

Extracting and applying archival knowledge in times of crisis

Anne J. Gilliland

Archives are integral to understanding how crises historically developed and were addressed or managed -- recent examinations of historical data about the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic to gain insights potentially relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic would be a particularly salient example. Similarly, longitudinal climate data has been essential for research on climate change. Archives have also been essential for tracking long-term consequences of crises, repatriating populations, and supporting claims for reparations and reclaiming land and property. Recent research has further pointed to the roles that archives and recordkeeping more broadly should and do play in both creating and resolving highly complex crises associated with natural disasters, political upheaval, famine, disease and so forth.

Archives, as heritage repositories, are frequently themselves at risk physically, politically and economically during and after such crises because of their content, their symbolic status and often inadequate resources. This paper will argue, however, that their contents become even more important at these moments because of the insights they can provide. At the same time, our ability to recover and extract knowledge about prior or even current crises from archives is tightly related to how much the scope and handling of those archives anticipated such kinds of uses. This paper, therefore, will present recent research that reconsiders archival documentary, appraisal and metadata practices as well as predictive algorithmic design from the perspective of anticipating extracting and applying archival knowledge in unfolding and future crises.

Biography

Anne Gilliland is Associate Dean for Information Studies, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, and Professor and Director of the Archival Studies specialization in the Department of Information Studies, as well as Director of the Center for Information as Evidence, at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). She is a faculty affiliate of UCLA's Centers for Digital Humanities, European and Russian Studies, and for the Study of International Migration. She is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists and recipient of numerous awards in archival and information studies. She is an Honorary Research

Fellow of the Centre for Global Research, RMIT University in Melbourne and also of the University of Liverpool Department of History.

Her interests relate broadly to the history, nature, human impact, and technologies associated with archives, recordkeeping and memory, particularly in translocal and international contexts. Specifically her work addresses recordkeeping and archival systems and practices in support of human rights and daily life in post-conflict settings; the role of community memory in promoting reconciliation in the wake of ethnic conflict; the politics of metadata; and digital recordkeeping and archival informatics.