FAGFELLEVURDERT ARTIKKEL

Natalia Bermúdez Qvortrup

THE BODIL BIØRN COLLECTION AND ITS COMMUNITY OF RECORDS: A RESPONSIBILITY WITH THE VICTIMS[1]

Abstract

In early 2000's, senior archivist Vilhelm Lange came across a collection of records at the National Archive of Norway (from here on Riksarkivet), that help document the Armenian Genocide and thus have immense cultural and historical value particularly for the descendants of the victims, the Armenian community. This collection, composed of photographs, slides, photo-albums, letters, pamphlets and the missionary newspaper of the time, is part of the larger institutional archive of the now defunct Norwegian Women Missionary Workers, *Kvinnelige Misjonsarbeidere* (KMA).[2] Bodil Biørn, a young Norwegian nurse and KMA member, travelled in 1905 from Norway to the Ottoman Empire with her personal camera. There, she lived on and off until 1925.[3] Biørn and her KMA colleagues took photographs and wrote accounts of their daily life and the events around them. These

[1] I would like to thank Per Kristian Ottersland and Vilhelm Lange for answering all my enquiries, Gudmund Valderhaug for his feedback on the first draft of an early paper for this research and Inger Marie Okkenhaug for her correspondence.

[2] Translated to English as the Norwegian Women Missionary Workers, yet referred to in this paper by the Norwegian acronym KMA.

[3] Okkenhaug (2011).

records would later take on a life of their own and a meaning beyond Biørn, the KMA and Norway. The story of this collection begins with the story of Bodil Biørn's missionary work in Armenia, yet as I will describe here, goes beyond the narrative of the Nordic missionaries showing us how records travel through contexts and time to be activated for different purposes, and the fundamental role that archives play in their activation. This is particularly the case in this digital age.

The paper shows the importance of a *community of records* in cases of atrocity, for contextualisation, a deeper understanding of historical events and respect for the victims. A community of records is described as 'both to how records are (re-)created or reused within a community as well as its contextualization of records (through memory and narrative construction)'.[4] This community of records, a community that has a stake and an interest in the records, has helped activate the records in the Bodil Biørn collection and prolong their life in the service to which they were intended by Biørn, helping the Armenian community. This paper shows the participative nature of archivists and archives making them more than spectators but active participants in the politics of remembering.

It is a case of third-country sharing[5] and the collaborative efforts of a national archive to promote remembrance and acknowledgement of genocide, in opposition to the political stand taken by the Norwegian government. Digitalisation has extended the lives of these records, as is central to the sharing process with partners such as the Armenian Genocide Museum, Wikimedia, documentary film-makers, authors

4 Yakel and D.Torres (2007 p 93).

5 Ciorciari and Franzblau (2014) describe the term «third-country» in the context of alleged human rights violations as referring to «countries outside of the state in which those violations took place. Louis Joinet introduced this use of the term in an influential 1997 U.N.-commissioned report on combatting impunity» (pg. 2).

and with other projects. Yet, an online life raises concerns of erratic use that decontextualises and disconnects records from their community and memory institutions, which can at least be made accountable for their narratives.

The Bodil Biørn Collection

The Bodil Biørn collection, found at Riksarkivet is a collection of records, mainly photographs but also slides and photographic diaries created by Bodil Biørn during her years working for KMA. The KMA organisation was composed solely of female members who saw as their profession the protestant calling of missionary work[6]. The KMA work in the Ottoman Empire started in 1901 as a response to the large-scale massacres of 1894-96, when the Sultan Abdul Hamid ordered the killing of thousands of Armenians.[7] News travelled to Norway of the roughly 50,000 orphans and 100,000 widows in need of assistance and Biørn, hearing of the need for aid decided to travel to the Ottoman Empire as part of her Christian mission.[8]

She travelled first to the town of Mezereh in the Kharberd province, and later to Mush in Eastern Anatolia to help with relief work as well as the Christian mission.[9] Armenians made up a large part of the population of Mush and its surrounding areas and were described as the «main supporters of the economic life in Turkey» by the German ambassador of the day, Johann Heinrich Count von Bernstorff.[10] Yet at the time of Biørn's arrival, the destitution of Armenians was extreme due to their persecution and previous massacres. Biørn began documenting

6 Okkenhaug (2020).

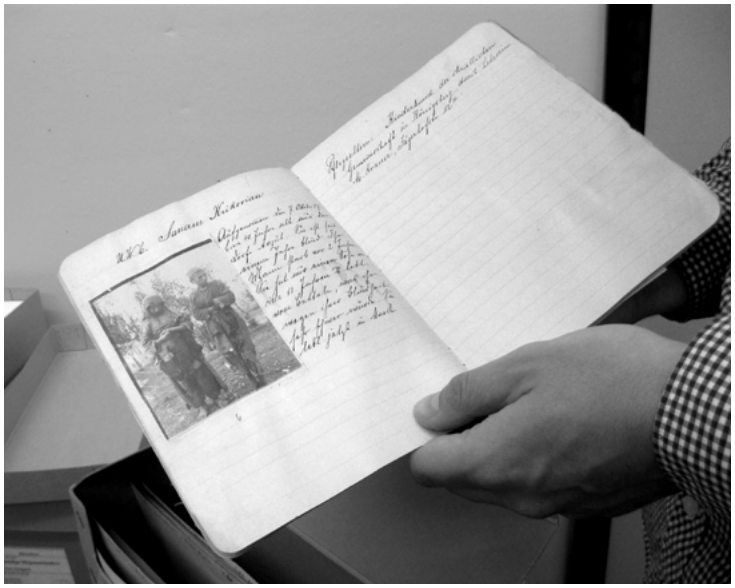
7 Gust 2014; Okkenhaug (2011).

8 Okkenhaug (2016, p. 19).

9 See http://genocide-museum.am/eng/15.04.2015-100photos.php

10 Gust 2014 p.4.

her work and that of her colleagues, the daily life, the landscape and the people they met and worked with. Biørn wrote in her diaries the name of the people she was photographing, the places, the dates and sometimes the context. The photographs pasted into Biørn's diaries, juxtapose the suffering on the one hand and the routine life she led among the locals on the other. One page will depict starving children whilst the next will depict a local family during a consultation, and the next the schoolchildren and their workers (see photo 1). Almost catalogue-like is the collection of photographs of the widows of Mush, taken by a couple of German missionaries linked to the KMA. These photographs were also gathered by Biørn and are part of her archive.



"Witwen in Musch" (Widows in Musch). Notebook with text and pasted photos, probably produced by German missionary B. von Dobbeler or his wife Anna (Biørn's colleagues in Mush). Each page states the name and age of a widow, the names of her children and in some cases how the husband died. The notebook contains 18 photographs + 4 loosely inlaid. This particular photo and story concerns the widow Sanam Krikorian. RA/PA-0699 KMA/U/L0033 Fotoalbum «Witwen in Musch»

Bodil Biørn's album: «Musch. Some of our little girls with their dolls.»
(Foto: Bodil Biørn / CC public domain)
RA/Pa-0699 KMA/U/L0033/0001/0009

One of Biørn's photographs portrays rows of Armenian girls from Biørn's day school dressed in Norwegian dresses and carrying dolls. The dresses were made in Norway by women who supported KMA activities and the dolls were sent from Norway as Christmas presents.[11] The photographs helped raise funds and show the improvements that were made with the funds that were raised.

Additionally, Biørn and her colleagues wrote in the organisation's international newsletter *Kvartalshilsen* to describe their work, share their experiences, call for funding, and generally communicate with their colleagues globally. The photographs that have survived to this day complement the written texts and together they build a picture not only of Biørn's experience and that of her colleagues, but that of the Armenians in Mush, albeit through the eyes of the missionaries. Together, the records help fill a documentation void left by the Genocide.

The Armenian Genocide

This paper refers to the events of 1915-1916 as Genocide as this is the term recognised for those events by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the European Parliament, the 1985 UN Genocide Report and the events were the precedent for the law on crimes against humanity.[12] Raphael Lemkin, father of the International Law on Genocide and the author of the term Genocide, described the crime against the Armenians as a defining example of Genocide.[13]

[11] An example of this can be seen in photograph 2. The story behind the photograph can be read about in Barseghyan and Stepanian (2015) and Qvortrup (2020).

[12] Altanian (2017); (Vahakn N Dadrian, 1989; Schabas, 2009).

[13] An Open Letter Concerning Historians Who Deny the Armenian Genocide» 2006.

It was his study and focus on the Armenian tragedy that led to his conceptualisation of the term in the mid-1940s.[14]

In 1908, the Turkish Sultan Abdul-Hamid was overthrown in the revolution of the Young Turks, who seized power, and initiated the creation of a modern Turkish state. For this purpose, they desired the removal of the multicultural, multireligious remnants of the Ottoman Empire, building a nation state made up of one people and one religion.[15] This process however, begun before the revolution when the Ottomans imposed a strict hierarchical system that deprived non-Muslims of basic rights and as the Empire declined the systematic discrimination, marginalisation and violence towards Armenians increased. This persecution and systematic violence resulted after eight years of turmoil in the region in the disappearance of the Armenians from what had been their homeland for some 3000 years.[16]

The complexity and atrocities of the Genocide which were a chain of events of systematic and increasing cyclical violence have been described and analysed comprehensively by well-known researchers and historians such as Dadrian, Hovannisian and many others[17]. The crucial point for purposes here is that in the midst of the winter of 1915-1916, a systematic government policy of what the Turks

[14] Balakian (2013).

[15] Altanian (2017) ; Hovannisian (2002).

[16] Adalian (2012 p. 117).

[17] The best-known Armenian scholars on the Genocide are Richard Hovannisian, Vahakn Dadrian and Levon Marashlian among others. Non-Armenian scholars include Yves Ternon, Robert Jay Lifton, Leo Kuper and Tessa Hofmann who write about the consequences and effects of the Genocide and its classification. Details as to the events of the Genocide are well catalogued in Gust, The Armenian Genocide as he gathers first-hand accounts, Suny, Göçek, and Naimark (2011), Vahakn N. Dadrian (2003), Balakian (2004), and Akçam (2012). The fate of women and girls is analysed in Bjørnlund (2009).

euphemistically called 'resettlement policy' began.[18] The deportations of the Armenians from their homeland in the middle of winter consisted in being rounded up in huge numbers, every village and town emptied of Armenians, and moved by foot to 'resettle' south to the Syrian desert.[19] Most never made it as no provision for food nor clothing had been made. Those that didn't die from exposure or starvation were killed, if not along the way, then when they arrived at their destination Deir el-zor. [20] Women and girls were targeted for rape, sexual abuse, slavery, and/or forced assimilation.[21] The destruction of the Armenian people was thereby carried out in «three different but related ways: dispersion, massacre and assimilation by conversion to Islam».[22]

In the midst of these atrocities, Biørn was running Deutsche Hülfbund's policlinic in Mush, which was an orphanage for boys and a school for girls during the day.[23] This gave her close contact with the local community, establishing a daily routine within the society. In 1915, Biørn witnessed the arrests, deportation and massacring of Armenians at the hands of the Turkish authorities.[24] The plain surrounding the town of Mush where Biørn lived, with its many Armenian villages has been described by Wolfgang Gust as the location of «one of the most dreadful chapters in the history of this Genocide».[25] At this point, Biørn used her photographs to corroborate the atrocities converting photographs that she had already taken to identify the victims and describe the occurrences. Photographs were copied

18 Adalian (2012 p. 117).
19 Adalian (2012 p. 120).
20 Suny and Princeton University (2015).
21 Bjørnlund (2009 p. 17).
22 Suny and Princeton University (2015 p. 335).
23 Okkenhaug (2011).
24 Qvortrup (2020).
25 Gust (2014 p. 19).

and were written on at the back stating who died and how. Biørn and her colleagues smuggled letters out of the country documenting what was happening and asking for help.[26] Many of the letters were written in code due to the censorship of the Turkish authorities. Hereby, an accumulation of records tracing the events of the time were produced at this point through writing and through photography.

Bodil Biørn's album: «One of the classes at the day school in Musch with the teacher Margarid. For several years we had a day school in Musch. Teacher Margarid Nalbanchiani (and) most of the 120 children at the day school were murdered in 1915.»
(Foto: Bodil Biørn / CC public domain)
RA/Pa-0699 KMA/U/L0036/0001/0152

26 Okkenhaug (2011).

Bodil Biørn's album: «With our teachers, priest, female teachers. Our Armenian helpers, of whom 6 were murdered during the massacres in 1915. Musch 1912.»
(Foto: Bodil Biørn / CC public domain)
RA/Pa-0699 KMA/U/L0038, Fra Armenia

One aspect that is important to note about the Genocide is that in 1933, Lemkin wrote in an essay that, «an attack targeting a collectivity can also take the form of systematic and organized destruction of the art and cultural heritage in which the unique genius and achievement of a collectivity are revealed in fields of science, arts and literature. The contribution of any particular collectivity to world culture as a whole forms [part of] the wealth of all of humanity, even while exhibiting unique characteristics».[27]

[27] Raphael Lemkin quoted in Balakian (2013 p. 59).

The point is that even though much of Lemkin's cultural definition of Genocide was lost during «the political parsing and compromises that preceded the 1948 adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide», Lemkin's points about cultural destruction remain relevant to understanding genocide.[28] Not only were the Armenians as a people persecuted and nearly destroyed through mass murder and the massive appropriation of their properties and wealth, but all their cultural history including libraries, museums, archives, registries, in other words much if not all of the population's recorded history was destroyed.[29]

The Armenians, «as the intellectual core of Turkey, were in possession of valuable personal libraries, archives, and historical manuscripts … Churches, convents, and monuments of artistic and historical value were destroyed.»[30] This is a relevant point for understanding why the role of archives, particularly archives outside Armenia have become so crucial for collecting evidence about the Genocide and helping Armenians recover their history.

The need for record-sharing in cases of atrocity

The records created by Biørn and her colleagues became part of the KMA archive and were kept as historical remnants of the institution until 1982 when the KMA dissolved. The KMA wrote to the National Archive of that time asking if they would house their documents as they were of significant historical value and Riksarkivet accepted.

[28] Balakian (2013 p 60).
[29] Adalian (2012 p 133).
[30] Quote from Hairenik Weekly, January 1,1959 in Balakian (2013 p. 62).

The archive at Riksarkivet includes 1379 photographs, many taken by Biørn. It includes Biørn's personal photo album and diary, the correspondence of missionaries from around the world to the organisation's newsletter, loose photographs, slides, the fundraising pamphlets, the organisation's account book and a few recently published books about Biørn.[31] The photographs in the collection are originals as well as copies, sometimes copied more than once. The slides are organised in the order Biørn used for her slide presentations on Armenia in later years. The correspondence is organised chronologically, and the photographs are organised around the different time periods Biørn spent in Armenia. The first collection of photographs (written about here) dates from Biørn's arrival in Armenia in 1905 until 1917. The second, centres around her work with the Armenian refugees in Aleppo at a later period and her stay in India, a third depicts her period in Lebanon, and so forth.

Roughly 500 000 people survived the Genocide mainly orphans, widows and widowers who were saved through the delivery of relief aid administered by missions.[32] Generally, it was the missionaries and diplomats who were among the first to see the horrific conditions and to appeal to their governments, institutions and the general public.[33] Biørn was one of those missionaries. She wrote letters to the religious community to raise awareness of the atrocity, tried to raise funds at home and worked the rest of her life for the Armenian cause.[34] She documented the victims of the Genocide, capturing a moment in

[31] Qvortrup (2020).
[32] Adalian (2012).
[33] Adalian (2012).
[34] See Okkenhaug's work (Okkenhaug, 2010; 2011, 2016) for more detailed researched about Bodil Biørn and the work of Scandinavian missionaries around that time.

history, recording their names, their occupations, hobbies, personalities, and what happened to them during the Genocide.[35]

Even though many of the photographs in the collection do not depict the assassination or brutalisation of people in the image, Susan Crane asks, «do we require photographs of *death-in-process* […] before we can know the horrible truth?». [36] Here however we have photographs that depict the starvation, which show the brutalisation of Armenians.[37] I would argue that with the rest of the documents in the collection, the correspondence and Biørn's words at the back of the photographs, we get to know a sliver of the ever-expanding Armenian Genocide archive. The Bodil Biørn Collection on its own is not evidence of the Genocide, but it contributes to this ever-growing global archive based on records from third countries (mainly Germany and the US). The accumulative effect has been to clearly establish the scale and horror of the Genocide, both to scholars, researchers, specialists and the general public, to the extent that today there is consensus among both historians and genocide scholars (including legal scholars) that the crimes did amount to Genocide.[38]

This archive has been preserved and has had a life of its own through activations brought about due to Riksarkivet's work and the community of records they belong to, a community that involves personal ties and relationships including with members of the Armenian community. As mentioned above, this is significant due to the enormous

[35] See Kvartalshilsen index page: https://no.wikisource.org/w/index.php?sort=relevance&search=Kvartalshilsen&title=Spesial%3ASøk&profile=advanced&fulltext=1&advancedSearch-current=%7B%7D&ns0=1&ns102=1&ns106=1.
[36] Crane (2008 p. 317).
[37] See https://no.wikimedia.org/wiki/Prosjekt:Bodil_Biørn#Bilder.
[38] Altanian (2017 p. 17).

loss of the entire recorded memory of the Armenians. A process of destruction that continues to this day;[39]

> « In the Armenian case, not only did the authorities and local populations vandalize and destroy churches and other communal properties, but they also converted many into arsenals and artillery training grounds – even barns or brothels. Successive generations of Turks would find other uses for them: today, an Armenian church in Aintab is a mosque (and was formerly a restaurant), one in Kayseri houses a community center, another in Edincik is used as a garage, and one in Trabzon is now a factory» […]. «Most Armenian buildings – both sacred and secular – have been appropriated, demolished, or left to erode. The landscape of Turkey is littered with hundreds or more of them. But their remains are like fragments of sculpture, powerful and haunting in their partial disclosures and their evocation of what once existed».[40]

This point is important because the destruction of cultural memory exacerbates the humiliation and silence that are legacies of the «undoing» and «unmaking», as Balakian writes, of genocide. Suny states, a genocide «need not be total but it should render a «people» impotent, politically and possibly culturally».[41] The consequence of this has been that the people of Armenia have had to partly depend on external archives to rebuild their documentation.[42] Digitalisation has not only helped the sharing of records, the Biørn collection and others on the Genocide found around the world, but has extended their lives exponentially.

39 Balakian (2013 p 62).
40 Balakian (2013 p 65, 72-73).
41 Suny and Princeton University (2015 p 351).
42 Adalian (2012).

Digitalisation and the community of records

The digitalisation of this collection began when Vilhelm Lange found the photographs in early 2000s,[43] realised their significance and decided to set up a digital exhibition in 2005 called *Norwegian Women Document Genocide*. The documents were digitalised and published online along with a map of the Ottoman Empire, a photograph of an Armenian refugee camp in Aleppo and crucially UN's definition of Genocide from the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) of 1948.

The Riksarkivet website has become a way to mediate the archive, by reaching a larger audience and bringing people into the archive.[44] The reach of the Riksarkivet website means that what starts out as an online exhibition, connects people from different groups, disciplines, interests and countries together, and has the result of real time physical events around the original online exhibitions.

Although it was Biørn who captured the moment, the exhibition by senior archivist Vilhelm Lange is the *activation* of these records and the way he activated them showed not only an interest in history, but a consciousness about historical accountability towards the victims. The decision-making process behind the selection of records exhibited in 2005 and his use of the term *genocide* was explained by Lange himself in a lecture he gave in 2008 at Riksarkivet, where he explained the impact that the photographs had on him and delved into the definition and meaning of the word *genocide*.

43 Before this, the records remained unknown to the archive due to the indexing which did not recognize the documented community only the creator; the KMA and Bodil Biørn. This is problematic, but it is not the subject of this article. It has been written about in Qvortrup (2020).
44 Wilson (2012).

In an attempt to change the wording of the exhibition, the Turkish Ambassador to Norway wrote to Riksarkivet complaining about the use of the word *genocide*.[45] The letter stated that even though tragic events happened during 1915, it cannot be called a genocide on the basis of evidence also because an international jurisdiction has not been issued regarding these events. 'As a national institution, the Ambassador stated, Riksarkivet had a duty to articulate the official position of the Norwegian government, which follows the stated Turkish position. Lange consulted his superiors and the Ministry of Culture regarding the use of the term and whether it could stay, and it did.[46]

The choice of using the term *genocide* was the decision of an archivist to follow not only the official position of specialist scholars, legal experts, the UN Human Rights Commission, the EU Parliament, and the human rights community, but also to listen to the affected community, the descendants of the victims. In the words of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, the documentation on the Armenian Genocide is abundant and overwhelming. «The Armenian Genocide was the most well-known human rights issue of its time and was reported regularly in newspapers across the United States and Europe. The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by thousands of official records of the United States and nations around the world including Turkey's wartime allies Germany, Austria, and Hungary; by Ottoman court-martial records; by eyewitness accounts of missionaries and diplomats; by the testimony of survivors; and by decades of historical scholarship».[47] The continuing denial and

[45] Letter from the Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Gorkay to The Norwegian National Archive Director General John Harstad, 10 March 2006 — Letter provided by Riksarkivet Norge; See also Qvortrup (2020).

[46] Private correspondence with Riksarkivet's archivist Per Kristian Ottersland.

[47] «An Open Letter Concerning Historians Who Deny the Armenian Genocide» (2006).

suppression from the Turkish authorities based on the strategy of relativising or trivialising the evidence and the trustworthiness of those that support the corroborated evidence leads to public confusion and the impression that the Genocide is still up for debate.[48]

Riksarkivet's position was to acknowledge something that is widely accepted by genocide scholars and historians globally, that the Armenian events of 1915 *did* amount to a genocide despite what the Turkish lobby suggests and despite the position of the Norwegian government, which to this day does not acknowledge the Genocide[49]. This decision by Lange was not neutral, but neither would it have been neutral *not* to use the word. «Archivists are always political players».[50] The archivist in this case took a clear political position, articulated it and worked for what he believed was a just responsibility towards the victims, even though his connection was to the KMA documentation.

The argument about the neutrality of archivists has, with the postmodern turn in Archivistics, been increasingly problematized in academic literature,[51] as research comes to terms with the troubling history of archives with regards to severe human rights violations. On the whole the perspective today is understood as having shifted from a view of archives as neutral tools in the service of institutions and «mute observers […] of activity», to one of cultural institutions accountable to, and reflective of, the citizens in society and society as a whole.[52]

The expansive reach of websites means that the online exhibition of Riksarkivet was spread, reaching those who have a direct interest in

[48] Altanian (2017).

[49] For a more detailed description and analysis see Qvortrup 2020.

[50] Harris and Society of American (2007 p 254).

[51] Schwartz and Cook (2002).

[52] Stinnett (2009).

this topic, Armenians and scholars, as well as other communities with an interest in the subject, including the Turkish community. Hence the backlash with the Turkish authorities. The backlash however, was not worthy of the news. The issue of the Armenian Genocide is rarely in the Norwegian media. It did however become a subject of interest during the Genocide centennial in 2015. From 2015 to 2018, the word *genocide* was unfortunately removed from the Riksarkivet website, «so as not to cause controversy»[53] which begs the question; was this a lost opportunity by Riksarkivet to raise a more public debate about Norway's lack of acknowledgement of the Genocide? Whatever the answer maybe, there has been plenty of work from Riksarkivet and partners to spread the reach of the documents.

A large digitalisation project in 2017 funded by the Arts Council of Norway (Kuturrådet) in collaboration with Wikimedia Norway, and Wikimedia Armenia has distributed these records further still.[54] The photographs were suitable for uploading on Wikimedia Commons due to the expiration of the copyright and could therefore be shared under a free license.[55] Together, the Riksarkivet and Wikimedia have presented the collection at international conferences. A relationship between the two organisations has formed around the work with these records.

The records were also shared with the Genocide Museum in Yerevan Armenia and take a central place in the Museum's photographic displays both online and physical. The Genocide Museum website[56] serves not only for public engagement, but as a news platform for the

[53] Interview with Per Kristian Ottersland. 29, October 2019 at Riksarkivet, Natalia Bermúdez Qvortrup.

[54] See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bodil_Biørn

[55] Wikimedia NGO (2019) .

[56] See http://genocide-museum.am/eng/15.04.2015-100photos.php.

latest updates and events around the theme of the Armenian Genocide. Biørn's grandson has been a central player in this community of records, sharing private records he inherited about his grandmother's journeys and missionary work. It was his interview on the radio that Lange listened to which propelled Lange to look for the records in the first place. They have both worked together contributing to the growth and reach of the Biørn archive.

Books, documentary films and other activations of the records created by a community with interests in the records have meant that copies of the records have travelled for conferences and exhibitions, informing both about the Genocide as well as the work of missionaries. New forms of media and technology make new transformations in the way we use documents and new dynamics of distribution,[57] which have exploded beyond the archive.[58] The digitalisation of the KMA records has extended the social lives of these records to other communities and contexts. In a context where the Genocide is still denied, the activations of these records are crucial and their life beyond the archive to other contexts and communities is necessary. It brings attention to the Genocide, its attempt to be denied, younger generations can be taught, and the victims can be seen. The online nature of the exhibition and the records means that the remembering of the Armenian Genocide can happen on a global scale based on the same set of documents.[59] The participative nature of the archivists in activating the records, digitalising them and finding new uses in supporting collective memory promotes also what Levy and Sznaider call a «transnational memory culture». It also highlights the role of archives as active

[57] Brown and Duguid (1996).

[58] Edwards (2012).

[59] Michelle Caswell (2014a).

participants in the politics of remembering,[60] something they have always been.

The choice of what to preserve and what to record is socially constructed, as is the framework of strategies and methods that archives apply, and in this way influence the composition and character of the holdings.[61] But just as they may be «about imposing control and order on transactions, events, people and societies through legal, symbolic, structural and operational power of recorded communication»,[62] their mission shifts and changes from case to case depending on the aspiration and activity of human experience.[63] Today, other processes, other than evidence and accountability are central to the archival discourse such as local heritage, cultural and community sustainability, memory, remembering and narrative.[64] This does not make the archival link to accountability any less strong. Perhaps even the contrary. It requires looking at this link in a new way by bringing issues such as human rights, sustainable peacebuilding, development, social justice, democracy to the fore and making the profession more active and conscious of these issues.[65]

It here that archives play a role in «third-country sharing of human rights files» [66] to counter the denial of atrocities and build a memori-

60 Levy and Sznaider quoted by Hirsch and Spitzer (2009, p. 404); Paraphrasing of Ian Wilson in Nesmith (2010).
61 Schwartz and Cook (2002).
62 Schartz & Cook quoted in Ketelaar (2005 p. 279) .
63 Cunningham (2009, p. 192).
64 Gilliland (2016) ; Blanco-Rivera and Cox (2012).
65 Blanco-Rivera and Cox (2012).
66 Ciorciari and Franzblau (2014) refer primarily to human rights violations in more recent periods and focus on archival sharing mainly for international judicial cases. They recall the right to truth as underlying this effort. However, I believe their argument is also relevant for historically older events where the statute of limitations has passed but historical accountability is still crucial.

alisation across borders. It is here that Riksarkivet has played its part, and continues to do so, by forming part of a community with other institutions and people who have a direct interest in the records and thereby looking after, not only the records but contextualising the records in the greater historical and political narratives. Digitalisation has been of great assistance in doing this on a global scale. James Booth writes that,

«To neglect the memory of the community, not to preserve and transmit it, in short, not to bear witness to it, would be to damage the group's identity and violate a norm of reciprocity and co-responsibility: the debt, or quasi-contract, entailed by a life in-common across time between the present in whose hands these memories (partially) rest and the absent past».[67]

There is a duty that lies with those who hold records that help document atrocity, in particular when the statute of limitations has expired and all there is left are narratives pushed by powerful entities, in this case nation states. The duty is to bear witness of the victims, those that did not have a voice. As Hedström writes, «archives may be of most value not when collective memory persists, but when they provide the only sources for insight into events and ideas that are long forgotten, rumored but not evidenced, or repressed and secreted away».[68] Yet they must be activated by people, institutions and communities if they are to have any healing power.[69] When activated, there must be a conscientiousness about whom we represent and whose stories we tell.

67 Booth (2006 p. xii).
68 Hedstrom (2009, p. 179).
69 M. Caswell (2014).

Treading carefully with records on genocide

The online life of these records, however, needs to be paid attention to, as without memory institutions to contextualise the records they are left to 'fend for themselves' on the web.[70] Just as these photographs are now able to reach more people, the 'promiscuous posting of atrocity images' on the web and their use for purposes that do not honour the victims,[71] testifies to the 'double edge' of digitalisation. Double-edged is also the commercial properties of the web and therefore the commoditization of its contents. Wikimedia structures its data precisely so that it can be easily shared, also for commercial purposes, thus converting its images into commodities.

Duguid & Brown argue that the commercial life of documents must be paid attention to due to economic nature of new technologies, that results in the inevitable economic ends that people find for documents.[72] This movement of records beyond the archive means that they transit in and out of different settings which depending on their value will involve exchange, thus commodifying the objects.[73] Records move in and out of the commodity state by, for example, becoming imprinted on objects sold at the museum gift shop, being included in books or films and being consumed online through an ongoing wider distribution.

The online nature of the documents, their fluidity and flexibility, decontextualizes them from a larger narrative and the smaller details, by 'stripping down' the records to basic elements of 'bits and atoms'.[74]

70 Brown and Duguid (1996).
71 Crane pg. 320.
72 Brown and Duguid (1996).
73 Appadurai, Ethnohistory, Symposium on the Relationship between, Culture, and Ethnohistory (1986).
74 Brown and Duguid (1996).

It is the paradox of what they call 'the interactions between fixed documents and flexible social practices'.[75] The utility of the web as flexible and fluid means 'areas open up to dynamic revision'.[76] Susan Crane writes about the need to be careful with 'records of atrocity',[77] as «seeing atrocity images in ignorance only shocks the senses; it does not teach meaning-making or historical truthfulness, and it risks kitsch».[78] These records have enormous value to the descendants of the Genocide because of their knowledge and memory.[79] We have an obligation to the records as we do to the survivors, but is it possible to care for these records and their uses once they are online?[80]

From the archive or the museum, the uses of the photographs are to some extent controlled by making sure they are contextualised and seen in relation to other documents, in this case the newsletters, other photographs (with text on them), pamphlets, all framed within a historical and political background. These records give us a face, name and a narrative. The digitalisation of these records through the collaborative project with Wikimedia continues this community involvement because, in the words of Appadurai, the traders of these records are neither indifferent to the production origins nor the consumption destination.[81] The personal ties involving the archivists, Biørn's grandson, the collaborative partners and the Armenian community both in Norway and abroad have a stake in these records and how they are used.

However, once online, the use of these records becomes more erratic and knowledge about them more incomplete as there is increased

75 Ibid np.
76 Ibid np.
77 Crane (2008).
78 Crane (2008, p. 316).
79 Altanian (2017).
80 See Susan Crane's article on Holocaust atrocity photography.
81 Appadurai et al. (1986).

distance between the localised knowledge about the records (the people who have a relationship to the records) and their consumption in other contexts. Biørn's transformation of the physical photographs by writing on the back the names, date and their manner of death, disappears because once online the object is gone. Questions that are according to Crane, morally imperative to ask regarding atrocity images maybe answered about this collection whilst they remain part of a memory institution, whether that is an archive, museum or a house of memory anywhere is the world; 'Who are these people? What are they doing there? Who took the picture and why? Where was it developed and first published? Who owns the copyright today?'[82] As well as the questions of 'Who curates? For whom is the curating being done? In what circumstances?'[83] Memory institutions at least can be made accountable for their narratives.

Digitalisation poses great challenges in answering those questions and indeed promotes the distancing of documents to this information. Crane argues that there is an ethical crisis associated with the treatment we give depictions of human suffering, highlighted in the circulation of atrocity pictures in the twentieth century. Historical context, she argues, is crucial to address this, and archival institutions, I would argue, make this possible even though the telling of the narratives is not neutral but a conscious process of decision-making. In this particular case, the emergence of these documents has contributed to the Armenian efforts to document their past on their terms. It was the impact of the images that led archivist Vilhelm Lange to want to activate them and start collaborations with Armenians and stand up against negation. They brought together a cross national and generational network of

82 Crane (2008, p. 325).
83 Sarah Pierce quoted in Modest (2014, p. 34).

relationships. From Armenia they were sent to Norway and have now made it back to Armenia.[84]

Online they are available everywhere, whilst at the same time the material objects disappear. The question moving forward is how to preserve the integrity of records of trauma on the web by doing justice to the victims when records are disembedded from memory institutions and decontextualised, who will be responsible for their use?

The role of institutions: a final word

The role of archives and the sharing of documents by third-country archives has been central to move the conversation on the Armenian Genocide forward, standing up to denialism. In the case of Norway, Lange's work and the work of current archivist Per Kristian Ottersland, through their collaborations, activations and uses, are able to bypass official national political framework (the lack of acknowledgment of the Genocide), responding to the needs of an international community (the Armenian Community) wishing to build their historical memory in the face of negation. These practices show an understanding and engagement by the archivists that the Armenians 'have a right to keep the injustice in their cultural memory, as a source upon which they can make sense of their own history and identity'.[85] The activations of these records have been with this in mind as well as the digitalisation project with Wikimedia, which made sure to keep the records within their context and community of records.

But whilst institutions may be able to fix the context and structure of records, records are embedded in spacetime meaning they will always

84 Wikimedia NGO (2019).
85 Altanian 2017 p. 12.

have multiple lives as their contexts change and are reconfigured.[86] This multiplicity is increased online, extending the social life of documents and bringing them to a wider audience. This is important and necessary, yet collaborative efforts between memory institutions allow for this reach in a way that focuses not on extending their social life but prioritising their quality, authenticity, integrity («that they are complete and unadulterated»)[87] and reliability («the information contained in them can be trusted as a full and accurate account»).[88] We know today that making something more widely available is not necessarily better always. «Public relations documents, raw data, and loosely refereed websites do not make for intelligent analysis»[89]. Even though champions of the internet argue for its democratising power for all, the reality is that it has also been driven by commercial exploitation. It maybe that victims of atrocities may be able to use this medium to exploit capitalism in their favour as Caswell has written about the victims of the Cambodian Genocide,[90] but what happens when the victims are no longer with us and cannot consent or cannot sell their stories to obtain some profit? The governance or accountability of the internet and digitalisation is not the reach of this paper but there is no doubt that currently, institutions can be made more accountable for their narratives in a way the internet cannot. At a time of fake news and the strengthening and emboldening of authoritarian regimes both in Europe and abroad, there has been a growth of illiberal tendencies with a disregard for existing political conventions and norms and pressures toward independent media[91], which in turn threaten core institutions of democracy. The

86 McKemmish and Piggott (2013).
87 Altanian 2017 p. 27.
88 Altanian 2017 p. 27.
89 Mathiason (2009) .
90 See Caswell's book *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record* (2014a).
91 Cortright, Seyle, and Wall (2017).

archival profession has with the postmodern turn, come to understand that archival institutions are integrated in a social contract implicated in democratic strengthening and human rights practice. This has not been the case of archives or archivists everywhere of course, but within the international professional community and its identity is a growing acknowledgment of the link of archival institutions to power that has turned towards a growing interest in human rights practice, historical accountability and social justice[92]. There is also a growing understanding about the emotional and symbolic value of records of atrocity and the importance of a victim-centred perspective[93] that can be, and is being adopted by memory or information institutions.

The advent of the digital era means that, «Since document accumulation is still a power strategy, the fight now and in the future will be more and more about the control of the apparatus of the archive and the integration of the document providers and users in a collective process of documentation and collection of archival materials, based on clear democratic rules, integrating crowd sourcing».[94] The case of Bodil Biørn's archive attests to the increase of collaborations and the formation of new spaces and communities of debate in the digital age, but also of cultural production, heritage protection and societal demands[95]. However, the multifarious manifestations of records of atrocity in the digital age means that new methods to ensure inclusion, preservation and understanding[96] are needed and this needs to be further researched. Yet, I would argue this can only happen by tying the digitalisation of atrocity records down to effective democratic institutions where people are able to participate actively and hold institutions accountable.

92 Procter (2017).
93 Michelle Caswell (2014b); Robins (2011); Baumgartner and Ott (2017).
94 Grau, Rühse, and Coones (2017 p. 14).
95 Grau et al. (2017).
96 Grau et al. (2017).

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