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WATER WARS IN DETROIT: CUSTODIANSHIP AND THE WORK OF INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

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We examine the role of custodianship in the renewal of the institution of public water services in Detroit, Michigan. Our longitudinal qualitative study begins prior to the 33,000 household water shutoffs of 2014 and follows this ongoing crisis through 2017. It reveals the complexity of the task of renewing neglected societal institutions suffering institutional entropy. We provide an in-depth study of the characteristics, motivations, and actions of institutional custodians—actors who maintain and enhance institutionalized practices. We inductively identify four groups of custodians ("operatives," "warriors," "converts," and "agnostics") who are catalyzed to act at different times, take on unique roles, and have distinct understandings of institutional rules. In doing so, we establish that custodianship is both distributed and heterogeneous, rather than static and homogeneous, and highlight key intersections across custodians. Our study also offers timely insights into resource access and affordability in marginalized communities, and the role of institutions in addressing grand challenges such as the emerging global water crisis.

> So water becomes the grand mediator of all of life. We all get thirsty, we all drink, we're all of water, from water, playing in water, trying to get next to water, coming out of water, fighting water, water is fighting us. Water becomes the great conduit, the great solvent of our life.
>
> —Detroit community leader (Interview)

In the early spring of 2014, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) began to send tens of thousands of shutoff notices to roughly 130,000 households, half of its customers. These accounts were either 60 days or $150 past due (DWSD, 2014). Although water shutoffs were not new for Detroiters, their scope and scale were unprecedented. By December, more than 33,000 households had their water disconnected (DWSD, 2015). The shutoffs made headlines around the world as Detroiters headed to the streets in protest and the United Nations (U.N.) declared that the "disconnection of water services because of failure to pay due to lack of means constitutes a violation of the human right to water and other international human rights" (U.N. News Centre, 2014). This battle is ongoing, with over 112,000 homes disconnected through October 2018 and hundreds of families continuing to live without running water in what civil rights groups have called a public health crisis (ACLU, 2019).

Battles over water, often termed "water wars," have begun to grab headlines around the world as increasing and competing demands are causing a global water crisis (WEF, 2017). Emerging conflicts over water globally—from Flint, Michigan, to Ireland, and from South Africa to Standing Rock, North Dakota—reflect a growing debate as traditional institutions such as public water services face new challenges. Although institutional stability was long seen as automatic and often uncontested (Jepperson, 1991), subsequent research recognized that the survival of institutions cannot simply be taken for granted, but must be actively reproduced (e.g., Oliver, 1992). Individual or collective actors, termed "institutional custodians," proactively work to maintain these

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institutionalized practices (Dacin & Dacin, 2008), undertaking a variety of activities including the enactment of rituals as well as the enforcement of roles and rules (e.g., Lok & De Rond, 2013; Zilber, 2009). Despite a rich body of literature on institutions and institutional work, the characteristics of institutional custodians, as well as why custodians are drawn to these roles, is less understood. Scholars to date have focused primarily on "relatively homogeneous actor groups" (Hampel, Lawrence, & Tracey, 2017: 569) of custodians, including professionals and other institutional insiders with formal institutional roles (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). In their recent review of institutional work, Hampel et al. (2017: 575) noted that extant research has either focused on these homogeneous actors or on actors in direct conflict, stating that it is "striking that institutional work has very little to say about collaborations between heterogeneous actors." Emerging studies, however, have indicated that custodianship may be more complex and morally motivated than previously thought (Heaphy, 2013; Marti & Mair, 2009). We explore these dynamics by studying the array of custodians who came to the fore to protect a neglected institution: public water services.

In the United States, as in most Western nations, public delivery of drinking water and sewage services was introduced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, along with public education and healthcare (Masten, 2010). Public water services have similarly become institutionalized—taken-for-granted social systems and understandings—due to the fact that they are well-established and are supported by laws and regulations, as well as by custom and habit. Public ownership also confers added legitimacy, with the public often resisting attempts to privatize water services and other public goods (Pierson, 1996). However, water services have been neglected and face severe infrastructure deficits (Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2013). The work of individuals and groups to maintain the institution of public water services provides the context for this study, as we ask: *Who are institutional custodians, and what evokes custodianship?*

Using an in-depth longitudinal qualitative study, consideration of Detroiters' defense of local public water services allows us to examine custodians and their activities *in situ*. Our findings provide three important contributions to the nascent literature on institutional custodianship: First, we establish that custodianship is distributed and heterogeneous, rather than static and homogeneous. Custodians may, in turn, be independent and interdependent, allies and enemies. We are able to establish this because our study examines the range of actors involved in renewing an institution. Second, our model of custodian heterogeneity reveals the importance of intersections between these custodians in tackling the complexity and enormity of sustaining institutions. At a micro-level, our study demonstrates that no single action or actor can renew a large multidimensional institution on their own. Instead, custodians tackle different dimensions of the institution, and also have overlapping and divergent vested interests. If viewed at a more macro-level, however, the intersection of heterogeneous custodians' actions, either in sequence or simultaneously, appears coordinated and enhances the likelihood of institutional stability. Finally, we uncover the urgency of what we term "institutional renewal" in providing energy and resources to a declining institution. We argue that this is especially crucial in cases where an institution has been taken for granted and neglected to the point of entropy. Renewal is accomplished through the deliberate actions of custodians and is an overlooked element in understanding long-term stability.

In summary, as longstanding institutions—such as water services, education, healthcare, and democracy—are disrupted and decline, institutional renewal can provide a point of intersection or call to action for a distributed and unlikely set of actors to come together and cross divides. These custodians can play an important role in renewing "institutions that matter" (Hampel et al., 2017: 580) to address grand challenges, such as global water crises.

INSTITUTIONAL ENTROPY AND THE ROLE OF CUSTODIANS

Institutional research has acknowledged that taking an institution for granted is not sufficient for its survival (e.g., Oliver, 1992). Institutional practices, structures, roles, and rules may not remain intact, and institutional strength may lapse, fluctuate, or wax and wane over time (e.g., Powell, 1991). This view suggests that institutions are not in fact atemporal, and should, to the contrary, be thought of as existing only "until further notice" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 44). Institutional persistence and survival might therefore be better understood as the exception rather than the rule, and institutional arrangements may be the victims of "entropic forces" if not given "sufficient and ongoing energy and resources" (Scott, 2015: 470). One source of this entropy is that institutions may simply become such a taken-for-granted part of the social fabric that they

become unquestioned, neglected, and, finally, "neither defended nor advocated [for]" (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991: 337). The very taken-for-grantedness that has long been thought to underpin institutional reproduction may be taken to such an extreme that it leads to "decay and neglect" (Micelotta & Washington, 2013: 1160) and, ultimately, to entropy.

In a related stream, recent research has acknowledged that individual actors and groups play a key role in regenerating institutions. Institutional arrangements are therefore, at least in part, "situated, interpreted and reinforced locally" through social interactions (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010: 1394). As such, examining actors' actions and interactions or "where, when, how and why people wield ideas and lodge claims" (Barley, 2008: 506) is essential knowledge for understanding broader meanings and values, as well as institutional persistence. Or, as Stinchcombe (1965: 167) noted, "The problem is to specify who it is that carries 'tradition,' and why they carry it." Research has begun to address some, but not all, of these questions. In particular, Lawrence, Leca, and Zilber (2013) suggested that while *how* actors undertake institutional work has been more richly studied, our understanding of *who* these actors are, and *why* they engage in these activities is limited. Our research was inspired by these calls. Next, we explore these open questions and the custodians who ensure institutional persistence.

Institutional Custodians and Custodial Work

Although the institutions literature has been relatively silent on the actors who expend the energy and resources necessary to prevent entropy, research on traditions has emphasized the importance of understanding actors who preserve and enhance institutionalized practices (for a review, see Dacin, Dacin, & Kent, 2019). These actors have been termed custodians (Shils, 1981), and are important because they contribute to institutional persistence. Examining deinstitutionalization, Dacin and Dacin (2008: 346) built on the early traditions research, finding that what they termed "institutional custodians" may be particularly important "as a critical counterforce to entropy" in institutions. Similarly, DeJordy (2010: 6) introduced the term "institutional guardians," defining guardianship as "intentionally and consciously engaging the institutional environment in an effort to preserve it." Further extending this interest, Lok and De Rond (2013) examined practice maintenance and plasticity over time in longstanding institutions, while Howard-Grenville, Metzger, and Meyer (2013) proposed the idea of "identity custodians" who resurrect past social arrangements and introduce practices to new generations.

The majority of this nascent custodianship research has focused primarily on the activities of custodians in specific roles as they reinforce institutional rules, or *how* they reproduce institutions. Here, custodial roles, drawn from role theory, are seen as the specific social positions actors occupy, and behaviors they undertake in these positions (Biddle, 1986). These roles have often been viewed as highly regulative, as custodians train and socialize newcomers, instill values, and enforce institutional rules (Anand & Watson, 2004). Institutional rules, which have been defined both broadly, as the classifications and interpretations built into society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), and as more specific institutional policies and procedures (Heaphy, 2013), are used by custodians to reinforce and repair institutions.

Literature on institutional maintenance has examined the regularized work of actors in reinforcing existing rule systems, structures, and beliefs (e.g., Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). During institutional maintenance, institutional custodians have been shown to take on these structured and prescribed roles, including "socialization, rule monitoring, and enforcement activities" (Lok & De Rond, 2013: 185). Such activities require not simply routine regeneration and replication but also coping with day-to-day challenges, breaches, new entrants, external jolts, and changes to proximate fields or conditions (Zilber, 2009). Custodians are adept in such roles due to their ability to navigate status and informational hierarchies and leverage key constituencies within institutions (Dacin & Dacin, 2008). Custodians have been shown to maintain stability and transmit various roles (Dacin et al., 2019) in the face of challenges including social pressures and modernization (Dacin et al., 2010), new and potentially disruptive entrants (Zilber, 2009), and breaches (Heaphy, 2013). Yet, in each of these cases, the institution's roles and rules remain clear and understood, affording little understanding of the institutional "rebuilding" (Micelotta & Washington, 2013) that may be required to reestablish core tenets in cases of more serious neglect, or in the face of entropic forces (Scott, 2015).

Extant research has offered much more limited insight relating to *who* these custodial actors are, and has tended to focus on the role of professional and embedded actors. These actors include lawyers

(Micelotta & Washington, 2013), engineers (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2013), financial professionals (Riaz, Buchanan, & Bapuji, 2011), and policy makers (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Where nonprofessional actors have been considered, the focus has been on those with specific and defined roles who are embedded in the institution (Dacin et al., 2010; Heaphy, 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013). The limited breadth of actors studied has occasioned Lawrence et al. (2013: 1030) to ask, "where are the janitors and the mechanics?"—or a broader range of actors—and to call for research that better examines the roles and experiences of a variety of individuals "in vivo and in situ" (1029), focusing particularly on their morality and reflective purposefulness. As a result of this narrow view of custodians, understanding of custodians has tended to focus on either highly homogeneous actors (Hampel et al., 2017) or, where broader actors have been considered, those involved in outright conflict (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). The scant attention devoted to how heterogeneous actors may have been what led Hampel et al. (2017: 575) to comment that extant research has tended to "ignore the important possibility of collaboration among diverse sets of actors," and to call this a "significant gap." Custodian heterogeneity is also important, as prior research has suggested that the work and roles of custodians may vary based on who they are and whether they hold roles with an institutional authority (insiders) or are outsiders (Howard-Grenville at al., 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013).

Considering *why* custodians act, emerging research has also begun to offer some evidence that motivations vary more than previously thought. Prior research has tended to suggest self-interest and instrumentality by institutional insiders as a primary driver for custodianship. For instance, incumbent and embedded actors have been found to engage in maintenance in the face of field challengers (Schüssler, Rüling, & Wittneben, 2014), and in defensive activities to protect their own positions (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2013; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Yet, Riaz et al. (2011) suggested that actors' choices to participate in change or maintenance activities may depend on the individuals' status, position, and needs. More complex motivations can also be seen in Dacin et al.'s (2010) finding that custodians may be motivated by a sense of pride in their roles. Similarly, Heaphy (2013) found that individuals may use their embeddedness to navigate a flawed health care institution in order to access resources and care for needy patients. Marti and Mair (2009) also showed that actors may enhance institutional structures, such as health care and education, in order to help vulnerable populations gain access.

In summary, extant literature has offered a clear conceptualization of the agentic actors who may seek change as institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009) or contest social practices as social movement activists (Benford, 1997). However, we know relatively little about the nature and breadth of custodians (i.e., *who* they are) willing to undertake the often demanding work required for institutional reproduction, or about their reasons for doing so (i.e., *why* they act). At a time when many societal institutions are facing disruption and entropy, our study answers the above calls for theoretical insight as well as examining the role custodians and longstanding institutions can play in addressing numerous grand challenges.

RESEARCH CONTEXT: THE DETROIT WATER SHUTOFFS

Along with public delivery of healthcare and education, publicly owned water services emerged in most U.S. urban centers by the early 1900s as part of a public health revolution across developed economies (Koeppel, 2000). With industrialization and urbanization, existing systems of uncoordinated private water services became inadequate and outbreaks of disease and fire led to pressure to improve services (Masten, 2010). Public water services became widely institutionalized, by which we mean "taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that [is] underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings" (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008: 4). In the case of public water services, these include rules, laws, regulatory structures, and normative expectations around the delivery of low-cost, safe, and clean water for citizens. Water services are overwhelmingly publicly owned in the United States, and have been institutionalized and regulated for well over a century (Masten, 2010). However, public water services are neglected; infrastructure funding gaps are estimated at $384 billion in the United States (EPA, 2013), and there are growing inequalities in access, affordability challenges, pollutants, and political challenges to longstanding regulatory structures such as the U.S. Clean Water Act.

Public Water Services: Detroit, Michigan

We selected Detroit as an appropriate research site as it echoed the challenges emerging around

institutionalized public water services in the United States and globally. Detroit is situated in the U.S. industrial mid-West's "rust-belt," and suffers from ageing infrastructure, population decline, and economic downturn in a once vibrant center of global manufacturing. Detroit also prides itself on its history of public water delivery. The publicly owned DWSD was the third largest in the country at the time of this study, serving almost four million people across 127 neighboring communities (DWSD, 2015). However, according to EPA data, the system was facing the dual challenges of infrastructure and population decline, with water bills at an average of $75 per month—double the national average (Clark, 2014). In addition, affordability issues were acute, as Detroit's 82.7% Black and African American population faced a 39.3% poverty rate, more than double the national average of 15.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

After decades of economic decline and growing racial and economic inequalities, the 2007 recession hit Detroit and its struggling auto sector hard. In light of these ongoing financial struggles, Michigan's governor declared a fiscal emergency in March 2013 and installed Kevyn Orr as Detroit's emergency manager.[1] By July 2013, Orr had filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy, the largest municipal filing in U.S. history, and suggested that privatization of key assets was on the table. In what was deemed a related event by many custodians, this was soon followed by the 130,000 household shutoff notices and 33,000 shutoffs in 2014 alone (DWSD, 2014). The combination of potential privatization of the DWSD, infrastructure decay, and access and affordability issues made this a suitable location to study a once-lauded example of institutionalized public water services that had suffered years of neglect. This site also afforded us the ability to capture, in real time, the work of existing institutional custodians and observe emerging custodians, as well as to note both overlaps and key differences across custodians and with social movement activists and institutional entrepreneurs. Our study was conducted before, during, and after these initial shutoffs. A timeline of key events and data are presented in Table 1.

[1] Michigan's unique law, which allows the governor to appoint an unelected city manager, is highly controversial and believed by many participants to be race-based (Interviews, various). Both Detroit and Flint, Michigan, were under emergency management at the time of their respective water crises, adding to controversy.

METHODOLOGY

We began our research with a broad historical overview on emerging water issues and crises, including extensive archival data and preliminary discussions with key actors (e.g., Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013; Schüssler et al., 2014). This preliminary research allowed for the selection of Detroit as an appropriate research site. Our data collection in Detroit included observations, archival data, custodians' e-mails, investigators' journals, meeting minutes, and formal and informal interviews, as outlined below.

Archival Data and Journaling

Public materials included reports, white papers, articles, press releases, videos, presentations, television coverage, website content, and policy statements published by government, media, civil society, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Web searches using relevant search terms (e.g., "shutoffs," "human right to water") allowed for the identification of related popular press articles. Custodians also volunteered further documents, including a prominent Detroit activist organization's meeting minutes, as well as a prominent NGO's proprietary data on U.S. water privatizations and conflicts spanning over a decade.

In addition, two nonpublic journal sources were created specifically for this project (e.g., Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010) in real time: First, a high-level insider offered in-person meetings as well as weekly detailed e-mail reports, including personal journaling, expert insights, and public but difficult-to-obtain documents. In addition, the first author journaled throughout the collection of field data to capture thoughts, contrasting perspectives of actors and their activities, and emerging insights, as well as reflections on the emotional impact of the crisis.

Nonparticipant Observation

An immersive deep-dive into the community and situation inspired by ethnographic practices allowed us to better understand the context and phenomenon. The first author was able to establish credibility and trust with key actors, which resulted in invitations to numerous events, including: monthly meetings of the DWSD, the People's Water Board and community groups; protests, demonstrations, and rallies; speakers; press conferences; and community meetings. Several interview participants offered tours of their facilities and neighborhoods to explain

TABLE 1
Timeline of Detroit Water Shutoffs and Study Period

Date	Event
Archival, Observation, and Informal Interview Data	
2012	Activists push for a Water Affordability Plan in Detroit due to high rate of shutoffs.
Formal Interview and Journal Data	
2013	
March	Detroit emergency manager Kevyn Orr is appointed amid rumors of DWSD privatization.
July 18	Emergency manager Kevyn Orr files for bankruptcy, the largest U.S. municipal filing.
2014	
April	Shutoffs resume and increase in late March after a winter hold; 3,025 households are shut off.
April 22	Demonstrations against shutoffs at local sports arena that is reported to have unpaid water bills.
May 22	World-renowned water activist, Maude Barlow, and local community and water groups speak at Wayne State University in downtown Detroit, drawing a crowd of hundreds. **(1)**
June 2	Detroit's emergency manager solicits requests for proposals (RFPs) for privatization of the DWSD.
June 18	A coalition of Detroit and international groups submits complaint to the U.N. regarding shutoffs. **(2)**
June 25	U.N. Rapporteurs on Water, Housing, and Poverty publicly respond to the Detroit complaint.
July 10	Protests outside local company contracted to conduct shutoffs. Several arrests made. **(3)**
July 15	A federal judge overseeing the bankruptcy calls on officials to do more to help residents.
July 18	Over 1,000 protesters march in downtown Detroit against water shutoffs.
July 18	Protesters again gather outside the offices of the local shutoff contractor. **(4)**
July 21	DWSD announces it will suspend shutoffs for 15 days.
July 24	A "Water Convoy" of Canadian water activists brings a delivery of water across the border.
Aug. 26	Water shutoffs resume after a 30-day moratorium. **(5)**
Sept. 9	Detroit's Mayor Duggan and Detroit's suburban counties reach a tentative deal to transfer the DWSD's regional assets to a new Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA).
Sept. 29	Federal judge overseeing Detroit bankruptcy states there is no "enforceable right" to water.
Oct. 19	U.N. Rapporteurs for Water (Catarina de Albuquerque) and Housing (Leilani Ferha) visit Detroit neighborhoods and hold town hall meeting attended by approximately 500 people. **(6)**
Oct. 20	U.N. Rapporteurs hold press conference stating that many shutoffs are "contrary to human rights."
2015	
Jan. 12	DWSD offers to reconnect Flint to Detroit water due to concerns about water quality.
Jan. 19	Several-hundred-strong Martin Luther King Day march ends at DWSD buildings.
Jan.	Detroit activists visit Dublin to speak to Irish water protesters.
April	Baltimore's water department sends shutoff notices to 25,000 residents amid privatization talks, leading to involvement of water rights and activist groups and civil unrest.
Spring	California water advocates claim Nestlé is in violation of state permits and water rights.
August	Virginia Tech researchers find elevated lead levels in Flint water and make findings public.
Sept.	Pediatrician Dr. Hanna-Attisha speaks out about elevated lead levels in children in Flint.
2016	
March	DWSD announces a $4.5 million Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP).
May	U.N. rights experts ahead of Obama's Flint visit: declines in water funding impact low-income, Black, and African American communities disproportionately.
July	WRAP has a 2,500-person backlog, while 20,000 households are at risk of shutoff.
Dec.	Detroit and Flint water activists travel to activists in Standing Rock, and vice-versa.
2017	
April 8	Study finds that those on shutoff blocks are 1.55 times more likely to have water-associated illness.
July 26	Panel at Wayne State University questions why shutoffs are not declared a public health crisis.
2018	
	Whitmer (Dem.) wins Michigan governorship on platform of water protection and access.

Note: Key custodian-led events are denoted in brackets to match notations in our findings and in Figure 2.

the situation, with many tours lasting several hours. Field notes, videos, and photos were taken during and after events. Numerous informative conversations occurred at these events; these were recorded in field notes and form part of our data as informal interviews.

Formal and Informal Interviews

Our sampling technique was both deliberate and emergent (Eisenhardt, 1989). Our field analytic approach allowed us to inform our theoretical sampling of relevant actors. A total of 42 one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2013 and early 2015 (Table 2). Interviews averaged 88 minutes in length, with only one lasting under one hour and five lasting well over two hours. Interviews were tape recorded in all but two cases, where the participant's position led to requests not to be recorded and detailed handwritten notes were taken. An additional 48 informal interviews of generally between 10 and 30 minutes occurred at meetings and events and also informed our analysis. These interviews were used where participants were not of theoretical interest as custodians but had information that provided insight on the context. Any

TABLE 2
Qualitative Data Inventory

Data type and collection period	Quantity	Original data source	Original data audience
Qualitative formal in-depth interviews (2013–2015)	42 interviews, av. 88 minutes, 696 double-spaced pages	Informants, transcribed notes	Analysis for this study
Qualitative informal interviews (2012–2016)	48 interviews, 10–30 minutes	Informants, memo notes following conversations at meetings, seminars, conferences, rallies, town halls, and other events	Analysis for this study
Weekly insider e-mail journals, in-person updates (2014–2016)	160+ pages	High-level Detroit water insider in corporate and policy roles	Personal use and record keeping, reflection, updates to researcher
Investigator's journal entries (2014–2017)	100+ pages	Notes on personal observations, thoughts, emerging analysis, emotional reactions to shutoffs, etc.	Reflection for this study
Observation data (2013–2017)	120+ hours, 32 unique events attended	Principal investigator's notes (also videos and photos) from meetings, rallies, demonstrations, town halls, speakers, and tours	Analysis for this study
Monthly meeting minutes of local activist coalition group (2004–2015)	300+ pages	Compilation of notes, written by group's secretary, of all meeting minutes for period recorded	Members, public
Monthly board and committee minutes of DWSD (2013–2015)	1,000+ pages	Notes from monthly meeting of oversight board, monthly updates from water department executives or directors, and reports from prominent committees	Board members, retail employees and wholesale customers, city government, public
Media articles and reports; films and documentaries (2012–2017)	300+ pages 20+ hours	Newspaper, magazine, and online articles and editorials Documentary films, TV news, broadcasts, *The Colbert Report* coverage	Public
Government, NGO, and consulting global and U.S. reports (2012–2017)	5,800+ pages	Reports and documents on municipal water service delivery, privatization of water, and the human right to water	Public, government, corporations, shareholders, various stakeholders
NGO proprietary water ownership data and tracking (2000s–2016)	1,600+ municipal water systems	NGO spreadsheets tracking ownership proposals, changes, and media attention over time of relevant U.S. water systems	Internal NGO use, parts used in public campaigns
U.S. privatization data (2006–2016)	150,000+ municipal water systems reporting data	Environmental Protection Agency U.S. water systems violations and ownership status	Internal, public, government, water systems operators

individuals identified theoretically as custodians through informal conversations were asked to take part in a formal interview and were recorded only as such. One participant who we asked to be involved in a formal interview was deemed not to be a custodian following data analysis, and was then counted in our informal interviews only.

Snowball sampling was also used (Gioia et al., 2010), whereby custodians were identified as the research progressed and they emerged, or where their important role was highlighted by earlier custodians. Our relationships in the community were essential in gaining access to many individuals whose prominent positions and the political sensitivity of the shutoffs made them hesitant to speak. Given the history of racial conflict in Detroit, many vulnerable participants were also hesitant but agreed to be interviewed due to our early and unique interest in the situation prior to media uptake, and due to personal referral by earlier participants.

Formal in-depth interview participants were those we theoretically identified as custodians, namely those proactively working to maintain or preserve institutionalized practices. These participants were leaders, managers, and executives of their organizations or groups who were actively involved in water issues during our study. Participants included extensive representation across sectors including corporate, government, water experts (e.g., water lawyers, analysts, consultants), community groups, unions, and activists. Only one actor identified through theoretical sampling was unavailable to participate. In an effort to not simply focus on traditionally powerful actors, we also sought out grassroots leaders. Our access across sectors and Detroit communities allowed us to compile a uniquely comprehensive picture of the Detroit water shutoff events and those involved.[2]

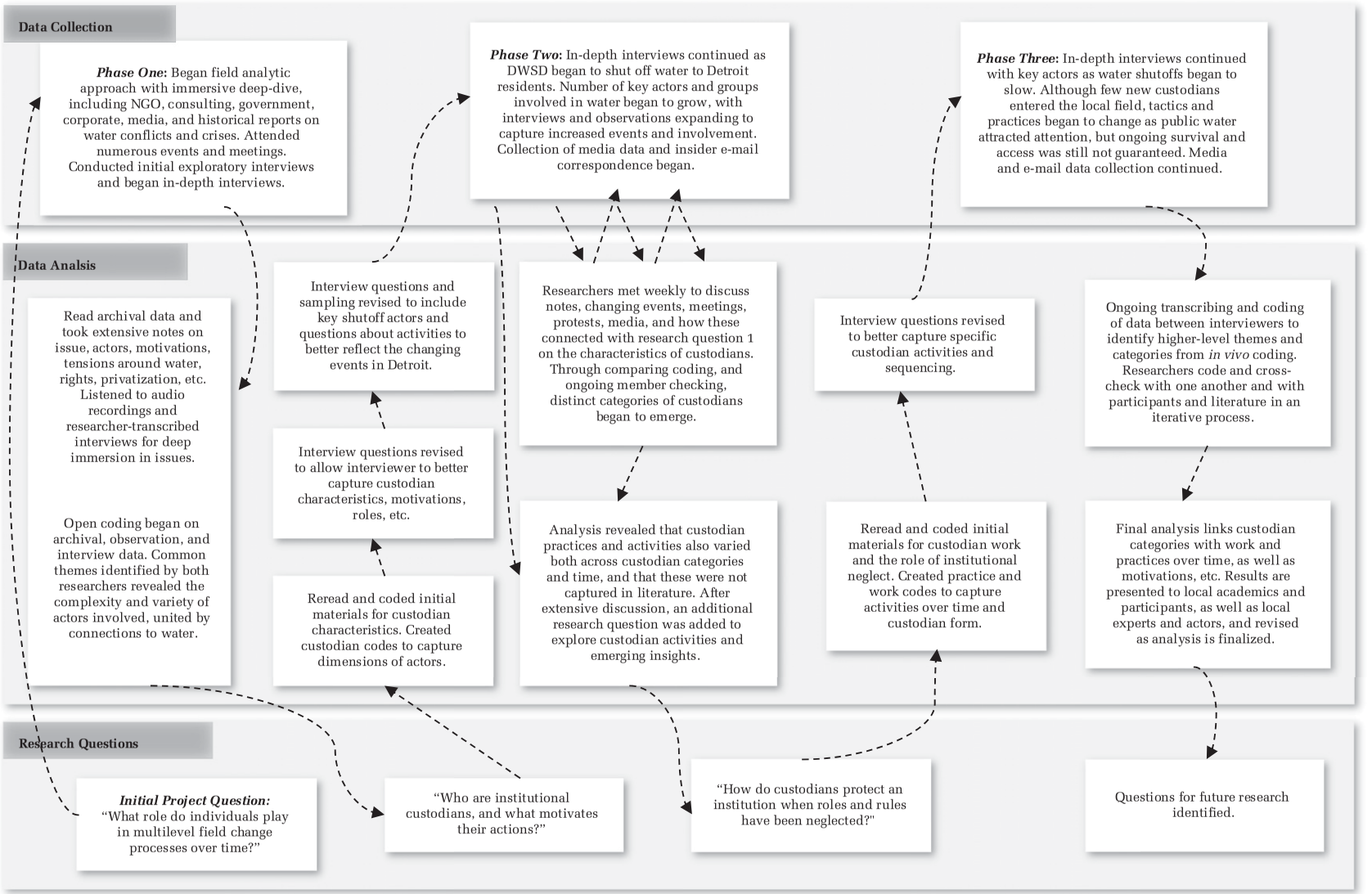
Analytic strategy. We began this research project with an interest in contestation around water privatization. However, as events changed and the unexpected water shutoffs began, our iterative data analysis drawing on grounded theory and ethnographic practices allowed us to capture the rapidly changing situation. Adapting our research involved moving back and forth between prior literature and theory, archival and interview data, and emerging theoretical insights (Locke, 2001), allowing the data, our discussions, and preliminary analysis to refine data collection as the study progressed and new insights emerged (Eisenhardt, 1989). An insider–outsider approach (Gioia et al., 2010) allowed us to combine our data with broader external and contextual factors and to integrate the insights afforded by the rapidly changing situation in further data collection. We capture the progression of our research questions, data collection, and analysis in Figure 1.

Analysis of our qualitative data was conducted both during and after data collection using a multistep process (Ansari et al., 2013; Dacin et al., 2010). As data collection was underway, interview data were coded employing *in vivo* words and statements used by the participants in their own terminology in an open-coding approach (Locke, 2001). This process involved asking questions (who, what, when, why, how) of the data (Purdy & Gray, 2009). Our initial focus was primarily on mechanisms of change at the local level. However, as the analysis and study progressed, we were struck by a "surprising fact" (Hanson, 1958: 86) in the data: a wide variety of individuals felt a deep commitment to public water services.

Contrary to, or in spite of, the deep divides we had expected among actors involved with public water services in Detroit, participants shared a common dedication to foundations of the institution of public waters services (public ownership and employment, clean and safe water, affordability, equal access). In reflecting on extant literature, we began to identify these actors as institutional custodians despite their varied formal roles. Their prominence prompted us to recode and reorganize our data to explore and theoretically frame (Fan & Zietsma, 2016; Locke, 2001) custodians. This included capturing their characteristics, backgrounds, motivations, activities, sequence of involvement, and roles. We initially identified six custodial forms in our analysis but were able to continue to explore these novel variations during ongoing data collection, code comparison across researchers, triangulation with other data, and member checking, ultimately revealing theoretical convergence on four unique custodial forms that captured our participants, as follows (see Table 3): "operatives," 11; "warriors," 9; "converts," 14; and "agnostics," 8. After recognizing the importance of custodians, and probing our data more deeply, it became evident that custodians also varied importantly in two other respects: they were motivated by different aspects of the institution of public water services, and they were therefore catalyzed to act under different circumstances. In a final step, we reviewed our analysis to identify where custodians overlapped rather than varied. Termed "custodian intersections," these data allowed us to explore when and how custodians worked in isolation versus in collaboration.

[2] The first author became seen by some locals as an expert and was often referred to media and policy makers.

FIGURE 1
Data Collection and Analysis Progression



Note: Figure formatted after Harrison and Rouse (2014).

TABLE 3
Additional Data Samples from Custodian Analysis

Representative quotes, events, and archival entries for underlying themes	
Theme 1: ***Operative Custodians***	
A. Instrumental connections to institution	A1. "And so again, it's not to say that—I don't want to make it sound like I'm only concerned with unions, but it's tied together. The very essence of unionism is that there is a common good, that's what solidarity is. You look after seniority rights because you know at some point that will be you. It's that sense that were all in it together. And that's another thing that they want to get rid of."
	A2. "Our interests are in getting the water we need when we need it, the quantity and quality we need, and for it to be as cheap as we can possibly get it. Period. There is nothing else, right. So we really do have common interests, which is why this shouldn't be so difficult. But it is. . . .We've tried to take a very active role in helping ourselves by helping DWSD. That's worked out, we've gotten a lot from that, I think they've gotten a lot from that. It's been a really good relationship."
B. Pride in the institution and water	B1. "You know, their health benefits have been slashed, their retirement has been slashed, they've been told they're lazy and incompetent people for a long time, and vilified by the press. When was the last time you've seen a story of a competent worker? I would love to see a story in the free press that highlighted a 55- or 60-year-old man that has to climb down a manhole in –4 degrees [Fahrenheit] and spend all night freezing his ass off trying to fix a water main break. Those guys are heroes. And they're not young, believe me. But that's not part of the county narrative at all. And I find it morally repugnant; I hate it."
	B2. "I try to maintain a very low profile. Because I don't care where you go, someone's got a water issue, wherever you go [laughing], oh my gosh. 'Can you help me? My friend, my friend, or my church.' It's always something. But nevertheless I haven't walked in their [other utilities'] shoes so I don't know what their attachments are to the community but I know that ours are strong simply because of what we feel is that element that people can't live without. Even though I think that's true of them as well, I don't see them as being as closely connected to the community as we are."
Theme 2: ***Warrior Custodians***	
C. Interest stimulated in water (often early and memorable)	C1. "Year after year was always wonderful beautiful Lake Michigan. And then one year there were some dead fish on the shore. And the year after that it was worse and the smells were more noticeable. And we still fished and swam but it wasn't as fun that year. And I remember the third year we came back it was really bad and we didn't swim at all, and that was the last year we actually went there as a kid."
	C2. "When I was in high school I took this AP-level science class and we were supposed to do water-quality testing, but very low level. You had a buddy and each of you would go take some water from some body of water and then you would test it. We took some water right near Santa Monica, and there is actually a water treatment plant that discharges very close to the beach there. And my teacher was very alarmed by our water sample, there was something growing in it that she could not identify. So I think that, I mean that class, was very instrumental in opening up my eyes to all of these issues. She just had no idea. To this day I still have no idea what that was. Like a white cobwebby thing but inside of the water, growing. It was weird."
D. Committing to protecting water	D1. "When it was time for me to go to college I went to an environmental college because I just really wanted to do something to help protect the planet, because I'd had this experience that I couldn't explain. And water has just always been a passion. So I started working for [X] the year after I graduated college; so I've been here [X] years now. And that whole time I've worked on water issues."
	D2. "[continued from text quote] And I thought that shouldn't happen to rivers, and I wanted to be part of changing that. It actually all started earlier than that, but that was probably the career trigger. I grew up in central [mid-West state] and I spent a lot of time on the water as a kid. And I guess I later realized that there is water and there's water. There was the dirty water in the Wisconsin River that flowed by our house and there was the beautiful clean water in the inland lakes up in the North, and then there were the Great Lakes that were kind of a distance from me, sort of like the ocean. They were very different concepts of water."
Theme 3: ***Convert Custodians***	
E. Devotion to nonwater cause	E1. "Once we got into the water issue we realized that the privatization issue would never go away. There would always be that threat. So we had to stick around. And the longer we stuck around, the more we realized how many other issues there are related to water."
	E2. "And I got involved in this because it's an issue of justice. And also of concern for me. And I have been involved in various groups before I got involved with the water issue. But for some reason, and I don't know, it's just like, the last five years at least—our group was formed in 2010—it's been the primary focus. I think because people were involved with peace and justice issues, which I'd been involved in before, and people had been involved in various aspects of that; there are so many issues. But there was no group in our area which was focusing on this particular issue. There was a void there and no one else was doing it. And so we were very concerned about the issue of possible privatization of water in the area. And so we kind of jumped in."

TABLE 3
(Continued)

Representative quotes, events, and archival entries for underlying themes	
F. Recombination of ideas and passions	F1. "At first I was really focused on pollution and trying to clean up the wastewater treatment plant, and sewage overflows. And that's not related to water affordability. How can it be related to water affordability? I just questioned it all and wasn't really trying to find a connection. I was just taking the two items as separate. So it was through [X] who was very persistent in saying 'no, they are connected you need to figure out what the connection is.'" F2. "So I knew they were cutting the water off but to the degree of how this whole thing is going down I did not know until I went to that gathering two weeks ago. And it was a gathering of different organizations that decided to collaborate no matter what their particular expertise was and how could we all work together to touch this whole thing. And they gave this presentation and passed out flyers. And that's when it was just really up in my face and I said 'Really, 1,500 to 3,000 homes a week?'"
Theme 4: ***Agnostic Custodians***	
G. Agnostic as to institutional structures	G1. "But it will have to change and that's where we're working on research and innovation now because we have a strong understanding that the model will have to change. See you know climate change, urban growth, we make better links now between contaminants and public health, so all of that will make the system change." G2. "For me, how do we develop, how does society make progress? And I think the competition has a role to play. Why companies are innovating, why companies spend money on innovation, it is to be more competitive than the other. If you stop the competition, then you also stop this competition and destabilize the system. That's where I see for me interesting [*sic*], if you hire someone from the private sector, if he doesn't do a good job you can just fire him and find another one and have them compete. And you can put your conditions in, you want that and that and that, and you want to reduce your energy footprint. So as a public authority you can set some goals and then challenge the private sector to achieve these goals at the cost."
H. Leveraging ideas and emotional connections to institution	H1. "They think they're helping the water, we think we're helping the water, and we've got different approaches. And again, as long as their approach is the right one, then good for them. But if all they're offering is to remove something and they've got no approach—and because they don't have operators and they don't employ engineers I don't really see any alternative approaches. I've seen them talk about, what do they call it, they still call it a PPP; I think it's a public–public partnership. Which I don't know, I haven't seen many of those in practice, maybe they work maybe they don't. But what motivates me and a lot of people at this company is just improving the country's water and wastewater." H2. "They style themselves almost like they are a public agency, one that protects taxpayer dollars. They never say we're here to make money. They say we're all about efficiency, we really just want to do what's best for people. I've been in meetings with American Water where they've handed out fancy brochures about all the money they've donated in all these communities where they have these water systems going on. If you weren't aware they make money, right [laughs], you could almost be confusing them for a charity. That and, Veolia's the exception, but American Water and Aqua America they have these very intentionally patriotic names. I mean, I think it's very, very funny. So they talk a really good game, they all talk a really good game about efficiency and how this is better for us all, and really ratepayers shouldn't be fighting them because they just want to give everyone better infrastructure and good-quality water and safeguard our water for years to come."

Iterating between extant literature and our data also began to reveal that the highly neglected nature of the institution of public water services was placing on custodians unique demands not explained in prior research. Our initial round of coding identified 46 separate *in vivo* codes for "taken for granted" and 36 for "neglected," drawing on custodians' own terminology regarding public water services. We see neglect as not distinct from but rather intertwined with the financial difficulties the city faced, making public water services a low-priority issue and an easy target for cuts. As a corporate executive explained:

> So, with water it's really hard because we do have this ageing infrastructure, but it is out of sight out of mind... It's not like transportation, where you have potholes and people are angry and they call their public officials. . . We have just as much need. This is people's drinking water. (Corporate Water Executive)

Drawing on prior literature on custodianship and moving to identify emerging themes (Purdy & Gray, 2009), we highlighted two key aspects that helped us to elaborate custodians' distinctions in our findings: the *roles* they adopted and the *rules* they reinforced. First, we examined the roles each form of custodian took on as they worked to protect the institution, with further analysis showing distinctions across custodial forms in role adoption. These roles were identified manually as well as through the code

cooccurrence. Roles included in the text for each custodial form were only those where a majority of custodians had shown involvement; other roles were not included therein. These roles coalesced into two overarching themes that we adapted from literature on the potential for entropic forces to emerge without "energy and resources" (Scott, 2015: 470), we termed these "energizing roles" and "resourcing roles." As we sought aggregate analytical dimensions to offer theoretical linkages between second-order themes (see Table 4), we identified the overall goal of these roles and work in the face of neglect as "institutional renewal." Second, with regard to rules, we highlighted differences in our analysis across custodians in how they framed (i.e., shared sensemaking and definitions of the situation) perceptions of institutional rules. We drew on prior research findings that framing is important in understanding groupings and divisions between actors (Brummans, Putnam, Gray, Hanke, Lewicki, & Wiethoff, 2008) and that framing micro-processes has implications for institutions (Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015). Drawing on these insights, we enhanced our emerging model by highlighting the importance of key intersections—overlaps where one actor affects another—in framing across varied custodians' understandings of the institution. Our theory building was triangulated with identification of code cooccurrence across authors and by using Atlas.ti software. Below, we present our findings and analysis on the heterogeneous and interconnected nature of custodianship.

EVOKING HETEROGENEOUS CUSTODIANSHIP

Desolate streets made Detroit's ongoing financial struggles and widespread poverty clearly visible in its once vibrant neighborhoods as our study began. In a city plagued by job loss, home repossessions, and evictions, utility shutoffs were certainly not new. For over a decade, a handful of social justice groups had joined with the once powerful unions to protest these, with little success. As the once affluent city drew global attention by declaring bankruptcy in July 2013, rumors flew of imminent privatization of the DWSD. Concern spread rapidly through the city's often "blighted"[3] neighborhoods that the shutoffs would be more extensive than ever as Kevyn Orr cleaned up the DWSD's books, preparing for a sale.

[3] A blighted building is fire damaged beyond repair, has been abandoned, has code violations, or is otherwise a public nuisance. Definitions of urban blight are often seen as racialized (Interview Notes).

The feared surge in water shutoffs began in late March 2014, with 3,025 households disconnected in the first month alone (DWSD, 2014). As citizens began to recognize the importance of public water services, new institutional custodians emerged. As heterogeneous operative, warrior, convert, and agnostic custodians emerged (Figure 2), we focused on their catalysts, characteristics, objectives, and "roles" (i.e., social positions and behaviors), as presented in Table 5. Each custodial form's framing of institutional "rules" (i.e., classifications, policies, and procedures) then follows as we highlight key intersections between custodians. We theorize that heterogeneous custodians with distributed roles work independently but also reinforce and energize one another at crucial intersections to renew a neglected institution.

Forms of Heterogeneous Custodianship: Emergence and Roles

The four forms of custodians emerged as the Detroit water crisis unfolded. We uncovered novel insights on the heterogeneous nature of custodianship, as well as on the convergence toward these four forms, detailed in their order of emergence below.

Operative custodians. By the fall of 2013, the DWSD's unions had been much depleted. Long gone were their infamous days of direct action and confrontation. Yet, news of Orr's appointment and the bankruptcy filing spread quickly among organized workers (Interview Notes) as these developments were seen by many custodians as part of a historic attack on public services. A community leader explained these widespread concerns:

> The political will [to privatize] was never there because water is so critical. That's a fight you didn't want to jump in, not only with the public employees but with the sentiment of the public around water. So, because of the bankruptcy, Kevyn Orr has a unique position to do what every other mayor refused to do. . . .sell the system. (Community Organizer)

DWSD employees watched job cuts accelerate in the fall of 2013 as a controversial external consulting firm (Observation Notes, DWSD Public Meetings) was brought in to "optimize" the utility (Observation Notes, DWSD Public Meetings; consultants' language). Employees and DWSD insiders saw the shutoffs as a precursor to the sale of the DWSD and to even more job losses. These dual threats catalyzed the first category of custodians to emerge during our study: operative custodians. Operatives were already actively engaged in public water services well before the majority of the

TABLE 4
Additional Data Samples from Custodian Roles and Institutional Renewal Analysis

Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data	
Second-order themes and first-order categories	**Representative quotes, events, and archival entries for underlying themes**
Aggregate Dimension 1: Energizing Roles	
1. Defender	
A. Recognizing value of institution	A1. "Detroit has an infrastructure which people from as far away as Dubai come to imitate. . . So my question was always why aren't we managing the DWSD better? Why aren't we emphasizing that our employee pay is great? Why aren't we maximizing our money and putting it back into our infrastructure? That's what gets me because our infrastructure is already there, it's making a killing." A2. "We've got 20% of the surface freshwater in the world, we're sitting pretty. How are we really going to be good stewards of that and take advantage of that so this will really be the best place on the planet to live? So I sense a real turning in that process where people are really seeing what it means to have this much freshwater. Not to just run pulp and paper mills and steel mills, but you know, the recreational value alone is fabulous. The Great Lakes fishery is worth 7 billion dollars a year."
B. Sharing and educating about value of institution	B1. "There aren't many opportunities that you have to speak to groups but I try to, at various times, to do something to help educate the public. I go around talking about water conservation to various groups and I'm sure I was not unique in that, that others did the same thing." B2. "People dump on Detroit all the time and I don't like to do this often but, if someone is being a jerk about it and they're from California, it's like 'Well you can go ahead and say whatever you want but don't come crying to me when you have all these droughts and we have all this water and we're going to be gazillionairs because we're going to charge you $15 for a gallon.'"
2. Reinforcer	
C. Link to outside institutional structures	C1. "The human right to water argument very much resonates. Just to explain, this is something you need to live, everyone should have a right to water regardless of their ability to pay. You will not find very many people publicly who will disagree with that statement." C2. "We had a water agenda for the city of Detroit that we wrote a year ago, so I was on the water subcommittee... I specifically crafted it around the United Nations language because I wanted to root the plight of the ordinary common person in Detroit in a U.N. frame. But [local official] took it out, said that he didn't want the universal declaration of human rights language in the water agenda for Detroit because it would open up the city of Detroit to scrutiny."
D. Link to outside institutional norms	D1. "But making the connection to the larger community and how this is a crisis for everyone really, that was pretty important. And at least on the legal front ACLU and NAACP were pretty important in helping, especially our local attorneys, and bringing in some of their networks." D2. "Even the way that they participated here in Detroit, very attentive, very interested, very inquisitive. Very much expressive too, like 'I can't believe this is happening. We've heard all these things in other parts of the world but we can't believe we're hearing that here.' So just from the [get-go] very much we could feel like they were here for us, you know. So that was pretty powerful because it even now has still done a lot for us to be able to say 'Look, we're onto something here that's right, that's correct.'"
3. Reifier	
E. Situational comparisons	E1. "So we were putting out the examples, especially in the water situation, that privatization doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to run any better. Especially in the case of Atlanta which is one of those good cases where it's reverted, so you can't say that, just because this company is coming in with their shiny literature and telling you that we can make it better." E2. "In particular instances like Atlanta. . . [they] privatized their water system, and a few years later because of the failure of that privatization, took it back. And there's another one that happened more recently in Indianapolis; they sort of pulled back from the privatization effort. And there was Cochabamba [infamous conflict over water privatization in Bolivia]."
F. Sharing stories of personal impacts	F1. "And sharing their stories, and sometimes it can be very moving and people supporting each other in what they're going through and everything."

TABLE 4
(Continued)

Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data	
Second-order themes and first-order categories	**Representative quotes, events, and archival entries for underlying themes**
	F2. "So I told the action story at the Charles Wright museum, the African American museum, you should do that some time the museum's good. But they have a big theater and nice theater-type space. . . .It's sort of like the Moth [storytelling event]. The Moth is White folks in Detroit, and this is like the Black Moth."
Aggregate dimension 2: Resourcing Roles	
4. Replenisher	
G. Mobilizing new interest and coalitions	G1. "So I knew they were cutting the water off but to the degree of how this whole thing is going down I did not know until I went to that gathering two weeks ago. And it was a gathering of different organizations that decided to collaborate no matter what their particular expertise was and how could we all work together. And that's when it was just really up in my face and I said 'Really, 1,500 to 3,000 homes a week?'"
	G2. "I think through the People's Water Board a lot of people sort of emerged that we didn't traditionally work with, like AFSCME—the local 207 is the union that represents water workers for the DWSD—some social justice organizations, Michigan Welfare Rights, the environmental organizations, coming together to form this alliance to really address the issues in the city."
H. Public displays of strength (rallies, demonstrations)	H1. "We get some people together and say let's get out there and protest what's happening. Call attention to the issue, maybe there'll be some local publicity on it. But usually using it as a first kind of organizing point to get people involved from the community."
	H2. "We would get in and put in questions to the TV debates, everywhere they were. And so we felt pretty comfortable with that, we felt that we had a lot of clips and everything we could use against them if they did it, and I think I even told one of them that I would do that to him at one point."
5. Retooler	
I. Recognizing impacts of neglect	I1. "I think you have to be legitimately concerned about people who can't afford water. The problem is how do you know who that is and where they live? . . .We have over half the population not paying their bills. Now do I believe half the population can't afford to pay their bills? No, I don't believe that for a minute. And so we've become totally frustrated."
	I2. "I'm not the guy that thinks everyone needs to agree. I think that when you have something as precious as water and the infrastructure that delivers it to you, you should have some pretty tense debates, that comes with the territory. Because if you weren't having those debates, I mean this is your water, you should care. . . We're not selling shoes."
J. Revaluating resource options	J1. "The human right to water is incredibly important but . . . is not the whole story if your issue is fixing the world. Once you solve that issue there's a whole lot of other problems to solve that aren't tied into the human right to water, like pricing. How do you price water, things like that."
	J2. "But what motivates me and people at this company is just improving the country's water and wastewater. I guess I'm kind of repeating myself, all I'm saying is that to the extent that they're helping the problem and they've got a solution that's different than us, then it's just arguing about what is the solution."
6. Exalter	
K. Connection between water and life	K1. "Internally there is profound recognition that we all drink water. That every fly, every insect, every microorganism, we're all dancing with water. So water becomes the grand mediator of all of life. So that's that quiet internal space of recognition that we all get thirsty, we all drink, we're all of water, from water, playing in water, trying to get next to water, coming out of water, fighting water, water is fighting us, and water becomes the great conduit. You know, the great solvent of our life."
	K2. "A lot of the homes. . . they were burning everything they could find for the winter. You can go sit over a manhole and get warm but you can't live without water. So I think that this is the final frontier. You can do a whole lot of things, you can go to a shelter, somebody can give you a whole lot of blankets, and you can somehow stand not having heat. You can buy candles if you don't have electricity. But if you don't have water you don't have a life."
L. Religious or spiritual connections	L1. "There is a religious leaders' letter that was signed by some bishops and a bunch of pastors. And that begins. . . There is a sense in which water is a gift, it falls from heaven, it is in some ways the emblem of grace, and free. That's embedded, that gets legally embedded in a variety of ways."
	L2. "So I personally visit winter or summer, rain or shine. And I have chats with Mother Earth down at the lake. Now I'm starting to sound crazy, but I do. And I meditate. The energy of water is really, really important."

FIGURE 2
Custodian Catalysts, Roles, and Intersections in Renewal of Public Water Services in Detroit

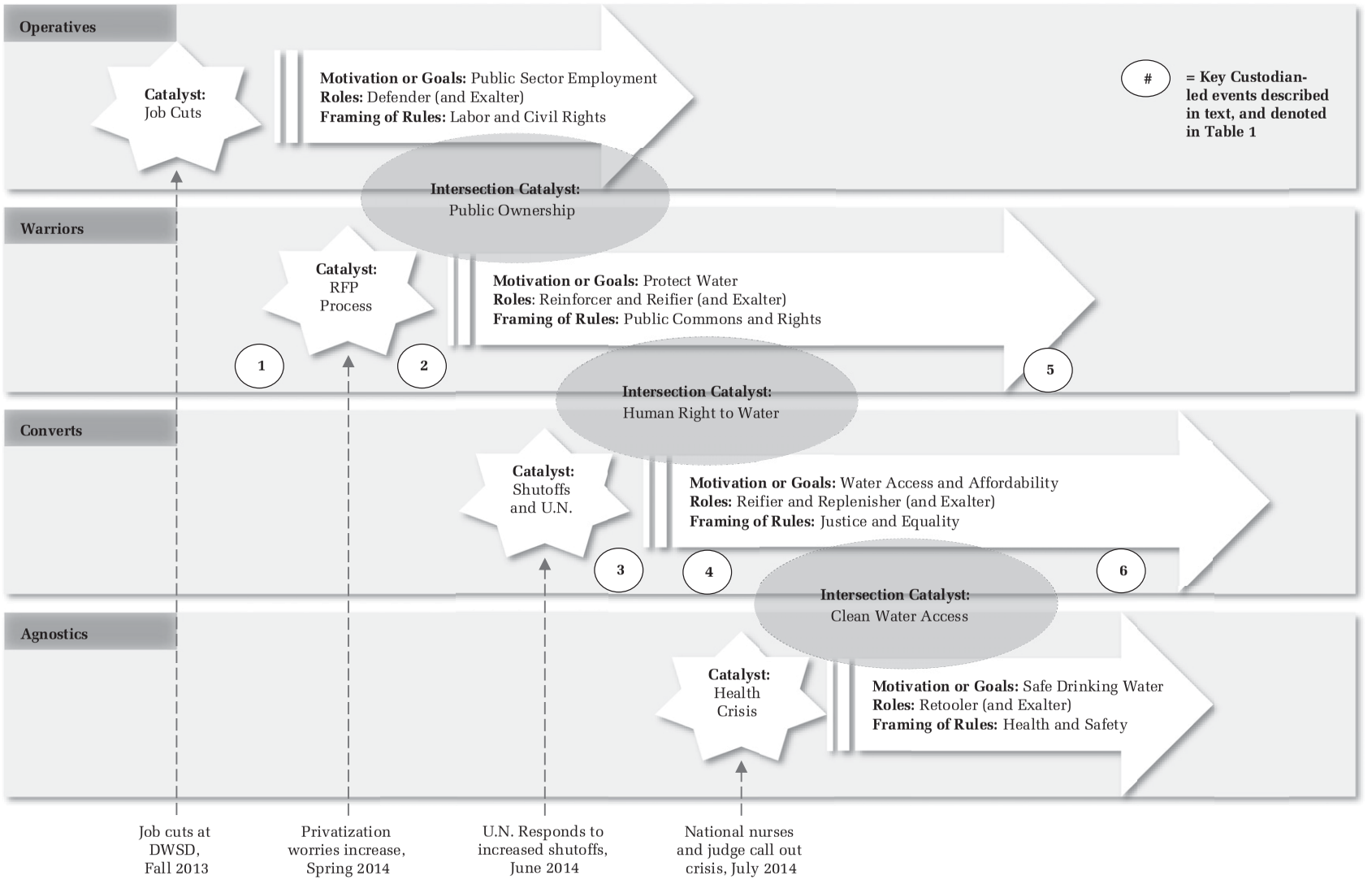


TABLE 5
Custodian Variance by Identified Form

	Identified custodial forms			
	Operatives	**Warriors**	**Converts**	**Agnostics**
General Demographic Notes	Directly or indirectly employed by water system and government. Came to issue through career. On average, racially diverse, middle-aged, and often male.	Career or work dedicated to water issues. More affluent, often outsiders to Detroit or from outlying areas, and usually educated. All ages.	Often Detroit-born and -raised locals. Long-term commitment to local causes. In leadership roles at community-based organizations. Often lower socioeconomic status, racially diverse.	Long-term careers in water and other utilities. Law, engineering, and business backgrounds are common. Actors tend to be more senior.
Objectives and Goals	Protect public sector jobs and employment, but also developed pride in water and their role.	Attachment to water protection across numerous water issues. Public governance seen as key.	Individual issues related to racial and income inequalities. Protecting water access and affordability.	Ensure clean water delivery and safe water and sewage, often with focus on technological solutions.
Catalysts	Job cuts under outside consultants' optimization plan and fear of sale or further cuts.	Possible privatization of public water services during RFP process, fear of impact on water.	Shutoffs themselves as these began to be shared, and U.N. human rights complaint response.	Public health and safety crisis and after nurses and demonstrations call attention.
Focal Aspect of Institution	Long-term public employment.	Public ownership or control of water.	Affordable water for all citizens.	Clean and safe water for all.
Roles	Fighting to protect DWSD in its current form, and employment in the sector; educating other custodians, inside knowledge.	Key in sharing information from outside struggles and institutions and other water-related issues.	Connections between water and their own passion projects and networks. Leaders of community sharing and storytelling.	Connections at higher policy and government levels.
Timing	Involved before shutoffs. Do not take on a prominent public role in anti-shutoff demonstrations, etc.	Life-long involvement in water. Interest rises as threat of privatization increases under emergency manager.	Connect with water as impacts of shutoffs on their personal passions and projects become clear.	Watch but tend to remain out of the spotlight due to roles and sometimes controversial positions.
Framing of Rules	Linked class- and race-based framing of public water services conflicts to possible attempts at privatization, as well as to suburban attempts to wrest control of DWSD from Detroit.	Framing against privatization focused on water as a public commons and a human right. Human rights framing became a powerful means of framing the privatization struggle.	Inequality and injustice, with public water services framed as a tool of equality of access. Shutoffs seen to remove DWSD from democratic control and ownership of all Detroiters.	Need to find solutions to address public safety and provide access to clean water for all. Focus on new financial or technical solutions that could do this, but may bring in new structures (privatization if needed).
Outcomes (during study)	Employees divided between DWSD and Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA). Many jobs were reclassified out of their traditional unions during GLWA changes, leading to ongoing legal battles.	GLWA authority retain public ownership of DWSD assets, now controlled by multiple local counties. Participants are divided on whether GLWA may prevent privatization or be a first step.	GLWA creation included repayment plans and a $4.5M assistance plan (Water Residential Assistance Program). However, with the plan over-subscribed and 17,000 possible shutoffs in 2018, the water crisis continues.	Many Agnostics successfully pushed for GLWA and its $50M annual payment to Detroit with the claim that it would allow Detroit funds to improve infrastructure.

shutoffs. They drew financial, status, or other benefits directly or indirectly from the institution as existing institutional insiders, and aligned with the instrumental notion of custodians captured in prior literature. Custodians sought to maintain long-term employment and job security aspects of the institution, and frequently mentioned these goals. Most interestingly, operatives also frequently mentioned the

connection between service and job cuts and a history of broader labor rights conflicts. Together, these issues catalyzed operative custodians to action:

> The right wing has kind of lashed back since the great recession... So, all these moves have been made against unions in recent years, and Detroit was kind of a target. One of the main targets in Detroit is the water department. And they've told us that they're going to get rid of 81% of our employees. (Union Leader)

At their peak, unions and operative custodians alone might have successfully fought off privatization and prevented shutoffs in Detroit. By the time of our study, however, a union member described the unions as "disemboweled" (Interviews) as they had been severely weakened in Detroit. In early 2014, permanent employees were tasked with training contract employees rumored to soon be taking their jobs. At the same time, the newly revived auto industry provided better-paid and more secure employment, dimming interest in labor unrest. Several custodians also acknowledged the community's indifference toward public water services. In response, the operative custodians we spoke with frequently tried to promote the value of public water services, taking on a custodial role that we term defender. Operatives, for instance, proudly offered the interviewer a taste of Detroit's award-winning water (Observation Notes, five occasions). In his living room in a now blighted neighborhood, a DWSD manager explained his own operative custodial activities in this role as defender:

> I've seen people dumping motor oil in the drains and I ran across and said "Hey, that goes right back into your water system man. That's the water you're drinking." And they don't have a clue. So, I think in order for Detroit, especially water, to survive... people need to be hit over the head with it every day. You know, about this is some of the best water in the world... And it's coming from your tap and it shouldn't be taken for granted. (DWSD Manager)

Warrior custodians. The diverse array of actors and groups already engaged with water protection in and around Detroit were the most receptive to the early concerns of operatives. In this Great Lakes city—where industry had a history of extracting and often polluting freshwater resources—several environmental groups had been active for years on water issues including fracking, invasive species, and water pollution. These groups shared the goal of protecting water and shared an attachment to water itself that was often long-term, personal, and emotional, making them powerful and outspoken advocates. We term these warrior custodians. One warrior explained the deeply held dedication to water issues many warriors held as follows:

> Well, it all started in my dorm room in December 1969. I opened up a *Time* magazine and I saw a picture of the Cuyahoga River on fire. And I thought "that shouldn't happen to rivers," and I wanted to be part of changing that. (Director of an International Water NGO)

As operative custodians shared information on the rumored privatization of the DWSD and on internal job cuts and outsourcing, warrior custodians began to emerge as defenders of public water services. Although many warriors we spoke with in the early stages of the crisis had little past connection with these issues, they came to see an important connection between protecting water itself, their focus, and the need to protect the institution of public water services.

> You know water has become critical, particularly because of droughts and because of the climate. Implications around fresh water, the aquifers, surface water becomes critical...work particularly through the U.N. has reframed water as not just an entity that is critical for survival but also the most potent element in resources being privatized and under threat. (Environmental Activist)

In connecting the protection of water to protecting the institution, warriors often harkened back to the historical reason for public ownership of the institution: that early private water operators had inadequately cleaned and protected the resource.

Warrior custodians began drawing on outside ideas, contacts, and institutions established through their connections with water issues. This provided new energy and resources that public water services had been lacking, and became a key role for warriors. We term this warrior role "reinforcer." In this role, warriors reinforced support for water by bringing in outside speakers, resources, statistics, and stories of water conflicts elsewhere—underpinning the importance of public water services in Detroit. For example, warriors invited leading global water activist Maude Barlow to speak at Detroit's Wayne State University in May 2014 (Figure 2: Event 1). Warriors drew on reinforcing concepts and institutions such as the public trust doctrine and the public commons, as well as the human right to water and sanitation. Barlow herself had been instrumental in passing the declaration of the human right to water and sanitation at the U.N. in 2010. While most audience members knew little about these reinforcing ideas (Observation and Interview Notes), a warrior explained how the ideas resonated with the crowd:

> I think what's more important isn't the power of that law to force people to act differently but the power of that law to create narrative around which a lot of people can organize. If you have a statement from the U.N. that says water is a human right, that's something that's massively empowering to people who are like "Yes, I want to get involved." (Political Leader)

Warriors also adopted a second key role: "reifier." Warrior custodians, like operatives, frequently told us they struggled with the fact that public water services were so taken for granted in Detroit that water simply seemed to appear from the tap. The public was not sufficiently aware to care about challenges to public water services. In their reifying role, warriors sought to make the institution less abstract. Warriors frequently told stories of failed privatizations in places like Atlanta, Indianapolis, and Peru, using these negative experiences of water privatizations to emphasize what might happen to the local institution. A Detroit activist who had worked against water privatization in Chicago gave an example of this reifying role:

> It was actually amazing because I have never seen Chicagoans so upset in my life as they were about the [privatization of the] parking meters. I mean people were really, really furious. But it gave us a really excellent and tangible way to talk to people about what it looks like when a water system is leased or when a water system is sold. (Environmental Justice Activist)

The human and community implications of living without water became increasingly apparent as shutoffs expanded throughout neighborhoods. At first, families hid the fact that their water had been cut, due to shame or fear of child services removing their children (Interviews), making awareness of the extensive shutoffs slow to spread. In addition, as warriors often did not have first-hand knowledge of the shutoffs or direct links to those impacted, the Wayne State event provided a setting for water-focused warriors, activists focused on social justice, and local community members to come together physically. At the event, Barlow suggested that a formal complaint be made to the U.N. under the declaration of the human right to water and sanitation. In doing so, some of these leaders soon took on new custodial roles (Figure 2: Event 2).

Convert custodians. We conceptualize the outside community leaders who next emerged as custodians as convert custodians. These converts were already deeply engaged with local causes such as social justice, poverty, community development, land use, food and urban agriculture, environmental issues, politics, race and civil rights, and spiritual and religious issues. They were relatively unaware of water issues until realizing the important connections between their own causes and public water services, or lack thereof. Seeing this connection sparked a rapid commitment by many to the institution's protection, with the goal of ensuring water access and affordability for Detroit's most vulnerable communities. One convert custodian explained:

> Water has ended up being emblematic, and I've been really pleased and edified to realize sort of the depth of the connections of water and gospel. It's more like how do we talk about this and how does it connect with our traditions, and suddenly things are lighting up for me that I hadn't seen before. (Religious Leader)

Convert custodians tended to have a close connection to the Detroit community, were often long-term locals, were more likely to be visible minorities and women, and were often in less secure or less well-paid employment than other custodians. Many converts mentioned direct experiences with those whose water had been shut off, and a few were struggling with their own water bills. The scope and size of the shutoffs themselves and their impacts on friends and neighbors were the catalyst for converts' involvement. Converts naturally connected with the founding ethos of equality of access that was deeply entwined with the institution's creation.

As mentioned above, Detroit residents had been initially hesitant to tell their shutoff stories. Now, they began to share these stories publicly. As custodians became increasingly aware of water shutoffs, they adopted the warriors' reifier role but adapted the storytelling from being about elsewhere to reflecting the experiences of friends and neighbors. One custodian relayed a widely told story about a community leader she did not know (also a custodian) who was arrested during the shutoffs. In the telling, the narrator underlined the importance of the reifying role:

> I do know that there was a woman who was jailed. I think she said she didn't know they were coming to cut the water. She was in her PJs and she went out to talk to people and they got rude with her, she got rude back with them, and she called the police. Because at this point she didn't even know if it was really the city coming to cut her water off. So when the police came, the meter people said she did ABC, XYZ—so they took her to jail in her pajamas. (Food Activist)

Several warrior and convert custodians submitted their joint complaint to the U.N. on June 18, 2014. By June 25, the U.N. responded with three Special

Rapporteurs declaring that the shutoffs were a violation of the U.N.'s declaration of the human right to water and sanitation. This unexpected response drew new convert custodians to the cause. It also vastly expanded global, national, and local awareness as custodians, led by converts, became heavily involved in organizing anti-shutoff actions. These included blockades outside the shutoff contractors' offices (Figure 2: Event 3), mass demonstrations through the streets of downtown Detroit (Figure 2: Event 4), and a water convoy from Canada (Figure 2: Event 5). Together, these actions propelled the movement further into the national and global media, as one convert custodian explained:

> Three things got big attention: The first arrest was very physical and it went out on YouTube; the appeal to the U.N. and certainly the immediate response from Catarina [de Albuquerque, U.N. Rapporteur for water] was international news; and then, the day of the second arrest blockade there was also the big action downtown with 1,000 people demonstrating at that one. So all of those were the big bumps. (Political Organizer)

Through these actions, converts began further expanding custodian numbers through their role as "replenishers," restoring the institution's social capital resources. Although bearing much in common with social movement mobilization and persuasion efforts, this replenisher role was focused specifically on (re)engaging institutional outsiders with existing institutional arrangements that had proven beneficial in the past. For instance, convert custodians organized a large town hall meeting (Figure 2: Event 6) that attracted media and several hundred residents who shared the personal impacts of the shutoffs with U.N. representatives and global media. Teachers spoke about schools opening their doors early so children could bathe and wash their clothes, families voiced worries about losing their children to foster services or being evicted after shutoffs, and neighbors told of leaving outside taps on to help those in need. Finally, a mother of five living in a bus shelter since being evicted after a shutoff recounted matter-of-factly that she tried not to let her children eat too much so she didn't have to find a toilet, asking the shocked crowd "How can you deny a person the right to use a toilet?" (Observation Notes and Journal). Converts, in their dual roles, helped to take the institution out of the taken-for-granted and then replenished commitment for renewal from new audiences.

Agnostic custodians. Summer heat intensified, and the number of citizens and households without water or sewage services grew as the shutoffs continued through the early summer of 2014. The potential for a significant health crisis in Detroit quickly became apparent. One July protest image featuring actor Mark Ruffalo (who was filming *The Incredible Hulk* in Detroit) went viral as it prominently displayed a protestor's sign asking, "Where do you expect us to sh**?" The question was one that local government also began to ask, pressured by local health professionals and a national nurses' conference held in Detroit that same month.

The looming health issues and lack of safe and clean drinking water, rather than the shutoffs themselves, catalyzed the involvement of agnostic custodians. While converts were catalyzed by the personal impacts on fellow community members, agnostics tended to be more isolated and removed from these impacts due to their socioeconomic status. Instead, they thought in more general terms of the broader goal of protecting health and safety. Agnostic custodians were generally professionals involved with water, including analysts, and government and corporate executives. Custodians classified as agnostics displayed two characteristics: First, they were committed to protecting the institution's foundations regarding the supply of clean and safe water. An executive chief water engineer explained this deep commitment to providing water services and solving water challenges:

> I think you'd find that in any of the major companies, I mean we're spending eight, 10, 12 hours a day thinking about water and water issues and wastewater. And we have a joke that not everyone spends their days thinking about "wastewater," but we do. So yeah, we think we can make the world a better place. (Corporate Water Executive)

Second, their focus on finding solutions was not linked to the current institutional structures. In seeking solutions, agnostics tended to be more flexible regarding the structures that delivered water, separating their commitment to quality water services *for* the public from the traditional institutional structure of water services provided *by* the public sector.

One agnostic in a long-term senior policy role spoke of himself as an "environmental problem solver" (Interview). Others frequently spoke of "flexibility" and finding "new alternatives" to solve problems (Interviews). A custodian at the Detroit mayor's office summarized this stance:

> So yeah, I didn't get a sense of having this kind of ideological perspective on privatization versus keeping it

> public. It was just like, what is going to get us the outcome of delivering the best service to customers. (Senior Policy Analyst)

The agnostics' key role was "retooler." Although originally some had been unaware of the shutoffs, as they realized what was happening they began to vocally support the tenets and ethos of the institution as emerging custodians. An executive and city advisor with a hardline public stance on shutoffs explained how his views had shifted during the shutoffs:

> So, getting to the core, yeah, okay, I understand. I get it. I'm not stupid. I understand there are some people that can't afford this. But let's try to figure out who they are and develop a system where they can get subsidies. So that's where we are. It's an imperfect system, it's an imperfect society. You just try to do the best you can. (City Executive)

Due to the policy and executive roles agnostics often held, their involvement was not as public as that of other custodians, often happening behind closed doors.

Custodians' Shared Role: Exalter

As we sought to understand and distinguish across different forms of custodianship, and the various roles they played, our analysis showed cross-cutting custodial attempts to build connections with water itself as a means of strengthening commitment to public water services. While the institution of public water services was largely taken for granted or ignored, water itself was treated similarly; often, water is seen as infinite, especially in the Great Lakes basin. Using a role we term "exalter," custodians across all forms sought to increase the awareness of water as a valued, finite, and increasingly scarce resource—almost as an institutional artifact—thereby inducing commitment to renewing the institutions that protect it.

This exalter role largely consisted of connecting water to its life-giving properties and, frequently, connecting water to spiritual traditions. The attempt to increase commitment to water through its connection to life became a powerful rallying cry across all custodial forms. For example, a city official used water's life-giving role to explain her policy-making priorities on a proposal to sell the Detroit Institute of Art's (DIA) collection during the bankruptcy:[4]

> I feel so strongly about water not being one of those issues that is lumped into everything else. As much as I love art, I don't drink art. And I recognize the value of any city in having strong cultural institutions. But the realities are what they are. It's not life and death. (City Executive)

Signs, and even graffiti on Detroit buildings and highway overpasses stating "Water is Life" appeared frequently (Observation Notes, various). One activist explained the power of this exalting work in protecting both water and, by extension, the institution of public water services:

> I would rather the public space to hold it because some things cannot be commodified. Not only from a spiritual sense but from a human dignity frame. It's priceless. Life is priceless. And if water is foundational to life, it too is priceless. (Environmental Activist)

Invoking water in religious scripture and in other spiritual practices, some custodians furthered this exalting role, deifying water to achieve resonance and connection. A religious official commented on a July demonstration to block the contractors' shutoff trucks, "We had a big chalice of water that we passed around that people drank out of and reported alignment of water." In sum, exalting water strengthened connections with public water services and was an important shared focus in renewal efforts across all custodial forms.

Intersections Across Heterogeneous Custodians

As varied custodians began to emerge in our analysis, it became apparent that their understandings and framing of what the institution of public water services was, or precisely what aspects of the institution's ethos and rules (i.e., classifications, policies, and procedures) they were fighting for and considered integral, was also heterogeneous. In order to attempt to identify custodians' understanding of institutional rules, in this section we trace the key aspects of framing of the institution's rules used by each custodial form (Figure 2). Most importantly, we highlight how these frames and understandings intersected with and helped to catalyze new custodians. By intersection, we mean areas where framing of the rules of the institution by one custodian connected with and catalyzed later custodians to action.

Operative and warrior custodian intersection: Public ownership. Operative custodians focused largely on framing institutional rules through the

[4] The DIA's collection was saved through donations in what was termed Detroit's "Grand Bargain."

lens of ongoing labor and civil rights struggles. In the eyes of operatives, the current cuts were just the latest in these decades-long battles. In this light, growing pressure from suburban mayors to have greater control of the DWSD stemmed from an underlying sentiment that Detroit was incapable of managing the utility. Although operatives were racially diverse, this race-based and class-based framing was found frequently across these custodial forms, and the shutoffs were often thought to be targeted at removing jobs and driving out Detroit's blue-collar, Black, and African American citizens from Detroit neighborhoods (Interviews, various). The weakened unions meant that operatives also needed and sought supporters, and this allowed operatives to engage and connect with outside groups. One operative illustrated this perceived role and framing:

> If somebody raises their head, that will allow others to raise their head and ask questions that aren't being answered. . . That aren't being asked. And that changes the whole consciousness from "I'm worth what rich people think I'm worth" to "I'm worth something because I'm a human being." (Retired Union Leader)

With insider status, and with the shutoffs being conducted by an outside contractor rather than by DWSD employees, some operatives relayed early details on when, where, and how the shutoffs would occur (Interviews, various) to outside activists and emerging custodians, primarily warriors. Warriors, in turn, drew on public commons and human rights framing as they were catalyzed, and took on a larger role as custodians. In their reinforcer and reifier roles, public-commons language was a particularly powerful means of framing the privatization struggle, and one broadly understood by unengaged community members. Warriors' and operatives' concerns therefore overlapped when it came to maintaining a publicly owned institution and fighting privatization. One warrior recalled the impact of these intersections in framing:

> And what I was really surprised by was that, you know, when you talk about privatization, I feel that it can be very kind of wonky, and the average person might not care that much. But people in general seem to have a very strong sense... This is something they want publicly owned and operated. They absolutely didn't want to sell it off. (Executive, Water NGO)

As operatives connected with other custodians on privatization—especially with warrior custodians—they also took on ideas from these other custodians about the public ownership and environmental protection aspects of the institution. A warrior custodian shared her observations of operatives after these interactions with warriors:

> And labor groups who were just freaking interested in a paycheck really, "Can I have a job and can I pay a car loan?" begin to start thinking about water in a holistic frame. "Not only do I have a job working for a water board and a water system, but I'm improving the quality of life and protecting it." (Community Organizer)

The operatives' interest in public employment and equality combined with the warriors' focus on protecting the institution from privatization and maintaining water as a public commons. This led to important intersections and overlap in interests around the idea that public ownership of the institution must be defended in order to ensure jobs *and* the protection of water.

Warrior and convert intersection: Human right to water. As warriors intersected with operatives over public ownership aspects of water services, their human rights framing resonated with new custodians in Detroit: the community groups from which convert custodians generally emerged. Many converts represented organizations fighting for various forms of equality and justice. Given Detroit's socioeconomic context and history, many in Detroit felt they had been abandoned for decades by local and state leadership. The importance of the human rights framing, introduced by warriors, lay in the perception that it offered external support and even potential legal avenues. A convert custodian explained the importance of this framing:

> From local authorities, we are constantly being told, "No, you have no rights and you have no protections." Um, to have these folks come in and, you know, verbally and loudly state these things, it was important I think for a lot of people. (Social Justice Organizer)

Connections with broader human rights framing also offered reassurance to emerging convert custodians that they were working for a greater cause and that their actions were legitimate:

> So just from the get-go, very much, we could feel like they were here for us. You know. So that was pretty powerful, because it even now has still done a lot for us to be able to say, "Look, we're onto something here that's right, that's correct." (Political Organizer)

Further, a citizen's partial ownership of the water system, regardless of socioeconomic status or race, was also frequently used to invoke pride and the desire to preserve an institution that was framed as having equality of access built into its ethos and rules. For example, chants of "Whose water? Our

water" were often heard at public events and resonated with local crowds (Observation Notes, various rallies).

As the intersections of these ideas catalyzed converts to take on custodial roles, warriors in turn began to cross the sectoral, socioeconomic, or racial boundaries that had tended to inhibit collaboration with grassroots community groups across aspects of water issues in Detroit. A warrior custodian focused on environmental impacts, and who had grown up in affluent white suburbs, recalled how these intersections were first explained to her by a convert custodian:

> As a justice organizer, she really opened my eyes to the water affordability issue and how it was connected to the sewage overflows. And I have to say, at first I didn't get it. And I think that was coming from my white privilege of "[affordability's] not really related to pollution, and why should I focus on that?" (NGO Director)

Convert and agnostic intersection: Clean water access. Local authorities, politicians, administrators, and judges could no longer ignore the crisis as increasing global media attention continued into the summer months. Many began to join citizens in demanding that something be done. With their primary commitment being to health and safety, many agnostics voiced agreement with the human right to water, but framed their efforts in terms of moving beyond this to more crucial health and access problems:

> The human right to water can be misapplied because I think people are ideologically opposed to the private sector. Not that the human right to water isn't important—but that's easy. Once you solve that then you've got to work on the harder problems, which are, how do we make this infrastructure, actually build it for the 21st century? (Corporate Executive)

The arguments around rights, justice, and access led initially by warriors, but later adapted to the framing of converts, also resonated with some policymakers and DWSD board members who had originally supported the shutoffs. The comments of one custodian explained how water access and safety began to resonate with his own colleagues as agnostics became aware of the issue:

> And we know that, if there are children in the home and the water is cut off, the children will be taken away. So, you've got to have balance, you've got to have your business hat but you've also got to have your humanity hat. You cannot not think about that. (Corporate Water Executive)

Summary: Custodial Outcomes

The assets of the DWSD were subdivided with the new Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) in late 2014. For operatives, who had sought to maintain public sector jobs, this was a mixed outcome. The DWSD was kept in public hands and additional large-scale layoffs were avoided, but many jobs were reclassified and control was now shared with the suburbs. Warriors also saw success in their goals to maintain the DWSD, and later the GLWA, as public entities. Water services in Detroit have remained publicly owned and the GLWA's creation included a $50 million annual payment to Detroit to maintain and improve its water infrastructure. However, the fear of privatization remains among many warriors. For convert custodians concerned with access and affordability, a $4.5 million fund to assist low-income residents was an important aspect of the GLWA deal. However, with the fund oversubscribed and thousands still on shutoff lists, the water crisis continued well into 2018 (Stafford, 2018). In terms of human rights and health, the impacts of water shutoffs are also just now becoming clear; those living on a street with shutoffs were found to be "1.55 times more likely to be diagnosed with a water-borne illness" (Gross, 2017: 1). However, despite mixed successes in Detroit itself, the publicity and public engagement around the Detroit and, later, Flint water crises made public water services an election issue in Michigan in November 2018. The state's new governor successfully ran on many of the ideas and frames shaped by the custodians and events captured in our study, promising new funds and protections for public water services.

A MODEL OF HETEROGENEOUS CUSTODIANSHIP AND RENEWAL

Building on our findings around the emerging role of custodians during the Detroit water shutoffs, we theorize a model of heterogeneous custodianship and institutional renewal. We posit that this model is generalizable to other institutions similar to public water services: longstanding institutions with broad societal impact and community connections that are nevertheless suffering neglect—such as global health care, education, democratic, and legal institutions.

The first and foundational aspect of our model is that custodianship can, and often must, include custodians with heterogeneous characteristics, catalysts, and objectives. This first aspect of our model builds on our *in situ* data collection and analysis

before and during the Detroit water crisis. Rather than observing only homogeneous, like-minded custodians who are direct institutional beneficiaries, we were able to iteratively identify four forms of custodial actors. We posit that these forms are likely to appear in other cases of institutional renewal, and build our model based on them: operatives who are existing insiders with largely instrumental objectives and are closest to the custodians identified in prior studies; warriors with a deep passion for the core ethos of the institution (e.g., water, education, democracy, etc.); converts who are newly aware of and engaged in the institution's connections to their own outside causes and passions; and agnostics who are flexible on structural and normative aspects while aligning with key instrumental objectives of the institution. While we expect these custodial roles to map onto other institutions and their custodians, it is possible that not all custodial forms will emerge in all cases, or that additional custodial forms may be uncovered. Nevertheless, the important first finding and aspect of our model is that custodians are heterogeneous.

The second key aspect of our model is that heterogeneous custodianship is distributed. Custodians are catalyzed by different understandings and aspects of an institution and have differing objectives and motivations. As a result, they take on different custodial roles, both across custodian type and across time. We build this insight directly from our case, which illustrates that different custodians had different interests and catalysts and emerged at different times. Therefore, in our model, heterogeneous custodians will be catalyzed when the aspects of the institution that are closest to their interests or passions are engaged. Further, as each of these aspects is jeopardized, custodians will be catalyzed to take on relevant and varied custodial activities. In our model we posit that these roles are likely to align with the four custodial types outlined above. The early custodians to emerge—operatives and warriors—will try to energize interest in and support for the institution, drawing on their insider knowledge or knowledge about the institution's history and core elements. Here, we identify several roles of operative and warrior custodians, such as defender, reinforce, and reifier. Later, our model suggests that custodians who were not as connected to the institution will emerge as replenishers and retoolers. Finally, we expect all custodians to jointly take on certain roles, such as exalter. These varied roles later assume importance in the institution's renewal. It is important to note that while our model highlights these specific roles, we see overlap and role sharing as possible and even likely, as was evidenced in our data. In addition, new roles may emerge that are not identified in the model, or roles that are not necessary may be excluded based on context as well as custodians' skills and resources.

The third aspect of our model is that heterogeneous custodians work both independently and collectively, with vital leverage points often occurring at intersections across and between different custodial forms. In this third aspect of our model we argue that one custodian role can catalyze another, and that custodians are often energized and resourced by the roles other custodians play. For example, regarding roles, as distributed custodians emerge over time, we theorize that earlier custodians will take on roles (such as the energizing and resourcing roles) that are at least in part targeted at potential new custodians, and will shore up the awareness and support the institution lacks. In the early roles (defender, reinforcer, and reifier), custodians are independently and jointly involved in what we term energizing roles to restore interest in the neglected institution and energy for defending it, drawing in external audiences and potential custodians. In roles that emerge later, (replenishers, retoolers, and exalters*)*, we see custodians developing the networks, skills, and connections required to stave off entropy through resourcing roles, again bringing new custodians to the cause. In addition to institutional roles catalyzing one another, we highlight the intersecting framing of institutional rules in our model. Here, we expect that while distributed, custodianship may be catalyzed at points of overlap with custodians who have different understandings of the institution. For example, drawing from the current study, while warriors were most concerned with protecting water as a public commons through the institution, their ideas around public ownership and a right to water intersected with the interests of converts who had no prior experience with public water services. In sum, new custodians draw energy and resources from existing custodians and, in turn, catalyze new custodians as they intersect. In other words, custodians may not only be catalyzed and custodianship evoked through external events, it may also be the result of the work and ideas of prior custodians.

The last aspect of our model points to the intent, or intended outcome, of the custodians. We propose that efforts to restore the energy and resources (Scott, 2015) of a neglected and entropic institution is aimed at what we term institutional renewal. In our study

we found that after creation, the work of institutional maintenance may be neglected, leading to institutional entropy. With our model, we posit that renewal of both energy and resources, through the roles performed by custodians, will be required to counteract these entropic forces. In such cases, a stage of institutional renewal is needed to reinvigorate the institution and to revive institutional roles and rules. Put differently, the crisis of neglect facing an institution (as was the case for the institution of public water services in our study) may be severe enough that maintenance work may no longer be ongoing, or even possible. In such cases, we expect that institutional renewal through restoration of energy and resources will be required, and is likely to be provided by heterogeneous custodians. Successful renewal, we expect, will allow for institutional maintenance work to begin again. However, we acknowledge that, as with institutional creation and maintenance, renewal will not guarantee long-term stability and may, in some cases, simply delay a failing institution's inevitable decline.

DISCUSSION

Our aim in this paper was to explore the nature, characteristics, and actions of the custodians who sustain institutions facing entropic forces. As carriers of the institution, custodians are crucial for the persistence of institutions and are in a powerful position to mediate how institutions are interpreted and enacted over time. The context of institutionalized municipal water services in Detroit highlights how different forms of custodians became engaged, and catalyzed others in the work of institutional renewal. Our context is unique in that a rapidly changing situation on the ground allowed us to experience the full range of custodians immersed in separate roles and activities yet yielding collective outcomes.

We make three contributions to the literature on institutional custodianship and institutional renewal: First, we argue that custodians are not the homogeneous institutional actors observed in prior research but are much more heterogeneous and diverse in their composition, focus, and activities. Second, our findings reveal the complexity and enormity of the task of sustaining institutions. We demonstrate that intersections between heterogeneous custodians collectively and concurrently can drive, and may even be necessary for, institutional renewal. Finally, we uncover the importance and urgency of institutional renewal when institutions face entropic forces. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings below.

The Shifting and Heterogeneous Nature of Institutional Custodianship

Identifying the extent and nature of heterogeneity across custodians is key to understanding why custodians act and when they are catalyzed to do so. We find that custodians interact with and engage others, shift in nature over time, cycle between insiders and outsiders, and form formal and informal coalitions over interconnected yet diverse interests. Our findings contribute to the small but emerging body of research on custodianship in several ways, and push us to reconceptualize our understandings of institutional persistence and stability.

First, our study, uniquely, explores why, how, and when various custodians are catalyzed to action. In doing so, we answer a call for *in vivo* and *in situ* analysis (Lawrence et al., 2013) to distinguish how purpose evolves and varies across custodians. We find that morality and reflective purpose (Lawrence et al., 2013) can be important catalysts for action, suggesting a revised conceptualization of custodial calling. While we confirm that some custodians are motivated by instrumental factors, as in past research, custodians are also motivated by factors ranging from pride, spiritual connections, childhood experiences, community, and passions for outside causes. Understanding these complex custodial motivations challenges prior conceptions that the work of persistence is less strategic and purposive than is the work of change agents, such as institutional entrepreneurs (e.g., Battilana et al., 2009). Conceptualizing custodians as active, powerful, and motivated guardians of institutional arrangements, rather than the oft-perceived cultural dopes (Powell & Colyvas, 2008), provides a new perspective on institutional stability. If agents of stability are better understood to be equally as powerful and purposive as agents of change, then without active custodianship institutions are likely to fall into entropy or disappear entirely. This theoretical reconceptualization also offers insight into current practical concerns for the vulnerability, disruption, and fragmentation of numerous longstanding societal institutions that have been long taken for granted.

Second, our study reveals the distributed agency of custodianship in that it is both independent and interdependent. We find that the task of custodianship may shift between different forms of heterogeneous custodians, and between insiders and outsiders.

Numerous individuals who became active in our study did not possess formal roles and, in some cases, had no prior direct engagement with the institution. Rather than assuming stability managed by core elites, as in much prior research, we argue that synergy across varied actors with unique skills and resources can enhance institutional renewal and, therefore, persistence. This is especially true where it is unclear *a priori* where action is needed and what actions will work. In a situation where traditional leaders and insiders were unable to prevent entropy, our study suggests that with institutions, as with many other management spheres, complex problems may be best addressed by a diversity of actors.

This insight that custodians are shifting and that agency is distributed is also important as it illustrates that actors previously on the outside were afforded greater discretion to be more radical in their approach and tactics compared to those who held formal insider roles. For instance, custodians (converts) who did not hold formal roles offered important resources, knowledge, and networks that embedded insiders (operatives) did not have access to, as well as being more vocal and visible in their actions. These insights require us to reconceptualize the previously small number and narrow range of actors thought to be both engaged in and valuable for institutional stability and survival. Our findings and model also illustrate openings and opportunity during times of entropy, suggesting that potential custodians may be previously unengaged and undetected. Further, explicitly connecting their experiences to an institution can give voice to new actors—many from vulnerable communities—illustrating that insiders facing entropy may be well served to encourage heterogeneous new custodians with needed energy and resources.

Intersecting Institutional Custodianship

Our model of custodial heterogeneity also challenges extant understandings of institutions, as it underscores both the complexity and enormity of sustaining institutions. We argue that no single action or actor can tackle the renewal of a large multidimensional institution on their own. Our model instead highlights the timing, sequencing, and intersecting nature of institutional stability. This offers insight to calls for research on collaboration between heterogeneous actors (Hampel et al., 2017) by showing how common goals may dovetail even where explicit collaboration is challenging or unlikely. Rather than a unified and taken-for-granted whole, we show that heterogeneous and intersecting custodians hold different systems of meaning about an institution as they negotiate and reconcile their differences. At a micro level, heterogeneous custodians with divergent interests renew different dimensions of the institution that, if viewed at a more macro level, appear to be a largely collective effort toward renewal, and potentially toward longer-term stability.

By exploring both the independent and interdependent nature of custodianship, we are also able to temporally map these heterogeneous custodians and their roles into distinct phases, offering more nuanced inferences about their utilization and actions across time. In some instances, custodians' activities are unstrategic and uncoordinated, emerging independently (Dorado, 2005). Yet, more often, as our model illustrates, custodial practices are influenced by the custodians and activities that precede or appear concurrently with them at key intersections of ideas, framing, understandings, and motivations. One Flint activist explained these intersections at a Detroit public meeting as, "I stand on the shoulders of the water warriors who came before me" (Observation Notes, July 2017).

The greatest impact at those intersections occurred where diverse custodians, including those who were not expected to be in agreement, echoed and amplified one another. Diverse custodians thereby came together to share energy and resources around common ideas, even where their overall objectives or understanding of the institution differed. Further, this cycling of support meant that while individual custodians may not have achieved all of their own objectives, or may even have failed, their energy and resources nevertheless supported institutional renewal. As such, the complexity of the institution allowed touch points for diverse custodians to be catalyzed to action, leading to broader stability. To the converse, our reconceptualization of stability and the key role of intersecting heterogeneous actors means that institutions that do not attract a distributed web of support, or for which custodians do not emerge and intersect in a timely manner, may be vulnerable to instability and failure.

Our findings on intersecting custodians also have implications for the literature on collective action in the context of multistakeholder partnerships. Gray and Purdy (2018) suggested the importance of learning from the body of work on multistakeholder partnerships in order to understand issues of change in contested fields where change is often multilevel, involves conflict and contestation, and entails both

insiders and outsiders (Purdy & Gray, 2009). Similarly, we highlight the importance of internal and external custodians, as well as the need to pay close attention to the timing and sequencing of actions in addition to both the overlapping and diverse interests of key constituents in changing institutional contexts. In our case, in contrast, custodians worked to renew an institution in decline but did so without a system of formal collaboration, lacked "shared rules, norms and structures" (Wood & Gray, 1991), and were often largely independent and sequenced in their efforts, although efforts did overlap and dovetail at times. Our findings thereby suggest novel approaches to how and why distributed actors may be catalyzed and can collaborate to solve complex problems, especially in times of institutional disruption. The importance of role and rule intersections in our study also suggest that while marginalized populations are often disadvantaged by the intersectionality of multiple sources of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989), intersections across custodians, including the vulnerable, can be a source of institutional renewal and power.

Institutional Entropy and Institutional Renewal

Our study captures a case in which institutional structures had been neglected, resulting in entropy (Scott, 2015). We argue that institutional renewal must take place via custodians who rebuild the energy and resources lost in entropy. Our important contribution here is the insight that custodians are catalyzed to act to renew an institution as they become aware of challenges to different aspects of the original institution, seeking out institutional remnants to support their causes. Although a neglected institution bears commonalities with institutional voids—where institutional arrangements are noticeably absent or weak (e.g., Marti & Mair, 2009)—the understandings of what the institution of public water services meant remained powerful in the minds of the custodians who emerged in our study. This ability to draw on institutional remnants, which may be stories, traditions, memories, or sentiments about the institution, can be used to reinvent practices or for the reemergence of older traditions (Dacin & Dacin, 2008; Shils, 1981). The important insight that emerges from our study is that these remnants were drawn on differentially by different custodians: operatives fought for the institution's traditions of public employment, warriors drew on aspects of the institution around water as commons, converts connected with the notions of rights and equality of access, and agnostics supported the ethos of clean and safe water. These threats catalyzed custodians at different times as they took on different roles, framed their arguments and perceived rules uniquely, and engaged with and repurposed different aspects—even as they all, together, supported the broader institution.

Capturing the power of these past remnants and core institutional values used by custodians leads us to reconceptualize institutional stability and posit that a neglected institution may act primarily as a palimpsest—an object that is altered in reuse but continues to bear traces of its original form. The neglected institution in our case provided important and resonant raw material that was highlighted, emphasized, and curated by various custodians. This view aligns more closely with the French tradition of institutional analysis, which differentiates two dimensions of an institution: the temporary dynamic dimension and the historically fixed instituted result (Lapassade & Lourau, 1974). As such, we posit that custodians seeking institutional renewal may make incremental change simply based on their different understandings and by reusing preferred remnants of the institution, even while not purposefully seeking the outright change explored in the institutional entrepreneurship or social movements literatures. Reconceptualizing institutions as palimpsests that allow subtle and incremental changes, particularly at points of renewal, also offers new insights to the debate over embedded agency that has questioned how embedded actors, like custodians, can make change. Our findings show the complex machinations of stability as ideas are held and renewed by diverse actors and activities across time.

Our conceptualization of institutional renewal also offers richer insight into the observation that while institutions can prompt inequality, they may also be important vehicles for reducing inequality (Amis, Munir, & Mair, 2017). Inequities have long divided Detroiters as narratives around "laziness" and "inefficiency" of water management were used to maintain or gain power. Growing inequalities in water access and affordability have even caused water to be termed the "new civil rights movement" (Walton, 2016). However, the water shutoffs elicited a shared connection to renewal of public water services that bridged some of these divisions, crossing numerous political and racial divides in Detroit in a way that issues such as poverty, lack of streetlights, food insecurity, and housing blight never had. Building on prior work on the potential for shared traditions to diminish or flatten status hierarchies

(Shils, 1981), our theorizing on renewal suggests that long-held institutions with broadly accepted values (e.g., water public services, healthcare, education, democracy, etc.) may be able to serve as a bridge or rallying point between diverse groups. The resonance of the institution can unite heterogeneous custodians as they work toward institutional renewal, providing crucial points of intersection that have the potential to cross, and create ties across, institutionalized boundaries and divisions.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study has two key limitations. First, we focus on a single case and are therefore not yet able to fully define the boundaries of our theory. For instance, water institutions may be unusually amenable to the passionate and varied custodianship efforts we identify due to cultural, emotional, spiritual, and religious attachments. However, our work here, and anecdotal evidence, suggests that while water may engender powerful attachments, these are a difference of degree, not of kind. The dedication and emotions exhibited by custodians of public healthcare systems, public education, religions, and constitutions of nations (e.g., democracy, gun rights) demonstrates similar passions and heterogeneous custodian involvement. Further, water institutions are widespread and longstanding, as are many other institutions. We expect that diverse users of these similar institutions may help to engender the heterogeneous custodial support we observed herein. Future research might explore whether other institutions can inspire the same forms of heterogeneous custodianship observed in Detroit. Additionally, questions such as how many custodians are required, which types will act or be needed in different contexts, and how they interact bears further study beyond our current case.

Second, the social movement literature is highly related to our study and tells us a great deal about the nature of mobilization and the power of injustice frames (e.g., Benford, 1997). While we draw from this important literature, we deliberately focus on institutional custodianship. Our custodianship approach more accurately captures the loyalties and roles of all of our custodians, many of whom would not consider themselves, and would not be considered by others, to be members of a movement. Custodians we identify are therefore distinct from, although overlapping and interrelated with, multiple movements around the environment, water, justice, and race that we have highlighted. Studying interactions and intersections between movements, activists, and custodians will provide interesting future research opportunities. For custodianship research, this might include attention to how custodians frame institutional challenges to mobilize activists and how they manage their own dual commitments. For social movement research, these opportunities include how and when movements use institutional loyalties and frames, as well as needed insights on the relative roles and capacities of activists (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The water shutoffs and affordability crisis we captured in Detroit is improving, but was by no means fully resolved by mid-2019. The renewal activities of custodians captured in this study, however, have had important reverberations not only in Michigan, but also for the institution of public water services more broadly. Subsequent water conflicts in Ireland, other areas in the United States (Baltimore, Flint, and Standing Rock), and South Africa continued as of mid-2019 to draw on the energy and resources renewed in Detroit. Often now terming themselves water "protectors" or "defenders," custodians have stimulated broad public awareness that water and water services are neglected and require active protection. Another lesson of the Detroit conflict and its custodians is that water crises will disproportionately impact the economically vulnerable as well as communities of color—deepening disparities and sparking conflicts. Our insights suggest that longstanding water institutions, and other disrupted institutions, may either succumb to entropic or more agentic forces or may serve as a rallying point for the emergence of unexpected coalitions that have the rare potential to cross ideological and political divides. Custodians of different stripes may, in turn, find that leveraging powerful shared institutions will be a valuable tool in the effort to address growing social inequalities and to protect resources in crisis.

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