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A Conversation about the *Reconciliation Framework*

RAYMOND FROGNER, CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER,
GREG BAK, AND GENEVIEVE WEBER

Earlier this summer, *Archivaria* General Editor Heather Home spoke with Raymond Frogner of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) about writing a Notes and Communications piece on the Steering Committee on Canada's Archives (SCCA)'s *Reconciliation Framework*.¹ Raymond invited Gwichyà Gwich'in historian and community researcher Crystal Gail Fraser and archival educator Greg Bak to speak to the *Framework* from their perspectives. Instead of submitting a polished and peer-reviewed article, we decided to present a recorded conversation, and we invited Genevieve Weber to serve as facilitator. Raymond and Genevieve, who previously worked together in the archives at the Royal BC Museum, both served on the SCCA's Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce, the committee that wrote the *Reconciliation Framework*.

A conversational format was chosen in an attempt to actively untangle the academic emphasis on written scholarship and the peer-review process and to capture the importance of the spoken word, oral traditions, and the fluidity of thought and engaged conversation. Meeting for a conversation online, using a transcription service, and then polishing our ideas promised a more accessible, quicker approach that would connect with the SCCA's intention of "living" scholarship. The preface to the *Framework* notes, "We intend this evergreen framework to be a living document – one that is adapted to respond to where

1 Steering Committee on Canada's Archives (SCCA), *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce* (n.p.: Steering Committee on Canada's Archives, 2022), <https://archives2026.com/response-to-the-report-of-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-taskforce/>.

we are on the journey toward reconciliation.”² We hope this article is received in the spirit of our discussion, as a positive opportunity to thoughtfully examine the *Framework*, a tool that positions itself as always provisional, always ready for engagement, and always ready for its next revision.

This conversation took place on Friday, July 28, 2023, and was transcribed using a commercial service. The transcript was then edited for clarity, readability, and length.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: Hi everyone. My name is Genevieve Weber, and I’ll be moderating this discussion. I’m the manager of heritage programs and services for the Province of British Columbia and a former archivist at the Provincial Archives in British Columbia, part of the Royal BC Museum. I am joining the discussion today from the territory of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, on Vancouver Island. Before we get started, I’d like to have everyone introduce themselves. Raymond, why don’t you start?

RAYMOND FROGNER: Hi, my name is Raymond Frogner. I am the head of archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. I’ve been in this position since 2016.

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: Drin gwǰǰzii shilak. Shoorzri’ Crystal Gail Fraser v̱aazhii. Inuvik ts’at Dachan Choo G̱èhnjik gwits’at Gwichyà Gwich’in iłhii. Good morning. My name is Crystal Gail Fraser. I am coming to you today from just outside of Edmonton, on Treaty Six and Métis lands.

GREG BAK: My name is Greg Bak. I’m an associate professor of archival studies in the Department of History at the University of Manitoba. I’ve been in this position since 2011, and before that I was a senior digital archivist at Library and Archives Canada. I’m a settler of Polish descent, currently living on Treaty One lands and the homeland of the Red River Métis.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: We’re here today to discuss the *Reconciliation Framework*. Its final version was published in early 2022, and a number of archives have since

2 SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, 8.

adopted it.³ The *Framework* was developed in response to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) on Indian residential schools and, specifically, in response to Call to Action 70:

70. We call upon the federal government to provide funding to the Canadian Association of Archivists to undertake, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of archival policies and best practices to:

i. Determine the level of compliance with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *United Nations Joint-Orntlicher Principles*, as related to Aboriginal peoples' inalienable right to know the truth about what happened and why, with regard to human rights violations committed against them in the residential schools.

ii. Produce a report with recommendations for full implementation of these international mechanisms as a reconciliation framework for Canadian archives.⁴

With this as our starting point, I'd like to invite each of you to explore Call 70. Where is the Canadian archival community and academia in regard to reconciliation and decolonization? What is the purpose of Call 70? I'd like to open up

3 A quick search on Google turns up many Canadian archives and archival associations that are being guided by, or have endorsed, the *Reconciliation Framework*. For example, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, "About the Archives: Reconciliation," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www.saskarchives.com/about-archives/reconciliation>; Council of Nova Scotia Archives, "Reconciliation Working Group (Ad Hoc)," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www.councilofnsarchives.ca/cnsa-reconciliation-working-group-ad-hoc/>; United Church of Canada Archives, "Reconciliation Framework," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www.unitedchurcharchives.ca/archives/colonizing-institution-records/reconciliation-framework/>; ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, "The ArQuives' Board of Directors Endorses Reconciliation Framework," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://arquives.ca/latest-news/the-arquives-board-of-directors-endorses-reconciliation-framework>; Aurora Museum & Archives, "Truth and Reconciliation," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www.aurora.ca/en/Museum/truth-and-reconciliation.aspx>.

4 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, MN: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 8, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf. Call to Action 70 is quoted twice in the *Reconciliation Framework*, on pages 5 and 69.

the floor to the three of you to discuss that. Greg, you're on my screen. Do you want to start?

GREG BAK: I don't mind starting the discussion. One thing that strikes me, particularly because you just read out the Call, Genevieve, is that the *Reconciliation Framework* does not focus specifically on the two instruments named in Call 70: the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP)⁵ and the Joinet-Orentlicher principles.⁶ Part 1 of Call 70 says we should determine the level of compliance among Canadian archives with UNDRIP and Joinet-Orentlicher, and I don't see that being done anywhere in the *Framework*. Part 2 of Call 70 was to produce a report with recommendations for full implementation of these international mechanisms.

You can read the *Reconciliation Framework* and get some really excellent advice from it in terms of working with community, including following the lead of community in determining when, how, and where meetings happen; how to identify and advance community objectives; and so on. Great advice. Much of it does align with UNDRIP and Joinet-Orentlicher, but the *Framework* does not specifically tell us what it means, as an archivist, to apply UNDRIP, what it means to apply Joinet-Orentlicher. At a couple of points, we are told to be aware of these instruments, but there is not much of an attempt to explain how archivists should interpret them and incorporate them into our practices.

I see a couple of things happening here. Rather than UNDRIP, which the TRC repeatedly referred to as the "framework for reconciliation," we are told to apply Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four Rs (respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility), which we are told "serve as the foundation upon which Canada's archival communities must engage in reconciliation."⁷ This is good advice and quite useful, but the TRC asked for an archival application of UNDRIP and

5 United Nations General Assembly, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295 (October 2, 2007), <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>.

6 United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity: Report of the Independent Expert to Update the Set of Principles to Combat Impunity, Diane Orentlicher, E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1 (February 8, 2005), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=138.

7 SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, 20. See Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, "First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility," *Journal of American Indian Education* (1991): 1–15.

did not reference the Four Rs. Similarly with Joinet-Orentlicher, which, if you map it onto contemporary archival thinking, takes a Survivor-centred approach to archiving.⁸ Instead, we see in the *Framework* a focus on trauma-informed archiving.⁹ Again, great stuff – there’s a lot there to recommend it – but it’s not what the TRC directed us to do.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: I think that’s a really interesting point and a good place to start. Crystal or Raymond, who would like to respond next?

RAYMOND FROGNER: I agree with Greg, but I would like to point out that we are really trying to lay groundwork for addressing these colonial archival challenges. This is a time of a conceptual crossroads for the archival profession, and I think Call to Action 70 launches this kind of reflection and introspection on just what has gone on in the past, just how colonial and embedded the role of archives has been in the process of settlement. Colonial public archives in Canada were always a repository for the proof of rights and title of settlers. And you’ll struggle to find evidence of Indigenous Peoples, their identities, their lives in traditional colonial archives.

I think this *Framework* is kind of a launching pad to these kinds of difficult questions to interrogate oppression and what it means for concepts of knowledge and the creation and sharing of valued knowledge. The *Framework* is a good place to start, and I think it lays out some of the most pressing issues. Because in a sense, we’re dealing with the concept of knowledge in all of its culturally mediated manners. We no longer think of archives as passive, objective repositories of records but engaged centres that create and mediate knowledge. Dealing with the issues and consequences of colonial public archives raises broader questions of knowledge, power, and subjection. I think the *Framework* could have been better situated within these broader issues.

But this is where we’re beginning from. This is our first step toward these difficult questions about, Where do we go from here? And quite frankly, even the term *archives* could be questioned. Is it a useful term to encapsulate what

⁸ For discussions of Survivor-centred archiving, see Michelle Caswell, “Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives,” *Archival Science* 14 (2014): 307–22; Jesse Boiteau, “The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and the Pursuit of Archival Decolonization” (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 2017), <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/handle/1993/32225>.

⁹ See, especially, SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, section 3.3; section 7 preamble; and footnotes 22 and 44.

we're trying to do with this idea of subjection and use of knowledge and power?

I mean, it's a start. And again, to be fair, we do focus intensely at the NCTR on UNDRIP, but UNDRIP never once mentions the term *archives*, and it doesn't really examine records. It talks about what it means to be an Indigenous person and, *What is Indigenous identity?* as written by Indigenous Peoples who lobbied for 25 years at the United Nations to get these ideas recognized. It starts the conversation that has been long overdue. That's how I'd put it.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: That's such an interesting observation about UNDRIP, one that you've encapsulated in a nice, succinct way. Crystal, can you speak to this question about Call 70, but in the context of academia?

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: I think so. Thanks for everyone's comments so far. I really resonated with a lot of keywords there, such as *crossroads* and *redefining relationships*, but also what it means to be Indigenous. In particular, it's been eight years since the 94 Calls to Action were published. Organizations have had a difficult time figuring out how to take up and implement the Calls.

When Sara Kormarnisky and I published "150 Acts of Reconciliation" as a response to Canada 150, it was exactly this hesitation around the TRC's 94 Calls to Action that we were trying to address.¹⁰ We wanted to engage ordinary folks, at the everyday level. Yes, the 94 Calls to Action are immensely important for governments, organizations, and other large-scale entities, but we identified a need to start with humans first and then move on to policy and structural change. How do we engage, educate, and, in some cases, change the minds of people?

In particular, when we look to the *Reconciliation Framework*, it is a good start, but we also have to keep in mind that the Calls to Action, and the TRC more specifically, were about Canadian genocide in the context of Indian residential schools. The TRC and its subsequent Calls to Action was about grappling with the genocidal history of the settler state of Canada. How can we redefine our understanding of Canadian history, learn about the lived experiences of Survivors, about what happened at these residential schools, and compensate generations of folks who were affected by this system?

10 Crystal Fraser and Sara Komarnisky, "150 Acts of Reconciliation for the Last 150 Days of Canada's 150," *Active History* (blog), August 4, 2017, <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2017/08/04/150-acts-of-reconciliation-for-the-last-150-days-of-canadas-150/>.

I say that because, in broader documents, we sometimes fail to centralize the ongoing importance of residential schools. Greg mentioned Survivor-centred practices. You don't necessarily see that here, in the *Reconciliation Framework*. Additionally, I wonder about the relationship between this document and Indigenous communities. As a historian and Indigenous studies scholar, as somebody who is not really a part of the professional archive community, I wonder about the methodology of the document – who was consulted and who was not consulted. I wonder about tensions within the working group. I wonder if this document is actually representative of a community-engaged research methodology that basically defines Indigenous studies. Relationships are at the centre of Indigenous practices, methodologies, healing, and sovereignty. And I don't necessarily see that here.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: My next question is about applying the *Framework* in institutional archives. The *Framework* has been available for archives to use as guidance for some time now, and many have adopted it as an addition to their internal policies and procedures.

The *Framework* is particularly useful for organizations in the early stages of decolonizing or Indigenizing their practices. And I'd like to take this opportunity to share my personal experiences with it very briefly as a practitioner.

I, until very recently, worked at the BC Archives, which is part of a joint museum and archives. In that role, I had access to museum colleagues who were working very closely with Indigenous communities on issues such as repatriation and doing long-term, deep and meaningful engagement work. I had access to people and resources that a lot of my archival colleagues across Canada don't have access to.

Acknowledging that, the *Framework* was something that we saw as supporting the work that we were attempting to do, and it was something that bolstered our internal policies.

However, I had colleagues calling from across the country after the *Framework* came out asking me how they could apply the *Framework* in their own institutions. And I think it's really interesting to consider that the *Framework* is so broad and so high level. I think it gave institutions a starting point.

It can give people a place to start and then build upon their internal policies that they don't necessarily have yet. I think it can be really positive that way. But, like I say, it is a starting point.

The other way that I found it helpful in my work was that we've been doing a lot of work in the past few years around the question of missing children and unmarked burial sites at residential schools. And this is something that, when we first started working with communities to provide access to records, as a government institution, I wouldn't say there's been pushback, but there's definitely concern or hesitation around providing open access. Obviously, there's legislation. I won't get into all of the details and complications of that, but having the *Framework*, again, was another tool that we could use when going to leadership or government to say, "This is another set of guidelines that is very specific to archives that we can use as a reason for doing the work in the way that we want to do it."

Returning to Raymond's comments, we do usually rely much more on UNDRIP. What the *Framework* does is specifically speak to archives and residential schools. And that was something that I wasn't necessarily finding in the other frameworks or guidelines. So, it added to that toolkit that we had.

That was my experience.

Crystal, I wonder if you'd like to start us off by talking about your understanding of decolonization in institutions. In the past, you've written about decolonization in state archives. Could you tell us how you see the *Framework* assisting, or perhaps not, in that work?

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: In my experience as somebody who accesses archives, I have not seen a profound change in how archives are managed, or their accessibility, since 2015 – since the 94 Calls to Action. Anthropologist Zoe Todd and I wrote a piece in 2016 called "Decolonial Sensibilities," which really talked about settler control of archives, accessibility issues, and some perspectives of Indigenous scholars who are forced to work in these colonial settings."

We referenced Library and Archives Canada, but much of my other research has been done at the Northwest Territories Archives, the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and other smaller archives. Based on all of my archival experiences, my critique from 2016 still largely stands. Having said that, I am grateful for

11 Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, "Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada," *L'Internationale* 54 (February 14, 2016), https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/54_decolonial_sensibilities_indigenous_research_and_engaging_with_archives_in_contemporary_colonial_canada/.

the *Framework* and the progressive nature of some of these spaces, but I also find that these conversations get caught up in bigger conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion, or EDI. Some people add another *I* for *Indigenization* and then a *D* for *decolonization*. Here, I point out the article written by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, called “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” Now, this piece is from 2012, so some might call it dated, but it’s still very applicable. I’m going to read from their abstract:

Our goal in this article is to remind readers about what is unsettling about decolonization. Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. . . . As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization. Because settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism. The metaphORIZATION of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or “settler moves to innocence,” that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity.¹²

I bring this up because we need to critically examine the intent and motivation around the project of decolonizing these spaces. And then ask ourselves if this is possible. For me, as a Gwichyà Gwich’in researcher and historian, I don’t think that archives can be decolonized. I’m not sure they can even be Indigenized. Archives, which Raymond and Greg can speak more to, have an entrenched history of methodology, practice, and theory that not only do not include Indigenous Peoples, practices, or worldviews but have actively oppressed them. Finally, this begs the question, Do we want to decolonize or Indigenize highly colonial spaces? Or should we take them for what they are, work to incorporate ethical and trauma-informed practices, and then support and fund Indigenous-inspired

12 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

and Indigenous-led spaces that actually reflect the philosophies, histories, desires, and sovereignties of our Peoples?

GENEVIEVE WEBER: Great. Raymond and Greg, can you please speak to this idea of how you've witnessed the implementation of the *Framework*?

RAYMOND FROGNER: Well, I'll also speak to some experiences. And again, as I said before, at NCTR we lean very heavily on UNDRIP and the Joinet-Orentlicher principles. Those are the ways I would say we are implementing the *Framework* as well. I very recently published a paper in the journal *Archival Science*, titled "The Train from Dunvegan: Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Public Archives in Canada."¹³ That lays out as formally as possible the perspective of the NCTR Archives to implement the UNDRIP in Canadian archives.

I totally agree with everything Crystal has just said. My personal experience has been working with communities and trying to make the records available to them for things such as unmarked burial research. This has been a great struggle. Part of the reason for that is because, when the TRC transferred over the records, the research that they performed – the almost four million records and the over 7,000 Survivor statements – they transferred the records to the University of Manitoba as a trust, in a trust deed.

In addition to the trust deed, the NCTR wrote, along with Indigenous and settler authorities, the NCTR Act [*National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Act*]. And they did that in order to place the materials under Manitoba's *Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy Act* (FIPPA) because the TRC is a national organization, and a national institution is responsive to national freedom of information (FOI) legislation. And without writing the NCTR Act and placing the NCTR under FIPPA, there would've been no privacy and access rules. And so, all of the very hurtful and sensitive and personal information that is in these records would've been wide open to the general public.

It was a move to really protect the statements of Survivors, the experiences of Survivors, the identity of the Survivors. Because first and foremost, our concern is for the well-being of the Survivors and their families. But now we're looking

13 Raymond O. Frogner, "The Train from Dunvegan: Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Public Archives in Canada," *Archival Science* 22, no. 2 (2022): 209–38.

at, How do we assist Indigenous communities in understanding these questions such as unmarked grave sites? How do we give access, as fully and completely as possible, to these archives?

Now, the only resolution that we were able to come to under FIPPA, as well as in discussions with Survivors, is to write memorandums of agreement that would give communities a complete, 100 percent access to all of the records, with an agreement that they would not be sharing these records. They would not be posting information on social media. It would be for the purpose of understanding the context and history of the relevant school so they could better investigate these unmarked burial sites.

We're not giving out the records, but we're opening our archives so that any information that's relevant to that community can be used by that community. And to my knowledge, I've never heard of an archive in Canada, a public archive, that's completely opened up all of its records in such a manner.

My concern, and I've had this concern come to me from both settlers and Survivors, is that now we have researchers who are capable of looking at everything. And aside from this agreement, there's nothing else out there that is going to prevent someone from actually spreading potentially harmful information. But at the same time, I think the benefit of assisting and understanding and investigating these very oppressive acts is worth that risk.

It's also not a solution that is appropriate over the long term. It is rooted in colonial common law and does not formally address Indigenous laws. I was speaking with Dr. Val Napoleon at the University of Victoria Faculty of Law. She was talking about looking at ways in which we can start to bring in Indigenous rules of law that would apply to these sets of information so that we're not just looking at FIPPA. We're not just trying to talk about what legally we can share under Canadian common law but, What would Cree legal understanding say to the use of this information in a sensitive way, in a way that isn't harmful or still respects the Survivors and addresses local, immanent community law?

And just one last statement I'll say for now. We do completely agree with The First Nations Principles of OCAP® (ownership, control, access, and possession): that these records do belong to the subjects that are documented in the records.¹⁴ However, this has come up many times. I talk to researchers who say, "Well,

¹⁴ First Nations Information Governance Centre, "The First Nations Principles of OCAP®," FNIGC|CGIPN, accessed January 29, 2024, <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>.

these are our records. Under OCAP, they belong to us.” But this is a very “private property” perspective. In fact, our records have been organized by school, and every school dealt with children that could have come from 20, 30, or even over 40 different communities across the region. If we give all the records to one single community, then what happens to all the Survivors and their relatives in these other communities? These are things that still need to be thought out, both from an Indigenous community perspective but also to find ways out of the very traditional settler archival perspective, which I think we need to abandon, as Crystal just said, and I agree.

I mean, to be honest, this concept of unmarked burial sites of children is so preposterously horrible that it’s never been contemplated before in Canadian common law or in any Indigenous legal frameworks. And we’re now starting to question just what to do with this explosive and possibly very harmful knowledge. These questions will take much more time and thought. Looking forward, as an evergreen document, I would fully expect to see future iterations of the *Framework* begin to contemplate these issues. A *Reconciliation Framework* council could, for example, work with the National Advisory Committee on Residential School Missing Children and Unmarked Burials,¹⁵ which has been struck by the federal government to address these issues. I’m on that committee and would welcome the collaboration.

And also, as one final word, we have to avoid falling into this dark hole of trauma, that we’ll be forever dealing with the traumatic effects of these events when we want to revitalize the communities that have been destroyed by residential schools. And so, we’re sharing information that can also build these communities back up, revitalize the cultures and identities of those communities so that they can go forward with confidence, knowing who they are and what it means to be a sovereign, independent people.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: I think it’s really important to note that the question around the unmarked burial sites was not raised at all during the development of the *Framework*. So, you don’t see that in the *Framework* at all. And that is something that has become such a primary focus of the work that archival institutions are doing with these records. It’s really important to note that the work has changed

¹⁵ National Advisory Committee on Residential School Missing Children and Unmarked Burials (website), accessed January 29, 2024, <https://nac-cnn.ca/>.

drastically, and I think we'll speak later in the conversation around the need for the *Framework* to reflect that and catch up to what is actually happening today.

I also think it's really important that you spoke about OCAP because the *Framework* does focus very heavily on the concepts of ownership, control, access, and possession, and uses those words throughout.

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: I want to respond to something that Raymond said. In particular, the fact that this *Framework* doesn't necessarily engage at all with this question about unmarked graves shows us a couple of different things.

First, the authors called this an "evergreen framework" and a "living document." And we've known about unmarked graves since Survivors started disclosing this information to communities decades ago now. Additionally, the TRC had a whole volume on student death and unmarked burials. The conversation about child death and unmarked graves in the context of residential schools is not new. Why wasn't that considered in the *Framework*?

In particular, the unmarked graves conversation is so important because there has been a steady and growing rise in residential school denialism.¹⁶ And so, how is it that the Association of Canadian Archivists, and archives more generally, can work to be allies to help undo some of this damage that is now being done to public Canadian history? That was my first comment.

My second comment addresses what Raymond said about damaging narratives. We're talking about genocide, trauma, and child death. And I think, when grappling with this *Framework* and when working with these records, we can start with two different approaches. That is totally fine. If you are a settler Canadian researcher, there are still things we need to know about the history of genocide in this country. We need the details, statistics, financial records, and policies of the system; that history is important and critical to furthering our understanding. If you are Indigenous – or another term is Nation Builder – if you're a Nation Builder, you might be working with community, Indigenous Knowledge and methodologies and toward sovereignty. If you are Indigenous and undertaking this work, I urge readers to consider Eve Tuck's work on damage-centred

16 Reid Gerbrandt and Sean Carleton, *Debunking the "Mass Grave Hoax": A Report on Media Coverage and Residential School Denialism in Canada* (Winnipeg, MN: University of Manitoba, Centre for Human Rights Research, 2023), <https://chrr.info/other-resources/debunking-residential-school-denialism-in-canada/>.

narratives.¹⁷ She talks about calling a moratorium on damage-centred research. She says that as Indigenous Peoples, we can no longer think of ourselves as broken. This is crucial when we approach this sort of work.

GREG BAK: Crystal, I'm glad that you expressed those really important points, and thanks for bringing up these additional works. I'd like to come back to Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," which you mentioned earlier. It's in the bibliography for the *Framework*, but I was surprised by the definition of the term *decolonizing* in the *Framework's* glossary, the first part of which lists a whole bunch of stuff as decolonizing, starting with "the process of identifying, deconstructing and removing (or replacing) Eurocentric control, dominance, influences [et cetera]."¹⁸ This seems like the kind of thing that Tuck and Yang discuss as a problematic and metaphorical use of decolonization, since it is not directly connected to the return of lands and life but includes a range of issues that, while also important, are not about the return of lands and life.

I would also, again, point us back to Call 70 and say that Call 70 only implicitly, and not explicitly, calls for decolonization of the archives. Crystal, I'm grateful for the article that you wrote with Zoe Todd, because you make this point so well there when you suggest that maybe decolonizing the archive is not possible, maybe it's not even desirable.¹⁹ There are things that we need to know from the un-decolonized archive. When we discuss your article in my archival studies seminars, we talk about how archival decolonization looks very, very different from other forms of decolonization because of the multiple ways that archives are used and the importance of keeping intact the racism, the colonialism, all of the records and evidence of genocide, even though it's going to be unsettling, uncomfortable, painful for people to encounter them. Archival decolonization paradoxically must provide access to colonial and racist records to enable the kind of evidence, accountability, and knowledge that is essential to decolonize other Canadian institutions and even society itself. Part of archival decolonization is preparing people for the kind of pain, and even trauma, that they risk when working in the archives, whether as researchers or staff. Although not discussed by the TRC, trauma-informed archiving offers a way forward that is

17 Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409–27.

18 SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, 66–67.

19 Fraser and Todd, "Decolonial Sensibilities."

compatible with the Survivor-centred archiving that the TRC does call for by citing the Joinet-Orentlicher principles. If drawn on a Venn diagram, trauma-informed and Survivor-centred archiving would be largely, but not entirely, overlapping circles. Both offer necessary guidance on the complicated and challenging work of archival decolonization.

I'd like to shift gears a bit and mention some really interesting discussions I had recently at the ACA annual conference in Prince Edward Island. I was talking with working archivists and archival managers who really liked the *Framework* for a couple of reasons.

One is that it provides a starting point, as you suggested earlier, Genevieve. If you haven't gotten your boots into this work already, then this is maybe a good sort of smorgasbord of ideas that you could start with. You can undoubtedly find some starting point in the *Framework* to initiate this work at your archives.

And secondly, they liked it because it's a way of selling up the chain. You have this nationally focused *Framework*, in which the Canadian archival community makes a collective response to Call to Action 70. If you're a working archivist who must sell this work up the chain to non-archival managers or stakeholders or whatever, having this document has proven helpful in making the case for this work.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: Yeah, and I think that's not necessarily what its intention was, but it is a side benefit. And unfortunately, it is the reality.

Now that you've all had the opportunity to use the *Framework* as practitioners in your field – archivist, educator, and historian – do you have any general comments or observations on the *Framework* that you would like to speak to?

GREG BAK: Can I make a couple of brief points about the format of the document before we get back into the heavier discussion of its content? On a very basic level, the *Framework* has been imagined as a print document rather than as digital. As a result, certain design decisions make it hard to read digitally, which is probably how most people will access it. For instance, Why is the *Framework* presented in PDF, in columns? This formatting immediately raises accessibility concerns for people with visual impairments; also, having the content in columns interferes with scrolling. For a counter example, I would point to the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, which is presented primarily

in HTML, with a plain-text PDF option.²⁰ Whether accessed in HTML or PDF, there are no accessibility issues with the *Protocols*. The focus is on the protocols themselves, not on the documentary expression of the protocols.

Additionally, roughly one-third of the *Framework* is a bibliography. Any time you have a bibliography like this, if you're familiar with the literature, you start to notice gaps. For instance, it mostly focuses on archival studies, which is the literature that the primary audience for the *Framework*, Canadian archivists, likely already knows best. So, maybe it would've been more helpful if there had been a list of relevant Indigenous studies articles or oral history recordings or something that might have been a reasonable and necessary path forward for archivists after reading the *Framework*.

RAYMOND FROGNER: I agree, especially that the bibliography is very problematic in my view. There's already been countless bibliographies on this topic, for one thing. So, it seems like we're reinventing the wheel. And as you just said, Greg, it's almost completely focused on the academic archival discipline, and I thought that was what we were breaking out of. But it seems to just intensify the whole process of institutional archival practice. We're still struggling to get out of the archival echo chambers, where vital topics are discussed only within the profession at conferences, in journals, and in special publications.

I would completely abandon the bibliography or open it up so that it's not just academic archival studies but instead speaks to knowledge within communities – living, organic social knowledge. What is the valued information? What is the valued knowledge that a community uses to perpetuate itself going forward? And how is that stored, shared, and made available to future generations over time?

This would take us naturally from archives to ideas about homeland, ideas about identity and belonging, belonging in a community of diversity, with respect. All of those kinds of questions going forward need to be addressed within the framework of social memory. And I don't think archives and the concept of archives traditionally deal very well with those issues.

Archives is such a state-oriented concept, right from its beginnings. Jean Bodin, in the *Six livres de la République*, wrote about archives for the purposes of creating the French state. And these are the criteria we now use for authenticity

20 First Archivists Circle, "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials," accessed January 29, 2024, <https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/>.

and reliability of archival records. I think we need to reconsider and interrogate these principles. We're trying to reimagine what it means to see ourselves anew, not just rehabilitate past errors.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: In regard to the bibliography, I know in the United States a lot of case studies have been done on the application of the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have Indigenous-led case studies done on the *Framework* and be able to add that as something – an additional contextual aid to what already exists? Crystal, what are your thoughts?

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: I agree with everything that has been said in relation to questions about accessibility, reading lists, and the general format of the documents. In particular, and coming from outside of the discipline, this document opens a conversation about archival disciplinary meaning and practices. How do we define those?

The *Framework* is, in particular, a gesture that responds to a specific Call to Action. This is a signal from the discipline; it signals both the need and a desire to change. It's both a commitment and a public proclamation. But what I see in the document is reproducing more of the same humdrum conversation regarding what I know to be true about archives. I must say, though, that this is familiar to me; coming from, in part, the discipline of history, historians are very traditional, and not in the Indigenous sense. We too have, practice, and defend a discipline rooted in Euro-Canadian oppression.

I see that here in this document, as well, not only the reading list, but in the discussion, what they focus on. Despite their saying so, nothing indicates the supposed evergreen or living or collaborative nature of the document; where is the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge, the focus on community partners and/or Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous practices and methodologies? Furthermore, that the *Framework* is only available in English is an important indicator that more work needs to be done. The question about accessibility and language – and the *Framework* only being available in English – reinforces the status quo and reaffirms the colonial worldview that is responsible for the last several centuries of colonialism. That is, of course, quite a simplistic statement, but it is the truth. Imagine if this document was available in Indigenous languages and was responsible for inspiring a new generation of Indigenous

archival professionals and creating new and robust conversations in Indigenous communities? That would be truly exciting and revolutionary.

We're in the position – yet again – where we're trying to reinvent the wheel, but doing so in the format of what they call a living document. In other words, the “living document” aspect of this work has fostered a *Framework* that fails to provide concrete advice about how to think through these issues and then implement them. Archivists, heritage professionals, researchers, policy makers, bureaucrats, and others in the field are left on their own for those endeavours.

The *Framework* – and perhaps the discipline of archives – is also fairly inward-looking. This does not work in Indigenous studies or for Indigenous communities. We have a number of important examples of interdisciplinary work that has been done in the context of reconciliation. As one example, I'm thinking about the Yellowhead Institute and the work of Ian Mosby and Eva Jewell, who track the implementation of the 94 Calls to Action. For archives to turn a corner, to shift in the ways that we need, looking to other disciplines and relationship building with other experts and professionals will make a big difference.

RAYMOND FROGNER: Just as more of a cautionary tale than anything else, I noticed they cite Gregory Younging's terminology document, which, at first, I thought was a good idea, and I built on it.²¹ And at the NCTR, I made another larger terminology list that was a way to try and coordinate our language around certain terms.

We have a Survivors Circle of seven elders, or seven Survivors from across the country, representing cultures and genders from various regions. I brought the document to them, and all seven found it completely offensive and triggering and just completely beat me up over it. And to their credit, after our conversation, I just completely understood that we have to redraft this idea of the terminology that we're using and how it's going to apply to the records that we have.

We're now working with the Survivors Circle to do a new version, a new-model kind of terminology list that moves beyond a traditional terms-of-use document.

GREG BAK: I would like to pick up on Crystal's point about reinventing the wheel. Arguably, the *Reconciliation Framework* is doing what the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* started doing considerably earlier. Do we really need

21 Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples* (Edmonton, AB: Brush, 2018).

a Canadian application of the *Protocols*? The First Archivists Circle, which wrote the *Protocols*, included Kim Lawson, a librarian and archivist for the Heiltsuk Nation. The *Protocols* were intended to be broad enough for all of Turtle Island and tried to avoid the kind of colonialist/statist idea that we need separate national versions. In teaching the *Reconciliation Framework* to new archival studies students, one challenge is the sheer number of protocols, declarations, guidelines, and so on. On the other hand, there is a certain clarity that comes from having the *Framework* as the official response of the Canadian archival community to being called out, specifically and by name, in Call to Action 70.

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: Can I bring up one point for Greg and Raymond? According to indigenouwatchdog.org, a draft of this report was released in July 2020, and then the report was actually published in February 2022. So, from today, the final published version of the *Framework* has been around for about 18 months. And what we've learned, I think, about processes of truth seeking, reconciliation, and allyship is the importance of accountability.

And so, as somebody outside of this discipline, my question is, Since the publication of the *Framework* about a year and a half ago, are archival professionals keeping each other accountable? Are there robust disciplinary conversations about implementing the *Framework*? Are people asking, "What is an evergreen framework? How are you adding to it? How can we make it better?"

A part of this document was to create these conversations but also, from my perspective, should be a new industry standard that keeps folks and organizations accountable. Has that actually been happening?

RAYMOND FROGNER: No, and that's a really good point. I think part of it, and we've discussed this a little bit before, is the SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council] framework of the project. Call 70 doesn't say it had to be done through SSHRC. It said that the federal government would support this review. I understand SSHRC is one of the few sources of financial resources that could be obtained, but we already know that the Tri-Council policy document is a little bit difficult for Indigenous research.²²

²² Panel on Research Ethics, "Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2022)," Government of Canada, 2022, https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html.

SSHRC, with its timelines, its principal investigator, all of its requirements, its final report, I think SSHRC, in a certain way – not to defend the process or anything – but SSHRC funding put it into the typical research framework of the academy, which is what we’re exactly trying to break out of.

You’re right, Crystal, that’s, I think, partly the reason the final report came out: SSHRC was satisfied, all of the obligations were met for this project. But I mean, the biggest obligation of all, the creating and maintaining new relationships and building on them – relationships with knowledge, power, and subjectification – didn’t seem to be front and centre.

GREG BAK: That’s a really interesting point about the SSHRC funding, Raymond. I hadn’t thought about it that way. SSHRC Insight, the program that funded this work, funds research more than relationships (the SSHRC Partnership and Connections programs do that), and it encourages a short-term timeline and concrete deliverables. Maybe SSHRC Insight wasn’t the best way to fund a living, evergreen *Framework*.

GENEVIEVE WEBER: We’ve talked a lot about the word *evergreen*, and just to put it in the context of the *Framework*, although we’ve touched on this a lot already, I want to read this statement in the preface of the *Framework* that mentions this term *evergreen*:

We intend this evergreen framework to be a living document – one that is adapted to respond to where we are on the journey toward reconciliation. It is our sincere hope that, in the years to come, a new taskforce will be established to assess this ongoing process. Once objectives have been actualized and assessed; First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and protocols have been identified and integrated into professional practices and policies; and respectful relationship building has begun, revisions and updates to this framework will be required to keep its relevance and efficacy intact and to ensure that today’s collective action will effect real systemic change in the Canadian archives profession.²³

23 SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, 8.

We've mentioned that we're in this period of change and learning about the way that we do this work. You've all touched on this, but let's talk about it more specifically. If the *Framework* is truly an evergreen, living document, whose potential is limitless, has this happened?

CRYSTAL GAIL FRASER: Categorizing this as evergreen or living is a good start, meaning that this document is subject to change and fluid. What I don't necessarily see is anyone practising that. And so, some questions that I might have include, What contributions have been made since February 2022 in the sense of reconciliation?

In particular, we had the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites offer a whole conference on data sovereignty in Vancouver in January 2023. Are those conversations happening in the field? What are they centred around? Is anybody publishing robust conversations about that work?

Additionally, we have other issues that are ongoing, such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). That is still a crisis in this country. And in particular of late, conversations at the national level have focused on the refusal to search the landfill near Winnipeg for human remains and the fact that landfills have been searched in the past in Canada.²⁴ How is it that the archival community can draw upon the records, and their knowledge about how to access those, in order to provide some help and insights into the challenges and processes of searching landfills? That knowledge and expertise is out there. It exists. What are archivists and archival professionals doing to help this cause?

This is all to say that, even when we look at a discipline, even when we look at academia more generally, we can identify many problems. But really, these spaces are just made up of humans, of individuals like us, who are confused and maybe not experts. Most of us are looking to do good and helpful things, but we don't really know how. We also don't know if it is our place.

²⁴ For an update on this issue, see Lara Schroeder, "Manitoba, Federal Governments Promise \$20M Each to Search Prairie Green Landfill for Human Remains: Funds to Support the Families also Promised, Grand Chief Cathy Merrick Says," CBC News, March 22, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/landfill-search-mmiwg-amc-funding-1.7152844>.

And this is where I would probably draw upon, again, “150 Acts of Reconciliation.” It really encourages people, organizations, and governments to better understand reconciliation in the context of histories of Canadian genocide. I encourage people to grapple with and think through truth and reconciliation, first, in their personal lives – figure out what that looks like for them – and then possibly come to their profession, in this evergreen living-document spirit, and try to foster change from the inside.

GREG BAK: Crystal, thank you for once again recentring our conversation back to MMIWG, residential schools, and missing children.

It is worth thinking about what it looks like when you have a truly evergreen document. Take OCAP. For the First Nations Information Governance Centre, one of its major activities, as an organization, is the ongoing work of stewarding the principles of OCAP. That is truly an evergreen, living set of principles. I wouldn't even call it a document, necessarily. And maybe thinking about the *Framework* as a document – maybe that's part of the problem here, honestly. But thinking about it as a set of principles that have to be stewarded and that have to be continually renewed – maybe that's a helpful way of thinking about it.

In the archival world, we have, unfortunately, more counter-examples than great examples of evergreen documents, including standards. I mean, if we look at *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*, we can see an example of what happens when a standard is not updated. Alternatively, we can look at the activity of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) when it comes to those particular standards that they're committed to keeping evergreen. What you see there are standing committees. Is there a standing committee of the Steering Committee on Canada's Archives, or the ACA – or anywhere else – responsible for keeping the *Framework* evergreen? The *Framework*, to its credit, acknowledges in its appendix some of the difficulties they had in balancing Indigenous and settler roles within their work. If there is a standing committee to steward an evergreen *Framework*, what would this standing committee look like? Who would participate? How would they be recruited? How would they conduct their work in a good way?

RAYMOND FROGNER: Greg, you mentioned *RAD*. Keeping the *Framework* evergreen would also mean keeping up with new technologies and standards. One thing that isn't mentioned is the potential of linked data. I think we're

growing a network presence for archives and for sharing this knowledge, and now linked data is going to happen, whether we're on board or not. I think it's an opportunity for people to start reflecting on how they can share collections or sets of records that otherwise would be inaccessible.

The question, I think, would be, as with linked data, there has to be a set of ontologies or a vocabulary list that people can reference when they do their research and when sets of data get linked. I mean, currently, the Library of Congress manages linked data in the United States in terms of the ontologies. Maybe that's something that we should start thinking about here in Canada, with a council that includes a strong representation of Indigenous authorities that can talk about these ontologies and meanings that people would want to know when they're linking records together from disparate sources.

And I think, for us, residential schools are a perfect example. I mean, you could link the records of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the records of Indigenous communities, the records of federal government offices, the records of the RCMP, the records of hospitals. All could be pulled together for the first time in an effective manner with ontologies that have meaning for communities. So, that's one thought.

And if we're looking to implement linked data, I think it's a mistake to cite RAD as the description model.²⁵ RiC-CM [Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model] is more appropriate for this.²⁶ And again, if we're breaking out of statist conceptual frameworks of knowledge, then why turn to a national description standard?

GENEVIEVE WEBER: I think you've all given us such great food for thought, and I feel like we all have an entire career's worth of work ahead of us just based on the things that we've mentioned here at the end of this conversation.

To wrap up, I want to thank the three of you. This conversation itself is an example of how we keep the document a living document and continue to examine it and question it and update the way that we're talking about it and thinking about it. Perhaps there can be future, similar roundtable discussions in *Archivaria*, at the ACA conference, or hosted by different archives or archival

²⁵ SCCA, *Reconciliation Framework*, section 6.3.1, 42.

²⁶ International Council on Archives, Expert Group on Archival Description, "Records in Contexts – Conceptual Model," December 21, 2023, <https://www.ica.org/en/records-in-contexts-conceptual-model>.

associations. Keeping a document evergreen starts by reading it, meeting, and discussing it as we have done today.

I really want to thank all of you for coming together and having this conversation and adding to the narrative with your questions around how we can use and update and implement this *Framework*. Thanks, everyone.

BIOGRAPHY Raymond Frogner is the Senior Director of Research and Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. His research and writing concerns Indigenous identity, social memory, and interrogation of the colonial experience. He has published articles in *Archival Science* and *Archivaria* and chapters in books. His two *Archivaria* publications concerned Indigenous Peoples and public archives; both won the W. Kaye Lamb Prize. He is the Co-Chair of the International Council of Archives (ICA)'s Indigenous Matters Committee and the principle author of ICA's *Tandanya Principles*. He is a founding member of the National Advisory Committee on Residential School Missing Children and Unmarked Burials. He was recently appointed Fellow of the Association of Canadian Archives.

BIOGRAPHY Crystal Gail Fraser (she/her) is Gwichyà Gwich'in (with English and Scottish heritage) from Inuvik and Dachan Choo Gèhnhjik, Northwest Territories. Crystal is an assistant professor in history and native studies at the University of Alberta. Her award-winning research focuses on student experiences at residential schools in the Inuvik region. Crystal serves on national and international committees: she is a member of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's Governing Circle, a director for Gwich'in Council International, and a founding member of the National Advisory Committee on Residential School Missing Children and Unmarked Burials.

BIOGRAPHY Greg Bak is an associate professor of archival studies at the University of Manitoba and a settler of Polish descent on Treaty One lands and the homeland of the Red River Métis. A Fellow of the Association of Canadian Archivists, his research and teaching focus on archival decolonization, digital archives, and the histories of digital cultures. He is a co-editor of *The Nordic Model of Digital Archiving* (Routledge, 2023) and “*All Shook Up*”: *The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook* (SAA, 2020), and he has articles in *Archivaria*, *Archival Science*, and *American Archivist*. Prior to 2011, he was a senior digital archivist at Library and Archives Canada. He holds a PhD (history) and an MLIS from Dalhousie University and an MA (history) from the University of Toronto.

BIOGRAPHY Genevieve Weber is a settler archivist and heritage professional working in the territories of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples. Over the past 15 years, she has worked in a number of archives and cultural institutions, with a focus on outreach, public programming, and Indigenous information sovereignty. She currently teaches archival theory and practice in the Continuing Studies department at the University of Victoria and is the Manager of Programs and Services for the Heritage Branch (BC Government).