safes in the ICRC reflects how the practice of confidentiality evolved in situation-specific ways.

2 Confidentiality is central to the ICRC's operations and has been constantly scrutinised as an 'irrational and sometimes dysfunctional tendency toward secrecy'.[2] The myriad consequences of the ICRC's confidential approach have also been evaluated in the context of specific conflicts in the field. When our gaze is turned back to the structures of the headquarters, describing confidentiality as irrational only gets us so far in understanding how this practice orders and structures the everyday life of institutions. Confidentiality had a direct impact on the nature of record-keeping within the ICRC.

3 The ICRC views itself as 'an impartial, neutral and independent organisation whose humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence by providing assistance.[3] While neutrality, independence and impartiality are cast as 'core principles' that drive the ICRC's work, confidentiality is not a principle per se but rather an approach. This practice is unique to the ICRC's identity as a private association under the Swiss civil code, which operates internationally in conflict zones via the status conferred by the Geneva Conventions and protocols.[4] Confidentiality is cast by the ICRC then as an 'operational tool' – which is variably applied depending on the context. In multiple official explanations and justifications for secrecy, the flexible approach of confidentiality is continually emphasised to show how confidentiality is not the goal but a means to an end. In this manner, the official justification of confidentiality is that it aids in protecting the other principles of humanitarian action, most importantly, neutrality.[5] The most direct consequence of the confidential approach is that those external to the ICRC will not

know the facts pertaining to a state or armed group's conduct, including the type of abuses, their location, their perpetrators, or their victims.[6]

4   Due to its variable nature, how confidentiality is embodied and interpreted by different actors within an institution warrants further attention. By analysing the modalities of confidential dialogue through observing ICRC delegates in the field, Billaud illustrates how it functions as a communication ritual that delegates use to manage and navigate the disorder inherent in the everyday operations within conflict zones.[7] Analysing the practice of confidentiality as a ritual allows us to move past the opacity of confidentiality within the ICRC and examine how it structures bureaucracies. In their archipelagic form, the ICRC's archives are an important site where the politics of confidentiality continue to unfold within the organisation. They act like a mirror that reflects the understanding of secrecy within the organisation. To render this reflection clearly, I turn to the literature on the anthropology of bureaucracies, focusing on the role of documents where the locus of confidentiality is often exerted.

5   Anthropology has recently begun to view documents not as objects used *for* study but as objects *of* study. Latour terms documents as 'the most despised of ethnographic objects'[8] where the everydayness of their production and use makes them invisible to analysis. To disrupt this invisibility, there is a need to focus on the mediating role of documents, thereby highlighting how the tactics of power and authority take a dematerialised view of documents in their claim of transparency in the face of secrecy.[9] The forms and aesthetics of these bureaucratic documents are seen as 'self-contextualising' and 'self-analysing' and, therefore, are not examined in relation to wider contexts and social relations of institutions.[10]

6   Similarly, Hull argues that documents are not merely outputs of bureaucratic organisations but rather are objects which simultaneously reveal and constitute bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge and practices.[11] Here, it is essential to note that this body of literature on the anthropology of bureaucracy and documents does not call into question how documents interact with the spaces of archives – in the process of their circulation, collection or preservation. This runs the risk of reiterating the archives as an inert space that does not influence a document's trajectory through an institution. The processes by which documents are selected to be archived, how they are preserved, and how access to them is restricted in the name of confidentiality are crucial yet unexamined institutional moves entangled with confidentiality. Verdery's ethnography of the archives of the Romanian secret police is one of the few examples which address this gap and examines secrecy from the starting point of both the documents and the spaces of the archives.[12]

7   As seen in the previous chapters, the archival archipelago evolved as a crucial layer of the bureaucratic structures of the ICRC. In this chapter, I introduce the notion of archival anxieties and show its existence in relation to the practice of confidentiality within the ICRC. I show how these anxieties were rooted in the very construction of the archives, were constitutive of the archival archipelago and shifted form with its evolution - directed towards and materialising on various figures who inhabit the archive islands. Here, I want to build on the resonances between archival anxieties and Stoler's reflections in and of archives. In Stoler's examination of the Dutch colonial archive, she constantly emphasises the 'epistemic uncertainty' over authority and racial order experienced by the Dutch authorities and colonial administrators.[13] For Stoler, this is generative of anxieties embedded in the records found in the archives, the way the archives are constructed, and the categories used to classify and organise

the archives. Given that these anxieties crystallise within the archive, she advocates for reading along the archival grain rather than against it in our efforts to understand the logic of colonial rule. Drawing from Stoler, I aim to show how confidentiality caused anxieties about constructing an archive in the very first place, even before proceeding to influence its structure and operation. These anxieties became directed towards regulating the imagined audience and, subsequently, eventual users of the archive.

8   The 'purpose' of the ICRC's archives was not always set in stone. Rather, we shall see how it was constantly shaped according to leadership changes and the wider climate the institution found itself operating in. Defining the purpose of the archives involved other actors—even if it were another staff member—interacting with records that the ICRC held. At the time of construction, archivists were at the receiving end of these anxieties as they represented the possibility of 'viewing' these documents by bringing them into the folds of the islands. This led to difficulties in constructing the archives, as we shall see.

9   These anxieties slowly shifted from the 'audience' represented by the archivists to the imagined user of these archives as the purpose of the archives became defined in the interpretation of records to produce official volumes of history. While the ICRC always intended to control who would assume the figure of the 'historian', several factors, including the broader landscape of changing public opinion, create the conditions for an 'external researcher' to use the archives. This chapter illustrates how this causes a shift in the locus of archival anxieties from the archivist to the researcher, resulting in the exercise of control over who is permitted to assume this role and their outputs. Viewing the eventual opening of the archives to the public in 1996 as intertwined with these archival anxieties allows us to understand its staggered nature. As we shall see, the construction of the categories of 'internal' vs 'external' and eventually 'public' users influence how the boundaries of islands are also modified to regulate these users, shaping the form of the archival archipelago.

Archival Anxieties in Construction

10   As seen in the extract at the opening of this chapter, delegates and committee members routinely practised the storage of confidential documents in metallic safes. Little is known about the official policy around the safes or their placement and operation. So far, in my searches, I have yet to find internal memoranda or administrative documents regarding this. However, there is a possibility that this exists in other fonds and series. Gleaning from the extract presented at the start of the chapter and knowing that the headquarters of the ICRC shifted between different sites, it is possible that some safes were likely attached to the offices of committee members and delegates and moved with these offices until the establishment of the Carlton headquarters. Within the minutes of the Commission de Archives, the issue of retrieving documents from the houses of Jean Pictet and Carl Burckhardt is referenced.[14] Perhaps there is a possibility that some safes also likely existed in the residences of the members belonging to the highest echelons of the committee.

11   This practice of storing documents in safes directly impacted the construction of the archives. As illustrated previously, constructing the archives involved consolidating documents from various places in the headquarters, leading to the emergence of the islands. The practice of using these safes effectively rendered various documents untraceable. The Commission des Archives et Bibliothèque actively debated this issue

in a meeting held on 3 December 1942. Members of the commission discussed how reports from delegates could not be found and referred, especially to the offices of Hans Bachmann, a member of the ICRC who occupied senior positions under former president Carl Burckhardt, Edouard Chapuisat and George Wagnière. Renée-Marguerite Frick-Cramer noted how these members were afraid that 'anybody could see confidential letters in the archives'.[15]

Figure 8: Georges Wagnière and Edouard Chapuisat

Source: ICRC AV (audiovisual) Archives, V-P-HIST-E-0685

12   Even with the external viewer not in the picture at this point, the fear generated by the possibility of archivists and staff from the 'lower rungs' viewing these documents drove these archival anxieties. Tasked with creating inventories to locate documents in various sites, the problem of tracking and 'finding' confidential documents scattered in multiple safes occurred.[16] The actions institutional cartography archivists were required to perform roused suspicion. In this case, the committee members of the ICRC who participated in the Commission des Archives' proceedings played a crucial role in negotiating access for the other collaborators to conduct their work. To allay these fears, creating a more basic version of an inventory in the form of an itemised list with no further details of the contents of these documents held in safes was proposed.[17] In this manner, the commission continued to advocate for the map-making exercises of archivists to continue whereby they would be able to understand the location of documents at the very least with the guarantees that these inventory maps would only be kept under the discretion of a few members involved in the commission.

13   However, this anxiety continued to persist in a subsequent meeting of the commission on 5 May 1943; members of the commission noted how 'the centralisation of archives has not achieved results because of several invisible (emphasis of the author) documents at President Burckhardt's house'.[18] The issue of requiring access to these

documents to undertake 'a complete job' was repeatedly emphasised. The question of trust emerged as an essential factor in these commission proceedings, especially when hiring assistants and other collaborators to whom they could entrust this work.

14 Here, it was worth noting that the practice of confidentiality within the ICRC likely urged delegates to use the safes for many of their documents, not just those deemed 'confidential'. This is likely because the Commission des Archives at this stage did not propose to assume control over confidential documents by seeking their complete transfer. The archivists were not seeking to erase the existence of confidential documents or to modify this status for specific documents by archiving them. Rather, the existence of an archive and its functioning depended on knowing where records existed within an organisation and how to ensure their timely, if not immediate, transfer to the archives. In many cases, the commission also referenced the possibility of transferring documents into safes in possession of the archives to allow them to continue to remain confidential.[19] This allowed them to extend the use of safes to ensure their practices were trustworthy. In this manner, the commission found itself navigating a tricky space. On the one hand, working with and not against confidentiality required maintaining a state of stasis for at least some documents within the confines of safes, with a 'simplified inventory' being proposed. Conversely, building an archive required some intervention to disrupt this stasis and consolidate them in an archive. This gave rise to the same 'scattering effect' and incomplete consolidation of documents underlying the emergence of the islands, as described in the previous chapter.

15 Here, it is worth asking what was brought into the folds of confidentiality. What was likely kept in the lockers that provoked fear and hesitancy towards the archivists 'taking' or viewing these documents? During my visits to the ICRC archives, I would often ask the archivists about this practice of confidentiality to understand how they made sense of it. During one of these conversations, I was directed to examine a particular sous fond titled A/CL (Administrative/Classified). It was explained that this sous fond contained documents that were once classified and subsequently declassified when the archives opened to the public. The inventory for this sous fond was not found in the reading room but with the archivists. During my visits, I conducted a preliminary examination of this lengthy inventory and the perusal of documents to understand which documents were deemed confidential. In the case of specific files revolving around issues such as the misdemeanour of delegates and problems faced by delegates in the field, the confidentiality reasons were administratively straightforward. Perusing through the first couple of boxes using the inventory, I came across the correspondence folder of Jacques Chènevière. During the Second World War, Chènevière directed the Central Information Agency on the Prisoners of War and the Central Bureau of the ICRC. Amidst the correspondence, I found multiple sheets containing drawings, sketches and greeting cards. A sample of these objects has been collated below. This illustrates how the administrative operation of confidentiality, due to its expansive, restrictive nature within the ICRC, often brought the personal and the mundane into its fold.

16 Furthermore, the presence of these objects amidst confidential documents indicates a blurring of the boundaries between the administratively confidential and the personal in the ICRC's everyday operations. In a note of order sent to all members and Chiefs of Divisions about how all mail is to be opened by the staff, the Chief of the Courrier and Archives division requests delegates not to send personal mail to the headquarters in

Geneva.[20] The note 'reminds the members and collaborators who have a home in Switzerland not to use the CICR office for personal things'. While all confidential documents were undoubtedly not personal, the blurring of personal and confidential documents certainly demonstrates one root of the spectrum underlying the archival anxieties.

Figure 9: Within The Folds of Confidentiality I: A collage compiled by author showing a selection of sketches found in a folder of Jacques Chènevière's personal correspondence
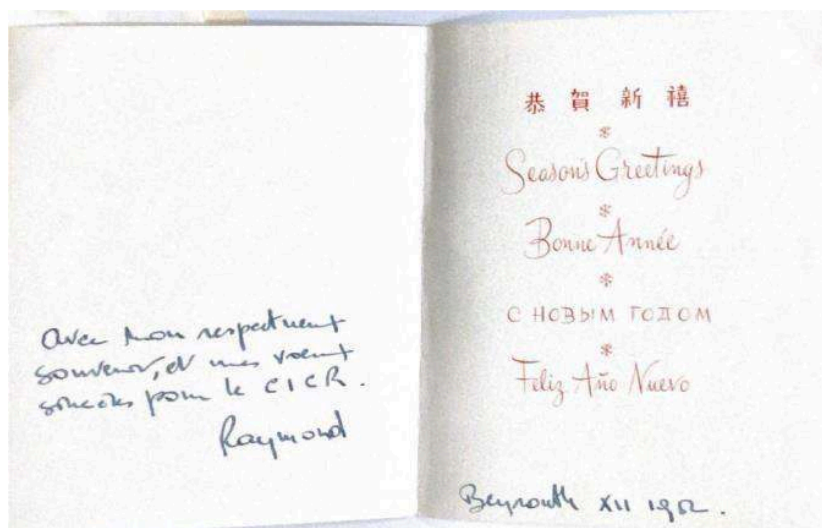

Source: ACICR, ACL 01.002, 16.03.1938 - 22.11.1949

Figure 10.1: Within the Folds of Confidentiality II: Greetings cards found in Chènevière's file above of
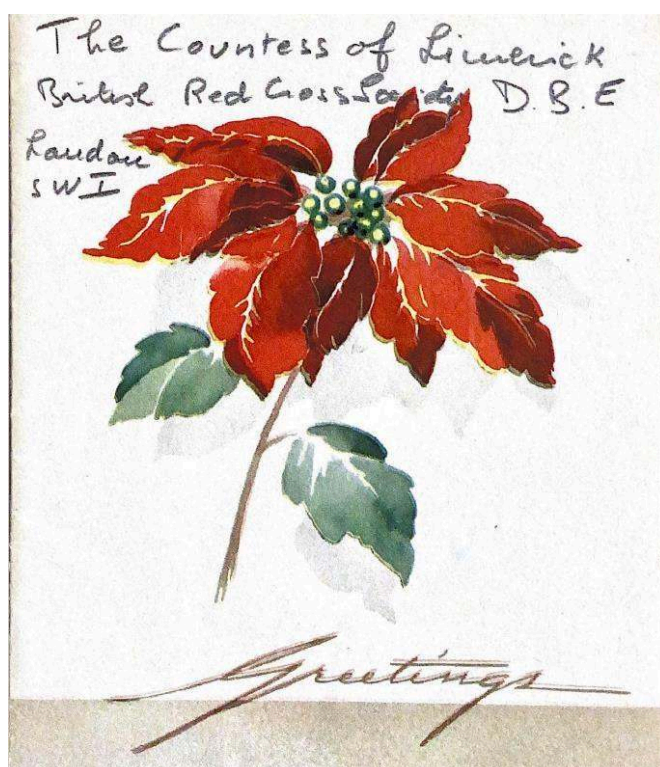
Source: ACICR, ACL 01.002, 16.03.1938 - 22.11.1949

Figure 10.2: Within the Folds of Confidentiality II: Greetings cards found in Chènevière's file above of

Source: ACICR, ACL 01.002, 16.03.1938 - 22.11.1949

Archival Anxieties and the Figure of the Researcher

17   As noted in the previous chapter, Max Huber's participation in the commission infused a sense of historicity via the production of the ICRC's historical volumes. However, producing the historical volumes was always envisioned as an internal endeavour by

committee members or delegates within the ICRC. During the inception and proceedings of the Commission des Archives, a conception of the 'public user' did not exist. The trajectory of arriving at the point of entry for 'the public' is an interesting one which reflects a tussle with the same archival anxiety generated by confidentiality – though the locus of this anxiety shifts from the archivist to the researcher in this process. What Hashemi terms as a 'balancing act' between confidentiality and access can be alternatively understood as attempts to manage and channel these anxieties.

18   The interest in institutional histories usually heightens around commemorative milestones. In the ICRC's case, the interest in expanding historical production also gained traction after its centenary in 1963. While the general rule was that public access was not granted, the Director of the ICRC's Division of General Affairs could consider individual requests on a case-by-case basis. In an administrative note dated 13 June 1972, Pictet writes '*le CICR est maitre de ses archives et il ne les ouvre qu'à bon escient, losqu'il le juge utile. Encore ne le fait-il qu'au profit de personnes qu'il connait et dans lesquelles il a pleine confiance*' (the CICR is the master of its archives and has the right to open its archives to whomsoever it chooses and the people it has confidence in). While Pictet voiced this case-by-case approach, the same document reflected his doubts about the sustainability of this approach, describing how the privilege of access to some could be questioned by another. While this approach was eventually formalised in a document outlining access regulations by the ICRC Assembly in 1973,[21] the problem of who would adjudicate these requests persisted. A large portion of requests were made to Jean Pictet, who directly corresponded with researchers, with little involvement from archivists or staff in the Archives Division. In response to requests, Pictet often noted that the researcher must write to the CICR to explain their use of records from the archives. Eventually, Pictet's responsibility for granting access was transferred to Jacques Moreillon, Director of the Law Department, and the Head of the Archives Division.[22]

19   The formalisation of this approach did not clarify the selection criteria for researchers permitted to enter. Instead, it reflected an unstated bias towards Genevois or Swiss researchers who had a connection to existing committee members. In response to a request by Professor Sven Stelling Michaud in April 1975, Pictet writes that a 'student or a professor affiliated to the University of Geneva is likely to get priority for access'.[23] In this manner, access to the archives was presented as a 'privilege' given to a select few deemed capable of safeguarding confidentiality. It is important to recall that not all research requests were necessary for confidential documents per se. However, archival anxieties cast all documents in the archives as potentially disrupting the practice of confidentiality when viewed by an 'external user'. This allowed the justification of restrictive access and increasing scrutiny of both the output and process of the external researcher.

20   At the start of the 1980s, there was a palpable shift in public opinion towards the ICRC's operations during the Second World War. Against this landscape, Jean-Claude Favez emerged as one of the most well-known figures who entered the archive and gained unrestricted access. In the preface of his resulting book, Favez wrote that 'the conditions were ripe in 1995 for the question of Swiss attitudes during WWII to become a subject of doubt and controversy'.[24] The ICRC's decision to allow Favez unrestricted access to its archives to evaluate its operations during the Second World War reflects both a recognition of these conditions and the deliberate institutional choice by the ICRC to undertake actions to salvage its reputation. With increasing public scrutiny

over how archival anxieties were managed, the move of 'Favez as the first' was not surprising given that he was a Professor at the University of Geneva and already had an existing rapport with committee members.

Shifting Morphing Anxieties

21 Favez's entry had long-lasting implications for the archival archipelago because it demonstrated that the gates of the archives could be opened all the way. It transformed the archival archipelago into a site where the ICRC had to salvage and safeguard its reputation because archival anxieties had been brought to the fore. At this moment, transforming Favez into a figure who represented the ICRC's willingness to respond to criticisms of the present moment showed that the ICRC could manage these anxieties in the face of public scrutiny.

22 These archival anxieties began to be moulded into sustainable and, more importantly, justifiable access policies as regulations that rested on arbitrary criteria no longer became tenable, given that the archives were becoming a crucial site to negotiate its standing and image in the international arena. Following Favez, Hashemi writes that the then ICRC president Cornelio Sommaruga 'sensed what was coming' and gave the mandate to 'reform its archiving system', which was subsequently approved by the Assembly on 10 May 1990. Tracing the deliberations leading to these institutional decisions would be necessary to see how archival anxieties were managed. However, these are currently inaccessible to the public, leading us to see how the remnants of archival anxieties are woven into the formulation of access policies for the public.

23 The ICRC Assembly adopted the first access policy for the broader public in its 17 January 1996 session. This introduced the category of 'public archives', which referred to files inventoried to become available to any individual external to the ICRC for research.[25] Archives were classified as 'public' after a protection period to ensure that consultation did not prejudice the ICRC, the persons it was mandated to protect, or any other public or private interest.

24 'The opening' in 1996 became a moment in the evolution of the archives, and it is necessary to see how this event has been framed by both researchers and archivists alike. The introduction of the 'public' category resulted in the construction of a reading room for researchers to consult material. An archivist who had started working at the archives two years before this event, recounted the 'extensive preparations' which had to be carried out to receive researchers. This decision of the ICRC had no precedent and required time to adapt to this situation. He noted how his work fundamentally shifted towards creating and making inventories and recalled the 'exponential increase' in inventories which had to be prepared when researchers arrived. The inventory was previously understood as a map by archivists to navigate the changing structures of the ICRC, within which they were fundamentally transformed. It now had to become a tool to guide researchers, who were keenly waiting to explore this terrain which had been cordoned off from sight for so long. On one of my visits, I met a researcher who recalled visiting the archives on the first day it was open for visitors. He noted how the opening was a 'high profile event', with journalists arriving at the headquarters to report on the day. It indicates that the performativity around the opening was crucial due to the limited access provided by the opening.

25 If we have seen archival anxieties move with the evolution of the islands, how can we continue to understand their presence, absence, or continued existence in the

aftermath of the opening? Have these anxieties disappeared now that at least a portion of the ICRC's archives are 'public'? I argue that the remnants of the archival anxieties have shifted form and have become embedded in the formulation of access policies and the ensuing protection periods which emerge from them. These anxiety-driven access policies reshaped the boundaries of archive islands in particular ways.

26 The introduction of the protection periods for the 'public' necessitated shifting and redrawing the boundaries of the islands in specific ways. As reflected in the most recent version of the access policy, Article 2 defines the ICRC's archives as comprising the archives of decision-making bodies, 'general archives,' the archives of the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency, Human Resource Archives, and audiovisual archives.[26] These categories were introduced to make the existing islands and scattered records intelligible to the public.

27 Furthermore, these categories effectively became how the public understood the islands'existence. It is unclear whether this resulted in moving the actual site of these records. Nonetheless, these categories introduced a way of delimiting islands from existing islands. Internally, this meant that documents had to move through specific channels to be publicly available within these categories. The first access policy in 1996 introduced a classification system, which documents had to pass through before they could be considered 'suitable' for public viewing – on a scale ranging from 'strictly confidential' to 'confidential' to 'internal'. The first policy also deemed that documents would be declassified after a period of what was termed as 'general archives' and 100 years for documents containing personal data, which primarily concerned the records held by the Central Tracing Agency. In the subsequent revisions of the access policy in 2004, this was reduced to 40 and 50 years respectively. [27]As understood via conversations with archivists, once the protection period has passed, the declassification process consists of making all documents public, irrespective of their classification scale. However, as the archivist explained – this is still subject to approval from the ICRC's Assembly, which may choose to extend the strictly confidential or confidential status for specific documents. This shows that the declassification process is not an automatic process that is guaranteed to occur. Instead, considerable institutional discretion is still embedded into the process. We see then that public access does not imply a complete state of transparency, and 'public' does not exist as a binary against 'the confidential'. Instead, confidentiality exists in textures and layers within the archipelago, ordering the movement of records to different areas within existing islands, where gates to enter the islands can be built. However, allowing entry into the islands is still a precarious state. It is true that once opened, the gates to the island cannot be closed completely. Nonetheless, it is possible that the researcher-explorer, having entered one part of the island, can continue to be restricted or subtly re-directed in their attempts to move through the island or to a different one within the archipelago. The exploration of the explorer-researcher within the archipelago is now tolerated but continues to be closely watched.

FOOTNOTES

1. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-2, Note *A L'Attention De M. Le. President Ruegger: Objet Archives Confidentielles* Par Bondeli, 30 May 1952. Extract taken from this note.

2. David Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

3. ICRC Mission Statement, supra note 3, 400.

4. Steven Ratner, "Law promotion beyond law talk: The Red Cross, persuasion, and the laws of war" European *Journal of International Law* 22, no. 2 (2011): 463.

5. ICRC, "The ICRC's Privilege of Non-Disclosure of Confidential Information: Memorandum", *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, 897/898, (2016), 435.

6. Ratner, "Law Promotion", 472.

7. Billaud, "Masters of Disorder", 107.

8. Bruno Latour, "Drawing Things Together", in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, ed by Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 55.

9. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, *Natural Histories of Discourse*, (University of Chicago Press), 1996.

10. Annelise Riles, *The network inside out* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

11. Mathew Hull, "Documents and Bureaucracy", *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, Vol. 41, (2012): 253.

12. Verdery, "Secrets and Truth", 2014.

13. Stoler, "Along the Archival Grain", 43.

14. ICRC Archives BCR 229, Commission des Archives PV: 30, 19 November 1942 – *Referemce to retrieving documents from Pictet's residence*. ICRC Archives BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 53, 5 May 1943 – reference to documents from Burckhard's residence.

15. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 40, 3 December 1942.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 8, 5 May 1943.

19. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 42, 3 December 1942.

20. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-2, Note à l'attention des membres du CICR membres de la Direction, Conseillers et Chefs de Service : Ouverture du courier, 24 November 1955.

21. Hashemi, "Balancing Act", 381.

22. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-070-009, Demandes de recherches a effectuer aux Archives, circa June 1975.

23. ICRC Archives, BAG 070-009, Correspondence between Jean Pictet and Professor Sven Stelling Michaud, 23 April 1975.

24. Jean-Claude Favez, The Red Cross and the Holocaust, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), xii.

25. Hashemi, "Balancing Act", 382.

26. ICRC, Rules Governing Access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, 2 March 2017. Available at: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/About/history/rules_access_icrc_archives.pdf

27. Hashemi, "Balancing Act", 388.

5. Image Fossils in Archive Islands: Glimpses of Archival Decision-Making

Figure 11: Sticker on photograph with caption that reads 'BIAFRA 1968-69: Enfant mort de la famine
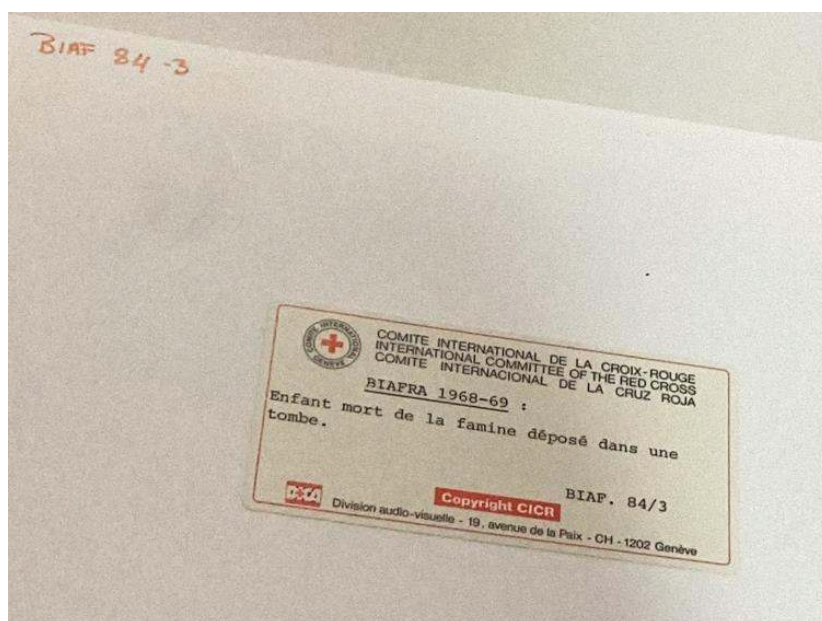
Source: ICRC AV Archives

1   At the ICRC headquarters, the 'offices' of the now entirely digital Audiovisual Archives are nestled within the library. After two visits to the ICRC library, I contacted the audiovisual archivist and requested to meet with her.

2   Speaking of the digitised photographs, she told me that the ICRC owned most of them or had purchased the copyright from professional photographers they had hired to follow their operation. When asked where the original print versions of the photographs were kept, SK slowly opened a drawer with neatly stacked orange files. 'These are not the original prints but copies of certain originals', she answered. She

thought to herself for a minute and asked, 'Would you be interested in seeing them'? In response to my vehement head nodding, Ms. X KS told me she would have to confirm with her colleague to ensure that none of the photographs here were 'sensitive' and could be viewed by an external researcher. She recalled that the previous researchers on Biafra who had used ICRC documents had not sought out the physical photographs or asked to see them. Since their digitisation, the physical photographs have not left their orange folder homes. But she noted that she had no idea how or why these specific photographs on Biafra were in her office and where the rest of the photographs were.

3   In my first sitting, I stopped after the third folder. I found a photograph of a deceased child in a grave. This photograph carried with it a sticker on the back that read 'Enfant mort de la famine déposé dans une tombe. BIAF 84/3. Copyright CICR'. This sticker also carried a stamp that stated 'Division Audio Visuelle' (DAV), ICRC – a sticker that did not appear on any other photograph.

4   This physical photograph existed in a grey zone, at the fringes of a digital archive – stripped of any information indicating its origin or context, in a state of neither use, preservation, nor destruction, the photograph of a burial, buried in a nondescript drawer.

Photographs, Islands and Archival Archipelago

> Let us stop thinking of photographs as nouns, and start treating them as verbs, transitive verbs. They do things. We need to ask not only what they are of and what they are about, but also what they were created to do. And when they are preserved or digitised, published, or in other ways repurposed and recirculated, we must ask how their material nature has been altered, and in the process, how the relationships embedded in them have changed and to what end.
> Joan M. Schwartz, '*The Archival Garden: Photographic Plantings, Interpretive Choices and Alternative Narratives*'[1]

5   Schwartz's passage perfectly encapsulates how we must begin thinking about photographs generated by the ICRC and their movement through the archival archipelago. Like documents, photographs also have the capacity to reflect the institutional dynamics that shape their production and circulation. However, these dynamics are different and take different trajectories through institutions. Tracing the paths of these photographs through the archipelago then requires a keen eye towards this difference.

6   Humanitarian photography, a genre generated by humanitarian actors and photographers hired by humanitarian organisations, has been the subject of much enquiry. Scholars have repeatedly emphasised its role and purpose as an inherently political image-making endeavour.[2] As the means of taking photographs has evolved, the norms and practices of humanitarian photography have also evolved.

7   This chapter explores the 'afterlife' of these photographs by showing how they moved through the islands and the ensuing transformations. If the broader shape of the archival archipelago has been established, photographs generated by the ICRC cause us to re-think the contours of this archipelago to see how institutions thought about their image collections and whether they saw a need for these to be archived.

8   Through the reconstructed history of the ICRC's archive islands, we see how the archivist-cartographer constantly mapped archival records to shape these islands. While these efforts largely centred around documents, photographs constituted a

separate set of archival objects because questions of consolidating, ordering, and classifying photographs were driven by different considerations defined by the changing purpose of the photograph.

9   Photographs within the ICRC currently rest within the Audiovisual Archives of the ICRC. While the Audiovisual Archives also include films and audio-recordings, photographs form the bulk of archival records constituting these islands. The ICRC's collection of photographs currently numbers 120,000 public images, with over 780,000 items in the form of glass plates, negatives, prints and digital photographs.[3] In many ways, the alterations Schwartz refers to in the above passage—emerging from use, publication, and circulation—occurred rapidly for the volume of photographs within the ICRC, making it difficult to trace the boundaries of structures holding photographs. Their circulation pace, in turn, affected whether photographs were seen as 'archivable' objects.

10 If we conceptualise the Audiovisual Archives as a separate island within the archipelago, we must understand how this separation came to exist. To answer this question, I deviate from the islands' linear reconstruction approach embodied in the first chapter. While this approach made sense to show the emergence of the entire archipelago, a chronological reconstruction appeared to make little sense for photographs whose paths through an institution such as the ICRC in no way seemed to be linear. Tied to the circumstances of each conflict from which they were generated, there are many ways one can 'enter' photographic analysis – from the people it represents to the creator behind the lens to the moment in time it sets to capture. I choose to show a shift in archival decision-making on photographs by focusing on two conflicts which shaped the ICRC's trajectory – the Second World War and the conflict in Biafra. By concentrating on these two points, I attempt to show two 'glimpses' of the islands by examining how classification and images were approached during each period. I use two photographs—one from each period—to construct these snapshots of the islands.

11 These images are not meant to serve as the epitome of images from either the Second World War or the Biafran conflict, and I have not provided an in-depth analysis of the photos themselves. Instead, I use these images to illustrate the relationship between the institutional purpose of these photographs and the kind of decisions made regarding archiving photographs at the time period the photographs represented. As this chapter aims to illustrate, how the photograph was viewed institutionally affected the extent of efforts to construct an image island.

12 I return to the *Commission des Archives et Bibliothèque* to render the first glimpse of the image island during the Second World War. With the aim of broadly analysing the ICRC's photographic collections, Gorin selects key images that represent 'milestones' within the ICRC.[4] While a small portion of her analysis focuses on specific decisions to organise and classify photographs in a certain manner, there is no systematic attempt to trace how archival choices were made and how archiving transformed the use of these photographs. The Commission provides us with further historical texture about the key moments that Gorin references and allows us to see the extent to which photographs were included in the archival decision-making occurring during this period.

13 The second moment is a glimpse of archival decision-making, which revolves around the conflict in Biafra. I use this conflict to also tether in the present as my foray into the ICRC's archives began with the Audiovisual Archives in November 2012, where I

focused on analysing photographs from Biafra. It is established that the Biafran conflict was a moment of organisational rupture for the ICRC, leading to the creation of Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF).

14 There are strong resonances between the two conflicts, particularly around how the ICRC responded to the invocation of the category of 'genocide'. The chapter illustrates how photographs were embedded in the institutional responses of the ICRC to both of these conflicts but in starkly different ways. Between these two conflicts, photographs rapidly transformed from 'evidence' to 'communication material'. The subsequent ongoing tension within the ICRC between the institutional practice of maintaining confidentiality and undertaking extensive communication activities about humanitarian action islands shaped the decisions being made on whether and how to consolidate photographs into an archive. In studying what form the image islands assumed at these points, the intention is to argue that there is a clear leap. Rather, these two moments are particularly illustrative of the challenges of bringing photographs into the folds of a single archive or image islands.

First Glimpse of the Image Island: Archiving the Evidentiary Photograph

Figure 12: Rossel posing in front of the bandstand in the central square of Theresienstadt, June 23, 1944

Source: ACICR G59/12 or CID, series 01161-27

15 During the Second World War, delegates were actively encouraged to take photographs. Seen as a technical instrument aiding the testimony of delegates, they were given the resources to engage in photography. The pictures generated by the ICRC delegate Dr. Maurice Rossel during his visit to the Theresienstadt Ghetto on 23 June 1944 have come under much scrutiny for embodying the ICRC's silence and neutrality in the face of Nazi atrocities. In an in-depth analysis of the context and subsequent effects of these photographs, Farré and Schubert write that the seemingly mundane pictures of Theresienstadt are exceptional for several reasons. They embody a rare instance of a concentration camp captured amidst activity, the elaborate nature of

staging undertaken by German authorities to portray Theresienstadt as a 'model ghetto', leading up to Rossel's visit.[5]98

16   During Rossel's visit to the camp, he was allowed to take photographs of the conditions which, like the contents of his report, were not disseminated. Out of the 36 photographs, not all were attached to his report, likely due to the inferior quality of certain prints.[6] Favre and Schubert also note that Rossel's report and accompanying photographs were not controversial when submitted to the ICRC and the Berlin delegation. However, based on the interpretation of certain committee documents, the authors note that when the report was used as propaganda by the German authorities to reinforce its portrayal of Theresienstadt, the ICRC refrained even internally from disseminating its content.

17   This treatment of Rossel's report and photographs tells us how photographs were not treated as stand-alone evidence and were not used to 'prove' violations. Instead, they formed supplementary evidence visually illustrative of delegates' testimonials embedded in the administrative reports accompanying the photographs. Still, photographs were treated with a high level of caution with the potential to destabilise the institution's stance of neutrality during the ongoing hostilities of the Second World War.

18   The commission likely encountered photographs from the First World War and even prior, in their efforts to consolidate and tabulate documents. However, over the four years of the commission's operations, from 4 November 1942 to 10 May 1946, the deliberations on what to do with photographs only appear in the last two meetings – in March and May 1946. In the penultimate meeting of the Commission des Archives in March 1946, a member of the commission confirmed the involvement of the Information Division in managing photographs. They explained that the classification of photographs, which had begun since the war, and alongside documents, had been extended and passed onto the Information Division.[7] The commission remarked that a certain number of photographs showing delegates in camps had been kept hidden by the Information Division. Jean Pictet, who chaired the commission, responded that there was a need to reunite the material with documents and establish 'a plan for centralisation to conserve documents with photographs'.

19   As both divisions were under his directorship, he proposed a practical plan to achieve the following.

20   In its final meeting on 10 May 1946, the commission actively debated the need to create a 'Service Iconographique' (Iconographic Division) to 'put an end to the destruction of photographs received in all offices and classify and use them either in the Information Division or the Review.'[8] Pictet put forth this idea as part of a more extensive reorganisation exercise. There was some resistance to this idea of reorganisation as members noted that archivists had been organising photographs since the beginning of the war. It was also stated that the Information Division had started classifying photographs according to 'their own method'. However, Pictet's idea reiterated a need for photographs not to be consolidated solely within the spaces of the archives, but within 'the framework of the entire CICR'. The help of archivists was enlisted in this reorganisation, and they were tasked with separating historic photographs from the rest.[9] Essentially, this mandated the archivists to continue their cartographic exercises in tracing photographs held by different divisions, establishing provenance and dimensions, and preserving photographs.

21 Gorin notes that P. Vaugnat, who we know was a member of the Commission des Archives, undertook a 'complete regrouping of all photographic material' before and after the Second World War and those held by the Information Division in 1953.[10] However, this exercise showed how several photographs were untraceable, and some could only be identified in relation to other images. Essentially, many photographs had already been separated from the reports or documents they were attached to, by their creators. This led to no metadata or contextual information about them when they were found. Additionally, the problem was that staff in the headquarters could not identify critical details about photographs taken in the field, leading to the mislabelling of photographs.[11]

22 These reorganisation tasks were undertaken without creating a separate, central space for all the photographs, as the question of where they would be housed was still in limbo. It was unclear whether the Iconographic Division was subsequently created. While the reorganisation exercise sought to bridge the gap between the 'historic photographs' and those classified as 'evidence' by the Information Division, this was likely never bridged as the photographs were not consolidated into a single archival entity. There was also no attempt at building systematic channels from divisions that put photographs to use in the archives. By the early 1950s, what existed was a partial archive island due to reorganisation, with the rest of the photographs scattered across divisions.

Second Glimpse: Archiving the 'Professional' Photograph

Figure 13: Image of caption behind a photograph of Max Vaterlaus and envelope
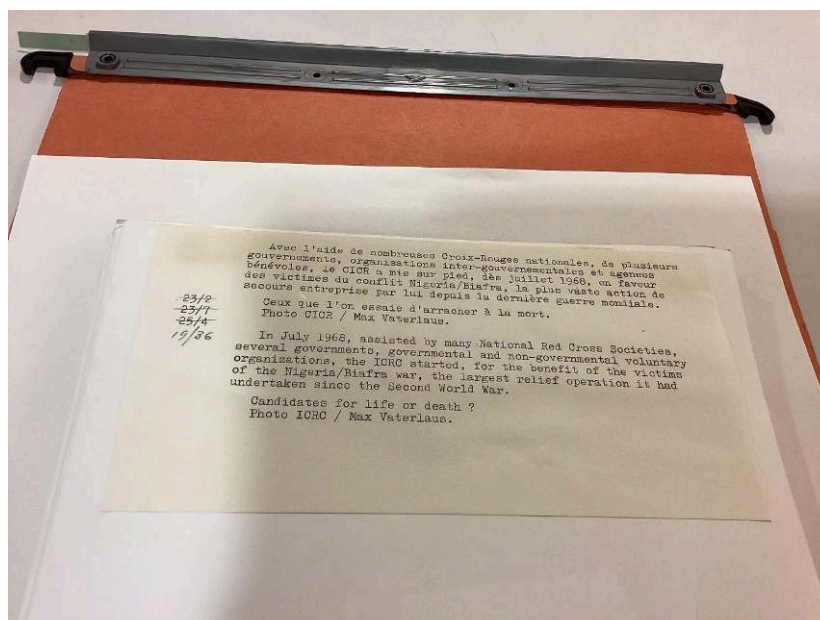
Source: ICRC AV Archives

23 The civil war in Biafra and the ensuing violence carried with them many labels and the politics of naming this conflict unfolded depending on the actors, time, and place. In July 1967, the government of the eastern region of Nigeria declared independence as the Republic of Biafra. In the summer of 1968, the blockade imposed by the Nigerian

government in the area resulted in widespread starvation and famine. This catapulted the conflict into the international realm, where it morphed from an 'internal matter'[12] to become an 'international humanitarian crisis'. A seemingly obscure conflict became extensively televised across Europe and North America. Driving a widespread sense of shock, horror and demands for intervention were the images of starving Biafran children under conditions of famine.

24   Heerten writes that the photographs of the 'Biafran babies' were seen as images from a 'new Auschwitz'.[13] This association allowed for the Biafran war to be rendered visible and sensible as genocide and resulted in an amplification of aid flowing to the region. Several humanitarian organisations, including faith-based relief organisations, were spurred into action. The largest of these organisations, coordinating operations on the ground between various other aid organisations, was the ICRC. Operations to undertake humanitarian aid to Biafra were among the most extensive undertaken by the ICRC since the end of the Second World War. This conflict would define the ICRC's operations in the years to come.

25   Differences on how to respond to this conflict and the extent of public denunciation of violence to be undertaken eventually resulted in a split in the ICRC and the formation of Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF).[14] The ICRC also faced difficulties on the ground in relation to other faith-based organisations and varying dynamics of competition with other agencies. Desgrandchamps writes that the ICRC was 'overwhelmed by the scale of tasks' at a time when media coverage, primarily driven by images of children, led to increased international scrutiny of the operations in Biafra.[15]

26   It is necessary to situate and historicise the ICRC's push to develop communication strategies, especially through photography, in the above landscape. The collaboration and commissioning of professional photographers and agencies such as Magnum and Gamma were driven by a strong need to communicate and publicise the ICRC's efforts. Giles Caron was one of the first photojournalists to cover the conflict as one of the founding members of Gamma photo agency and received enough attention for his 'journey to Biafra' to become a subject of scholarly enquiry.[16] In an interview, he noted that it was the [Gamma] agency that to some degree exposed Biafra to the public.[17]

27   Similar to Caron, Max Edwin Vaterlaus was also renowned for his coverage of Biafra. Following the digital footprints of the above photographers led me to discover various Red Cross publications where their photographs appeared as the conflict was unfolding. A striking example of this is seen in the magazines produced by the Swiss Red Cross society titled *La Croix-Rouge Suisse: revue mensuelle des Samaritains suisses: soins des malades et hygiene populaire.*

28   What is noteworthy here is how the photographer's actions, coupled with the structures of the ICRC, would influence the circulation of photographs and, eventually, the archiving process. Photographers such as Vaterlaus generated critical metadata regarding the time, place and region as seen in the caption above, which was crucial as these photographs, unlike those generated by delegates, did not carry with them any explanations of the context, figures and location they featured. However, a comparison of different photographs taken in Biafra shows that this was not a standard practice; instead, it depended on the photographer and their manner. It is also likely that the photographer only added this contextual information on photographs they decided to circulate.

29   Additionally, structural changes enabled the rapid and wide circulation of these images from Biafra within and beyond the ICRC. Some of these structural changes began to be

put into place before the conflict erupted. In May 1958 a photographic laboratory was set up to supply Red Cross societies, other humanitarian institutions, the public, journalists, and editors with documentation and to produce illustrated reports for donors.[18] In 1965, the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) created a joint photo library.[19] Kreis noted that the photo-library team began adding images to its collections—some copies, some 'lifted from the ICRC archives'—so that they could be loaned and shared with a wider audience.[20] As a consequence of this lifting, these photographs were likely separated from the archives. Based on the stamp seen on the photographs from Biafra above, we also see an 'audiovisual division' existed during the Biafran conflict. However, little is known about the existence of this division and its relationship to the photo libraries mentioned. Evidently, there was a rapid multiplying of entities which handled photographs and other audiovisual material to deal with communications demands. It is unclear how these structures evolved in relation to each other or where they diverged from one another. The intentional porosity between these structures was likely put in place to aid the easy use of photographs for communication. The examination of photographs during the Biafran war and the creation of these new entities likely led to the steady separation of photographs from the existing image island created at the end of the commission. In the BAG-070 files, which cover the period of the Biafran conflict, there is no mention of photographs by the Archives Division, and all the discussion in the documents pertains to documents. This provides some evidence of how there was no pipeline or channel to move photographs from these libraries to any existing spaces of the archives, and the responsibility of dealing with photographs was steadily separated from the archives. This is important to note because, as seen in the first chapter, intentional actions were taken to ensure that the commission's consolidation exercises continued in the case of documents and various existing divisions were required to channel their records back into the archives. However, this did not occur to the same extent with photographs. The entities responsible for enabling the use of photographs likely did not consider the long life of photographs beyond their immediate use or the potential historicity embedded in them. This led to the scattering of photographs to a far broader extent than documents and the existence of perpetually circulating photographs with no intended, eventual resting place.

Scattered Digital Fossils of Violence

30   At present, an entirely digital audiovisual archive exists for the ICRC. Documentary sources that trace this organisational decision likely fall into the period after 1971 and fall under the protection period. One could argue that the act of digitising can be understood as a consolidation exercise leading to the creation of an archive island entirely for images and other audiovisual objects. If the presence of archival anxieties can be extended to see why documents within the ICRC have not been made available in their digitised versions, the same cannot be said about photographs, which have been extensively digitised. However, this digital image island takes a strange form—most photographs carry no caption, very little metadata, and virtually no context about where and how they were taken or even who they depict. The above glimpses of archival decision-making show these challenges existed far before digitising.

31   Here, it is necessary to ask whether digitally consolidating these images has been accompanied by a similar exercise for the original print version of these photographs.

Scrolling through the hundreds of thumbnails, we also have little knowledge of whether the physical counterpart of every digitised photo exists or has been preserved in any way. As shown above, some exist in the offices of archivists, between documents in the public archives and perhaps in other divisions' offices. It is this scattering in unknown places, in between defunct and existing institutional structures and islands - old and new - which also makes an institutional 'unearthing of unseen photographs'[21] possible on various occasions. When I think back to the photograph of a dead child in a tomb in Biafra, I am left thinking about the implications of this excavating exercise for photographs depicting violence.

[32] Stripped of context, details, and information, some of these photographs exist as fossils. Carrying traces of violence, they continue to exist around the islands, gathering sediment.


FOOTNOTES

1. Joan Schwartz, "The Archival Garden: Photographic plantings, interpretive choices, and alternative narratives", *Controlling the past: Documenting society and institutions: Essays in honor of Helen Willa Samuels*, ed. Terry Cook, (Society of American Archivists, 2011).

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5. Sébastien Farré and Yan Schubert, "L'illusion De L'objectif," Le Mouvement Social n° 227, no. 2 (May 18, 2009): 71.

6. Ibid.

7. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV:95, March 1946.

8. ICRC Archives, BCR 229, Commission de Archives PV: 102, 10 May 1946.

9. Ibid.

10. Gorin, "Looking Back", 1361.

11. Ibid.

12. Jean-Louis Cleargerie, *La Crise Du Biafra*, (Paris: Press Universitaires De France, 1994).

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17. Ibid.

18. Gorin, "Looking Back", 1357.

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20. Ibid.

21. Kreis et al, "Unearthing", 2022.

6. The Archival Archipelago in Flux

Figure 14: Photograph of *Instructions for interacting with the exhibit showcasing a portion of the International Agency of Prisoner of War Archives at the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva*
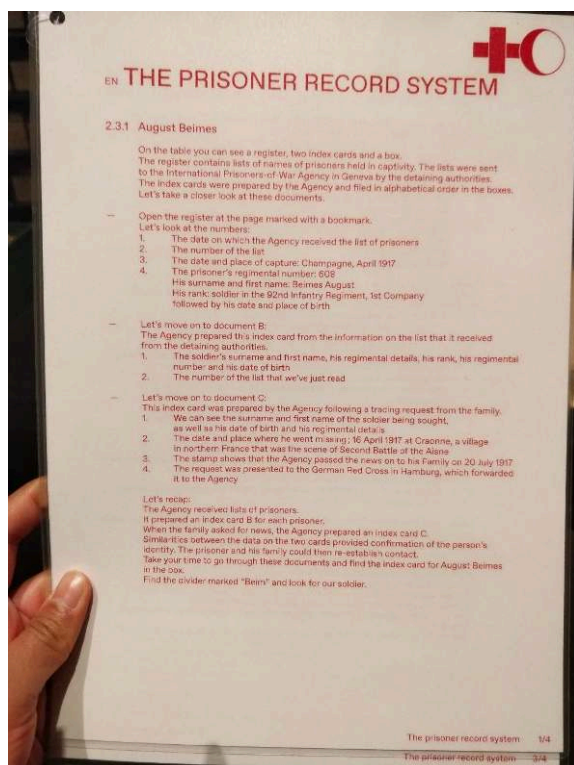
Source: Author

1   In the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, midway through the museum, we reach the exhibit displaying a portion of the archives of the International Agency of the Prisoners of War. The exhibit is designed to allow visitors to walk between the two glass cases holding index cards. As part of the exhibit, a table is set up with a box of index cards and a register. Instructions guide visitors on how to search for a particular prisoner using a particular page on the register and make sense of

information on a card. One can touch the cards, see where they are housed, and read the intricate cursive on which the names of prisoners are written.

2   On the Sunday I visited, I seated myself near the exhibit for an hour and a half. I hoped to see how many people would follow the instructions and 'interact' with these cards, as the curators intended. Most people missed the presence of the instructions card, which remained slightly hidden from view, attached to the end of the table. Some flipped through idly or ran a finger across the cards in the box. Although the intention is to allow a visitor to 'feel' the significance of what this card carries, this seemed to be diluted to an extent.

3   The index card is an object which is only rendered visible and sensible in volume.

4   An archival object has many lives, each crystallised in a different story. Within the archival archipelago, each archival object moving through an island at various points gathers another life story. In the introduction, the idea of the humanitarian walking trail forming an 'open-air' museum reflected a desire to 'take the museum outside'. The museum as a space has always been of interest to the ICRC. Two processes unfold when an object is moved from an archive to a museum display case. On the one hand, it gathers another story by entering this island. Simultaneously, one of its past lives (or some part of it) is deliberately extracted and frozen – as one part of an exhibit telling its own story.

5   The museum, in relation to the archipelago, has been an unexplored island thus far, but in some ways has always formed and operated in connection to the other islands. The photograph below is taken from a report submitted by Madeline Riser, a student working to reorganise the ICRC's library space under the supervision of Marion Jung in 1948. In this instance, the museum is in the ICRC's office in Rue de l'Athénée and essentially consisted of one room, with certain photographs and medals on display. The report does not make much reference to this space, aside from this photograph.

Figure 15: Photograph from report by Madeline Riser submitted in 1948

Bibliothèque et musée du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, 3, rue de l'Athénée
1871-1921

Source: ICRC Library

6   On 12 March 1946, in a final set of meetings, the Commission des Archives et Bibliothèque briefly grappled with the question of the museum. Martin Bodmer was given the position of museum manager and was asked to choose certain documents

that could be used for an exhibit. In the final meeting held on 10 May 1946, Bodmer noted that the various medals given to the ICRC were previously kept in a safe in the Musée d'Art and Musée d'Histoire and requested that one room in Métropole be allocated as the museum to display these medals and other objects.[1] From rooms allocated in various headquarters to the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the museum has undergone quite a metamorphosis.

7   Today, the museum is 'not a museum of the International Committee of the Red Cross', as staff will take care to point out. Rather, it is a museum about the history of humanitarianism as embodied in the work of the ICRC, the IFRC, and the national Red Cross societies. As an IFRC archivist explained, the museum's collections have been developed and accumulated from across the wider Red Cross movement in addition to the ICRC. While a significant portion of its photographic collections are loaned from the IFRC archives, many objects around the early founders and the period of the First and Second World Wars are drawn from the ICRC's archives.

8   The museum forms a fascinating island of the archival archipelago and has remained unexplored in my fieldwork. However, I present this preliminary sketch of the museum to show that the 'use' of archival records through displays and exhibitions was not a new phenomenon. Instead, these early attempts to build a museum in a room form an intricate layer of the ICRC's efforts to weave and share narratives about itself with a wider audience.

9   We began navigating the archipelago by examining how narratives of the ICRC materialised as myths on the urban landscape of Geneva. Then, we proceeded to investigate how the production of the official volumes of history was embedded into the construction of the archives and how confidentiality manifested in the exercise of control of external researchers also seeking to produce histories of their own, and finally, the differential treatment of photographs as records which do not embody the same kind of historicity as documents. These chapters have shown us various glimpses of how 'history' was understood by the ICRC. Having examined each of these facets through the archival archipelago, I return to this question of history to conclude the exploration of the archipelago thus far.

10   The debates around what constitutes history and its relationship to the category of memory are vast and can be entered in many ways. Shifting conceptions of the history-memory relationship form part of broader shifts and contests in cultural values.[2] I briefly draw on these debates to complicate the process of historical production at the ICRC. It is not sufficient to paint broad strokes about the entire organisation and 'ICRC's views' on historical production. Instead, one must look at various actors within and focus especially on actors who inhabit the space of the archives. By bringing forth their views, where the divergences and convergences between them exist, we see how various understandings of what constitutes history and memory exist in parallel, sometimes in tension within the ICRC. These views are likely to shape the future of the archival archipelago – especially at the present moment when funding, administrative, and moral crises have hit the headquarters of various humanitarian aid agencies, including the ICRC.

11   To begin untangling this relationship between power, archival sources and the creation of historical knowledge, I turn to Trouillot. For Trouillot, silences are inherently embedded into archives at four stages. First, at the 'moment of fact creation', when an archival record is created. Second, at the 'moment of fact assembly', when archives are constructed. Subsequently, silences are embedded at 'moments of fact retrieval' when

narratives are built and the 'moment of retrospective significance', when history is made in the final instance.[3]

12 Trouillot's notion of silences is one of the most widely used frameworks to make sense of the omissions in the archive. However, it is necessary to bring nuance to the operation of silence, especially at the latter three stages. By tracing the form and functioning of the archival archipelago, we saw how the construction of the archives was influenced at various moments by the interplay between the imperatives of confidentiality and communication. By focusing on archivists involved in the creation of archives and the challenges they faced, we see that silence, at some points, was not an intended effect but rather an inevitable outcome of the construction of every archive.

13 Yet, when considering the production of historical narratives, there is no doubt that the official volumes of the ICRC's history embody silences of many kinds – most notably a sustained silence around victims who receive humanitarian assistance. However, it is necessary to see how this production of 'official histories' is complicated internally by how actors today define the purpose of the archives using the terms of history versus memory (in particular, institutional memory). The intention here is to not draw on the theoretical debates to show differences between the two within the context of the ICRC. Rather, I illustrate different ways these terms are mobilised by figures presently inhabiting the archival archipelago and how the subsequent blurring of the distinction between memory and history occurs.

14 A simple search for 'memory' or '*mémoire*' amidst my translated notes of the commission's proceedings in the BCR 229 and BAG 070 files reveals little. The notion of 'memory' is not invoked at all to refer to the contents of the archives or the significance of the archive. On the other hand, as seen in the previous chapters, the notion of 'history' and writing history was always important to the ICRC and was tied to the function of the archives. However, we shall see how this category of 'history' is no longer constantly associated with the archives and is gradually being replaced by 'memory'.

15 We know that the production of the official volumes of history was an ongoing process which began with the commission's operations. This sense-making exercise about the ICRC's past through historical production was also intended to delineate through discrete time markers what constituted 'the past' versus 'the present'. Through interviews with the ICRC historian, I learnt how this position evolved from the role of 'Historical Research Officers' – created for staff working on the historical volumes. In addition to this task, before the opening of the archives, the role of historical research officers was to respond to external queries about the ICRC, using archival sources. Reflecting on his joining in 2002, the ICRC historian noted how there had been discussions to discontinue this role because the production of official volumes of history had been completed with the last volume. Given that the archives were now open, the ICRC saw no use for continuing this position. Eventually, it was decided that one historical research officer would be retained, and the historian noted how 'he had to make his own job specification'. He saw his work as 'giving an independent perspective using the newly opened archives so other historians could critique him'. Writing in the aftermath of the completion of the official volumes, he spoke of how 'imagination' was a crucial component in working with the ICRC's archives to show these records in a different light.

16   When asked how he interpreted the difference between memory and history, he explained that when he started, he saw history as being embedded in documents and 'that which could be proved'. What changed his perspective was working with oral history and interviewing ICRC staff in Rwanda for a project. 'With all the caveats of memory, there is a lot present in memory, which cannot be found in history, and the frontier between memory and history is unclear and something we take cautiously'. What followed was a discussion about 'omissions were everywhere in the archive', revolving around the difficulties of finding the voice of local staff from the fields and the voices of the victims as every document only told the story from the 'eyes of the delegate'.

17   After this first conversation, I began paying attention to how the term memory was mobilised and differentiated from history in subsequent conversations with archivists and staff in leadership positions of the Archives Division. In most conversations and interviews with archivists, the category of memory, rather than history, was invoked in the reflections on the archives.

18   'We are the only ones who keep memory within the ICRC', a staff member noted while proceeding to state how 'the archives are always in the consciousness of the ICRC'. In another conversation with a head of the division, the phrase 'deep memory' emerged – 'the archives hold deep memory and set our compass; without it, our needle is all over, and we remain directionless'. Archivists working internally noted that 'memory is what our institution holds; history is this memory, told from different points of view'.

19   The usage of these terms reflected a constant tension between 'the internal' versus 'the external'. Memory was confined to the ICRC's internal realms; history was what was produced – now largely by external entities and moved beyond the ICRC. However, the constant interplay between history vs. memory and internal vs. external showed how the decision to invoke these categories in fact depended on the audience. Which category faded into the background and which was pushed to the front was based on who was listening – somebody from inside the organisation or an 'outsider' like myself asking questions.

20   Archivists spoke of institutional memory and the need for 'business continuity' when there was a need to justify the archives' existence, functioning, or role to the higher echelons of the ICRC. This was done while constantly acknowledging that the archives held 'more than the memory of the ICRC' and 'shouldering the responsibility which comes with this' to audiences external to the ICRC.

21   These shifting lines between external and internal affected the two historians too – the second historian was commissioned to work 'solely on internal matters, for an internal audience'.

22   This troubled the idea that the historical production of the ICRC always moved from within the institution to beyond, embodying a single institutional position. The outputs of their historical investigations constantly changed – from reports for staff to talks about the histories of missions given to staff in operations, videos produced, and the 'Ask a Historian' portal on the ICRC's intranet. Reflecting on how they saw their role within the ICRC, the following statements emerged: 'I see my job as being a figure of caution when we try to reinvent the wheel – though the question of who listens is a separate matter.' In the same vein, when asked about how an external audience perceived scholarship produced by the 'official historians', he wryly remarked, 'people don't think I am a real historian because I write from within institutions without a PhD'.

23 Here, it is fair to ask to what extent the actors inhabiting the archipelago embody a critical approach. It is not that this does not exist internally. Rather, critique from within is carefully balanced regarding when it appears. At a public forum, a senior staff member repeatedly emphasised that the 'ICRC's Museum is a forum for conversation, not a temple … I do not set out to destroy the ICRC with my criticism, nor do I critique the ICRC's actions. The ICRC is made of people, and we should critique it, but when we do, we must know who exactly and what we are critiquing'.

24 The differences in the above views indicate a flux for the archival archipelago. They reflect underlying, unresolved, ongoing negotiations and dilemmas about what the ICRC's archives embody, their purpose, and who they should serve. These tensions will likely influence the archipelago in flux as it continues to take form and shape. A thin line unites what appears as diverging invocation, perceptions and use of the categories of memory versus history. Caught between the internal and external, there was a constant need to justify the archives' role to the chosen audience. Almost every individual spoke of the lack of awareness of what the ICRC's archives do and what exists and expressed worry about the same. The need to become more visible and stay visible seemed increasingly challenging against funding cuts, an ever-looming financial crisis and protracted humanitarian conflicts in most parts of the world. There existed some threads of a shared intention to prevent an archival archipelago from submerging into a state of defunctness and oblivion.

25 The archival archipelago has shown that archives are not only about the past. This state of flux unfolding within the archipelago demonstrates how the lines between the past, present and future are drawn and re-drawn in humanitarian action. What parts of the 161-year-old legacy it chooses to hold onto, weave and shape into an imagined future, depends on the evolution of the archive islands.

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