From Fragmented Records to Reliable Victim Data: Information Systems for Long-Term Post-Conflict Recovery

Laboratory of Military Ecotones

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English speaking script · approximately 15 minutes

Slide 1 00:00–00:54 Opening

The presentations in this session have shown how war survives through contested places, unresolved identification, and personal testimony. We now turn to the relationship between these experiences and the information systems through which societies investigate them.

Our central question is how fragmented records can support reliable knowledge about victims of war. Every human life is individual. Yet the evidence concerning these lives can be investigated systematically. We propose a research framework for doing so, while recognising a fundamental limit: information systems depend on the people and institutions that create, operate, and inherit them.

This presentation outlines a methodological programme. It does not report results from a completed victim database.

Slide 2 00:54–01:55 Individual lives and comparable evidence

Research often begins with individual cases. A family remembers a disappearance. An archive contains a list. A burial site provides material evidence. Each case has its own context, and comparison must preserve that context.

However, uniqueness does not make systematic investigation impossible. We can compare how institutions recorded people, how documents circulated, how names changed between languages, and how researchers connected evidence. We can also investigate recurring forms of exclusion and uncertainty.

The methodological work behind this presentation concerns the transition from accumulated incidents to organised investigation. One source examines mortality accounting in another field. We transfer its questions about provenance, duplication, and correction. We make no equivalence between its subjects and human victims. The transferable element is the architecture of inquiry.

Slide 3 01:55–02:59 Different records describe different moments

Fragmentation has several dimensions. Different institutions create records for different purposes. Their records may describe detention, disappearance, death, burial, or later recognition. These are different events and decisions. They cannot simply become interchangeable entries in a single list.

The same person may appear repeatedly. Another person may remain unnamed. A record may contain an approximate date, an altered spelling, or a location whose administrative name later changed. Information may also survive in separate languages and jurisdictions.

Our first task is therefore to establish what each record actually claims. We need to distinguish the event it describes from the date of recording and from the date of subsequent interpretation. A death during war and official recognition decades later belong to the same biography, but they answer different research questions.

Slide 4 02:59–04:03 The production of documentary visibility

An archive has a history of its own. Authorities, organisations, families, and researchers create documents under particular conditions. Some sources preserve valuable evidence while also reflecting the purposes and categories of their creators.

A person can disappear from an official account through physical destruction of records, inadequate registration, restricted access, or deliberate exclusion. These mechanisms require different explanations. A gap alone does not establish intentional falsification. It does establish a question for investigation.

Political labels also belong to this documentary history. If an institution called someone a hero or a traitor, the system should preserve who made that judgement, when, and on what grounds. The label cannot replace investigation of the person's experiences. Digitisation can reproduce earlier exclusions unless researchers examine the rules that produced the surviving record.

Slide 5 04:03–05:07 The record and the person

A reliable system needs several connected units. A source is a document, testimony, image, or other item of evidence. A claim is a particular statement within that source. A person is the subject whose biography we investigate. Events and places provide the circumstances of that biography.

We also need to distinguish these units from a research conclusion. A source may give a name. Researchers may infer that it refers to a person mentioned elsewhere. That inference must retain its evidential basis and its uncertainty.

Several documents can concern one person. One document can concern many people. A burial location can contain remains whose individual identities are unresolved. Keeping these distinctions allows later evidence to revise a connection without destroying the original documents or silently rewriting the investigation.

Slide 6 05:07–06:10 Traceability and correction

Reliability develops through traceability. An investigator should be able to move from a conclusion back to the specific evidence supporting it. A name alone is insufficient. Its source, wording, context, and subsequent interpretation matter.

Source dependence is especially important. Three publications may reproduce one original list. Their agreement does not automatically provide three independent confirmations. The system must preserve that relationship.

Contradictions should remain visible. If two sources give different dates, researchers need to assess the discrepancy rather than select one silently. When new evidence changes a conclusion, the system should preserve the earlier conclusion and the grounds for correction. These procedures provide a basis for checking the research. They cannot guarantee that every source is true or that every missing person will eventually be identified.

Slide 7 06:10–07:14 Three records and an unresolved identity

Consider an explicitly fictional example. A family testimony describes the arrest of a relative. A detention list contains a similar name and a possible matching place of residence. A burial record uses another spelling of the surname.

These records justify investigation. They do not yet establish a single identity. Researchers compare age, dates, locations, family relationships, and the circumstances of each source. They also check whether a later document copied an earlier one.

The system preserves each original record and records the proposed connection separately. A shared surname may support a candidate match, but further evidence may show that the documents concern different people. The example demonstrates why combining lists must include a documented process of reasoning. The number of records cannot serve directly as the number of victims.

Slide 8 07:14–08:20 Different outcomes of reconstruction

The fictional investigation can reach several legitimate outcomes. Evidence may support the proposed identity. The connection may remain provisional. Researchers may establish that the records concern different people. Or the available evidence may be insufficient to choose between these possibilities.

Each outcome should specify what the evidence permits us to say. Uncertainty belongs in the system as an explicit research condition. It should not force a case to disappear from the inquiry.

This also clarifies the meaning of reliable victim data. Reliability concerns the justification of a claim. Completeness concerns the coverage of the population or events under investigation. A carefully checked register can remain incomplete. Documentary identification also differs from identification of human remains, which requires the relevant specialist evidence. The system must preserve these distinctions when producing summaries and counts.

Slide 9 08:20–09:26 Patterns across different conflicts

Once evidence has this structure, comparison becomes more productive. We can investigate repeated forms of fragmentation without assuming that different wars have identical histories.

For example, researchers can examine how changes in official categories affect a register, how access to an archive changes the cases researchers can investigate, or how families supply evidence absent from institutional collections. They can compare the time between an event, its documentation, and subsequent recognition.

An increase in registered victims may reflect newly accessible evidence or a change in inclusion rules. The increase alone cannot tell us which mechanism operated. We therefore study both the history of harm and the history of its documentary recognition. Geography,

language, and institutional context become explicit parts of the comparison. A pattern guides further investigation, while its explanation still requires evidence.

Slide 10 09:26–10:29 Five directions of investigation

We can now identify five directions for the research programme.

First, provenance: where claims originate and how sources depend on one another. Second, reconstruction: how evidence supports links between people, events, and places. Third, selection: which groups and experiences remain outside a collection, and why. Fourth, comparison: which patterns recur across conflicts and which depend on particular historical conditions. Fifth, change over time: how corrections and institutional decisions alter the system itself.

These directions require different forms of competence. Historians and archivists investigate documents. Other specialists contribute to identification and spatial reconstruction. Families and local communities may supply essential knowledge. The research problem determines the necessary collaboration. An information system provides a shared structure through which these contributions can retain their origins and support further investigation.

Slide 11 10:29–11:24 Assistance within a documented inquiry

Artificial intelligence can assist with extracting information, searching across languages, and suggesting possible connections between records. It may help researchers work through collections that would otherwise take substantial time to examine.

Its proposals must retain links to the underlying material. Researchers need to check the original wording, transcription, and context. An automated match remains a proposal until the relevant investigation supports it.

AI also inherits the coverage and categories of the material it receives. If a collection systematically excludes a group, processing that collection more efficiently cannot restore the absent evidence. Responsibility for the research question, the interpretation, and the decision remains identifiable within the human organisation of the inquiry.

Slide 12 11:24–12:32 Technical reliability and human institutions

We now reach a limit that belongs inside the argument. People establish these systems, finance them, appoint their leaders, and decide how they operate. A database may contain technically accurate entries while presenting a deeply selective account of the past.

The selection can occur before any checking begins. An institution may define a category that excludes certain people, accept only particular kinds of testimony, or treat an official judgement as the condition for inclusion. Internal accuracy cannot correct those boundaries by itself.

No information architecture guarantees enduring impartiality among human institutions. Traceability and independent examination can make some distortions detectable and contestable. Their continued operation still depends on institutional conditions. We therefore propose a conditional method of inquiry. Its scientific value must be assessed together with the circumstances under which people maintain or restrict it.

Slide 13 12:32–13:42 The system after its founders

Consider a possible institutional trajectory. A founding group creates a system with demanding principles, extensive expertise, and a willingness to reconsider established accounts. Later, routine administration takes over. New managers may prioritise standard categories, reporting requirements, or organisational continuity.

This is a scenario for investigation, not a universal law. Administration can also preserve collections and sustain expertise. The question is what happens to the original research principles when institutional purposes change.

A system may retain its name and interface while changing whose experiences it includes and which questions researchers can ask. Its apparent continuity can conceal a change in function. We cannot resolve this enduring human problem through software design. We can recognise the limit and investigate it. The history of the information system, including its exclusions, revisions, and changes of authority, becomes part of the evidence about post-conflict society.

Slide 14 13:42–14:54 Reliable knowledge remains revisable

The approach outlined here supports systematic investigation while preserving the particular history of each person. It connects sources to claims, and claims to conclusions that researchers can examine and revise. It also makes the production of documentary visibility a subject of inquiry.

For the Laboratory of Military Ecotones, this is one direction within the study of how consequences of war persist through territories, institutions, and human lives. War continues to shape families through unresolved disappearance, disputed recognition, and inaccessible evidence.

Information systems can support the work of clarification and recognition. They remain dependent on human decisions, and their own transformation requires continuing study. Long-term recovery includes recovering knowledge about people whose fates remain uncertain or absent from official memory. Our contribution is a framework for making that knowledge traceable and revisable, with a clear understanding of the conditions and limits of its reliability. Thank you.

Sources and conceptual basis

Reference material for preparation. This section is outside the oral presentation.

Gibbs, Andrew, and Dmitry Nikolaenko. From Incident Records to Conservation Intelligence: A Methodological Assessment of Dolphin Mortality Accounting in Aotearoa New Zealand (2026). https://pollution-diseases-ojs.org/index.php/pd/article/view/53

Nikolaenko, Dmitry. From Individual Events to the Morphology of Military Contamination: An Epistemological Study of Form, Process, and Morphogenesis (2026). https://pollution-diseases-ojs.org/index.php/pd/article/view/32

The Record Can Be Rewritten, the Consequences Remain: Archives, Artificial Intelligence, and the Memory of War (2026). https://pollution-diseases-ojs.org/index.php/pd/article/view/90

Conceptual working documents supplied for this presentation: *ИИ и новая система производства знания*; *пос-война и наука*; *пост-война 100*.

The case on slides 7 and 8 is fictional and illustrates a research procedure. The institutional trajectory on slide 13 is a proposed scenario for investigation.