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Original Article

An LGTBIQ + archival boom? Grassroot archival activism and memory politics in Latin America

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Abstract

The formation of LGTBIQ + community archives across Latin America has increased significantly recently, becoming vehicles for challenging cis-heteronormative narratives of the past and pushing the limits of democracy. This article asks how and since when did queer/trans archiving, curating, and displaying material become articulated as activism in Latin America? What are the cultural and political meanings of these practices, and how do these relate to a global community archival boom? To answer these questions, we mapped 55 LGTBIQ + community archives and developed a discourse analysis of their digital content. This analysis highlights references to memory as an active political process to critically engage with the past and disrupt the progress narratives of democratisation in the present. We argue that the Latin America case should be understood within the hybridisation of a global rise of archival activism and a shared grammar of using the past as a political tool.

Keywords

archival activism, Latin America, queer archive, social movements, LGTBIQ+ activism, , ,

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Introduction

In May 1980, the Brazilian gay newspaper *Lampião da Esquina* featured the First Brazilian Meeting of Homosexuals as its cover story. In this issue, *Lampião* included a small section titled "Memória guei" (gay memory), inviting readers to contribute to a sort of archival fund:

> For some years now, the Brazilian press has been giving significant attention to the issue of homosexuality […] To ensure that all this material isn't lost in time and space, the *Lampião* newspaper decided to organise a Memory of everything that has been or will be published about homosexuality. For this, we ask for the collaboration of readers to send us the originals or Xerox copies of this material.[1]

This excerpt demonstrates that concerns about LGTBIQ + memory and archiving are not new. Indeed, many activists across Latin America have collected copies of the movement's ephemera, newspaper clippings, and photographs for decades. During the transition from dictatorships or authoritarian regimes to democracies, activists invested time in archiving ephemera and crafting a counter-memory to expand the limits of emerging citizenship. While using the past started as an impulse of authors/actors (Trindade, 2002) to complement their political action, in the twenty-first century, collective archival activism became a central form of LGTBIQ + political action. The impact of archival activism is reflected in the fact that today, there are at least 55 LGTBIQ + community archival projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. This article aims to understand this "archival boom" as an expression of the queer/trans uses of the past as a meaningful tool for LGTBIQ + community and political action. We ask ourselves: How and since when did queer/trans practices of archiving, curating, and displaying material about LGTBIQ + life become articulated as activism in Latin America? What are the cultural and political meanings of these practices, and how do they relate to or differ from a global community archival boom and, in particular, a queer/trans archival boom? We answer these questions by developing a mapping of LGTBIQ + community archives and a discourse analysis of their digital content to identify their particular political grammar.[2]

Scholars have analysed this boom by focusing on singular archives (Antoniucci, 2020; Fraccaroli, 2023; Guerrero Mc Manus, 2024; Rizki, 2020; Salerno, 2023) or examining national and local case studies (Simonetto & Butierrez, 2023; Macías-González, n.d; Menezes Neto and Barcelos Soliva, 2023; Saxe, 2023). However, there is still a gap for a cohesive regional perspective that contributes to moving beyond a Global (North) understanding of queer archives, which is always at risk of becoming a homogeneous mainstream narrative. This article contributes to a regional perspective that acknowledges how the circulation and hybridisation of local/global political grammars and the south-south dynamics have shaped this boom (Grimaldi and Gukelberger, 2023). While previous efforts from a regional perspective have analysed LGBT + museology (Boita et al., 2020) and the formation of an LGTBIQ + museums and archives network (Bisso Schmidt and Mascarenhas Neto, 2021), our research proposes a radical contextualisation of the "archival boom" to understand its unique regional characteristics (Varela Huerta, 2023: 30).

Analysing this boom requires a thorough engagement with these archival initiatives and the conceptual tools we might use to make sense of it. As cuir/queer and travesti/trans hemispheric critiques have emphasised, gender and sexual categories are neither fixed nor universal (De Perra, 2015; Domínguez Ruvalcaba, 2016; Pierce et al., 2021; Rizki, 2019; Sacchi et al., 2021). Similarly, we argue that categories like "community archive," "archival activism," and "queer archives" require careful and critical engagement in this context as they stem from different geopolitical contexts. While scholars of archival turn have analysed the rising interest in the past as a tool of social movements to formulate an intervention in the neoliberal context (Eichhorn, 2014), there is a risk of relying on a universal causal relation that overlooks regional/local dynamics. Drawing on cultural studies as an "ethic of reciprocity […] a mutual practice of both speaking and learning" (Couldry, 2020: 293), we approach this discussion with attention to the productive tensions and limits of applying global categories to specific contexts. This means remaining cautious of the risks of framing archives from a supposedly universal concept that operates in abstract, as if these concepts were not also situated and partial (Szulc, 2023: 6). On that note, we argue that beyond the essential dimensions of gender and sexuality, these archives must be understood through a distinctly Latin American political grammar of memory (Rizki, 2020; Salerno, 2023). This grammar not only shapes how the past is mobilised as a political force but also as one that transforms the conception of the archive and memory itself (Rufer, 2010). We argue that a shared post-dictatorship context has given rise to a Latin American LGTBIQ + archival activism—a framework that intersects with but also diverges from archival concepts rooted in other genealogies.

This article is organised into three sections. The first summarises our methodology of mapping and discourse analysis. The second radically contextualises this archival boom, showing the role of the south-south interplay. Finally, we analyse the archives' digital content to show why these archival works should be read in the context of the meaningful political role of memory in Latin American democratisation processes.

Some methodological notes

We developed a mapping exercise to understand the archival boom that identified 55 LGTBIQ + community archival projects. While mapping has been used as a feminist method centred on participant experiences of space (Fileborn, 2023), we deploy it as a research method to situate these archives (and the collected publicly available documents) in space and time. Our database is formed by publicly available digital content collected from LGTBIQ + archives that define themselves as community-based (excluding museums or public institutions). We deploy the term "archival activism" to define community-based archives that, along with preserving documents and collecting testimonies of LGTBIQ + life experiences, mobilise memory as a tool of political intervention (Rigney, 2024).

We described these archives using these categories: their name, how they identify or label themselves (used gender and/or sexuality categories), their year of foundation, and their geographical location, including the country, city, and whether they are based in a capital or urban area. We also considered how they present themselves to the public and

their motivations for founding an archive. Additionally, we considered the materiality of their collections: the presence of life history narratives, ephemeral materials, and the archive format (whether virtual, physical, or itinerant). While we acknowledge that some archives place strong emphasis on traditional archival practices, others are built entirely through virtual means. Our methodology does not establish a hierarchy between virtual and analogue archival practices, but rather sees them as interconnected processes. Digitalisation is key for many archives due to the nature of the collections (many of the owners of the documents prefer to lend them temporarily rather than permanently), the demands of funders to make them freely accessible and the organisation's strategies to become visible. Even if not the goal of this article, we recognise the need to develop a critical stance toward this pressure to digitalise driven by funding bodies and how this is shaping archives. Finally, we assessed whether the initiative was individual or collective, the types of activities they organised, and whether they maintained an active presence on social media or an institutional website. We also collected information from digital media to complement this information. This process deepened our understanding of how these archives engage with their communities and the specific motivations, formats, and organisational structures that shape their existence.

In our search to identify how gender, sexuality, and memory politics are entangled in the archival boom, we also analysed the texts in which these archives presented their projects online (e.g., sections such as "about us"). We coded these texts to identify common discourses that allow us to establish connections beyond individual cases. We define discourse as 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic' (Hall, 2018: 155). In this regard, we considered these projects' underlying notions and frameworks to encode and communicate their activities and missions to a broader audience. To 'decode' and interpret these discourses, we grouped them into main discourse groups, cross-reading them with literature based on community archives, archival activism, and the archival turn.

Our interest in understanding the development of this boom is anchored and affected by our relationship with archival projects in Latin America. Following recent debates about the need to distinguish reflexivity practices from the mere performative nature of some positionality statements, Gani and Khan (2024: 9) contend that such statements can subtly reinforce power structures and should be employed only when particularly valuable or necessary. In our case, highlighting our positionality arises from our deep personal and professional engagement with archives and understanding how these entanglements in the field can affect our analysis. The first author, a PhD student and community archivist, has been engaged with Acervo Bajubá for five years, combining perspectives as an archivist and researcher. The second author, a scholar working on Latin American queer/trans histories and a user of these archives, has developed various initiatives of collaboration with them. In that context, while this archival emergence seemed visible to us, almost like common sense, we recognised the importance of interrogating our perspective and not taking this visibility for granted. Our desire to craft this regional perspective is also informed by what Charles Hale (2006) has defined as the productive tensions between cultural critique and activist research - this means making visible how our double affiliations as researchers and as members (Fraccaroli) and supporters (Simonetto) of these projects play a role in a grounded analysis that is not neutral but also crossed by politics/affections.

Mapping the archival boom

In a recent book of oral history testimonies published by the *Archivo de la Memoria Trans* (AMT), an elderly trans woman called Cinthia Aguilar writes:

I was obsessed with photos and had many albums stored in my house. When I went to Europe, they broke into my home, took it over, stole from me, and I lost everything. I imagine those albums were taken because they saw trans women in them. (AMT, 2024: 14)

This testimony shows that this desire for archiving - as a reaction to the precarious living conditions of trans women in Latin America - was necessary for the emergence of LGTBIQ + archival projects and extended beyond activism. Considering that 'archives do not arise from thin air' (Hall, 2001: 89) - we are aware that conceptualising this emergence as a "boom" risks erasing the archival contexts that made these uses of the past possible (Ketelaar, 2023: 45). Many of the analysed projects were built upon previous individual collections that then configured a new political archival meaning. As an example, the AMT was initially envisioned by the activist Claudía Pía Baudracco (1970-2012) and the director of the archive María Belen Correa, two activists who, in 1993, created one of the first trans organisations in the country, the Argentine Association of Travestis (ATA). The same year that trans activists pushed the Argentine government to pass the Gender Identity Law (2012)- one of the most comprehensive legislations protecting trans rights - Claudia Pía Baudracco died, leaving her vast collections of photographs and ephemera to María Belen Correa. María Belen Correa then created a closed Facebook group where trans women uploaded photographs and shared everyday experiences, which would be the seed fund of the team that created a project with now national and international projection (Correa et al., 2019). The practices of archiving and displaying the past as a political tool have a long genealogy in Latin American LGTBIQ + movements. Some examples of this are the Brazilian activist and writer João Silvério Trevisan, founder of one of the first gay liberation groups (*Somos*) - who authored a systematised history of homosexuality from colonial times to democracy (Trevisan, 1986). The Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis (1938-2010) - who was involved in the early Homosexual Liberation Front led by the lesbian activist and theatre director Nancy Cardenás (1971) - is considered a founder of the history of homosexuality in Mexico (Parrini, 2014). Similarly, Carlos Jáuregui, founder of the Argentine Homosexual Community and a professional medievalist historian, wrote *La homosexualidad en Argentina* (1987); the activist and writer Zelmar Acevedo who participated in homosexual activism since the 1970s, published *Homosexualidad: hacia la destrucción de los mitos* (1985); and Néstor Perlongher, founder of the first homosexual liberation movement and sociologist, wrote essays such as *Historia del Frente de liberación Homosexual* (1997[1985]). Beyond gay men's actions as author-activists (Trindade, 2002), travestis/trans activists have advocated for the need to produce shared-collective authorship of the past. Even if not involved with archival activism, the Argentine activist Lohana Berkins theorised on the need to articulate a collective narration of Latin American travestis that transcended individual testimonies, articulating experiences coded and passed down over time through orality, as to go beyond their precarious lives (which in many cases ended at young ages as a result of extreme social exclusion and violence) (Berkins interviewed by Jones, 2008).

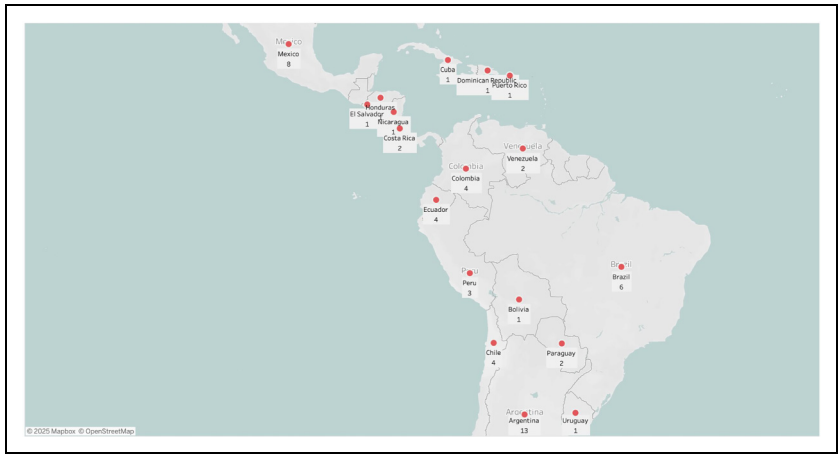

Figure 1. LGBTIQ + archives per country in Latin America and the Caribbean. Map generated by Tableau.

LGTBIQ + archival activism has acquired a new robust extension and political meaning in the twenty-first century. While our mapping (Figure 1) risks conveying a static uniform representation of a dynamic process, we propose it not as a depiction of reality but rather as a constructed lens shaped by data that the authors have selectively included and omitted, much like archival work itself (Ketelaar, 2023: 38). For example, while we included projects such as *Archivo Arkhé* (Colombia), they are not visually represented on the map as they are located in Madrid. The tensions in locating geographically (and socially/culturally) archival projects could be traced to the challenges for "queer methodologies" to capture the experiences of subjects characterised by fluidity and migration (Ghaziani and Brim, 2020: 4–5). Understanding the geographies of archival practices in Latin America demands acknowledging that many collections travelled and were transformed by LGTBIQ + migrants who escaped social exclusion and discrimination in their homelands. The mobile nature of these collections challenges a mainstream understanding of archives as static institutions grounded in one place and time. The preservation of these collections reflects the uncertainty and mobility of LGTBIQ + lives, in which some traces survive the precarity while many documents are lost in movement or sometimes erased by families of origin (Freire, 2025: 80). Likewise, this visual representation could invite misinterpretations associated with a ranking of modernity and progress in the region that associates either the expansion of rights or community initiatives to a standard of desired Western civilisation (Delatolla, 2020). In contrast, we propose this map as a window to read dynamic processes, as the trace of archival activism in the region where the synergy of previous activist traditions, democratisation, activists networks and funding infrastructure converged in the formation of a unique political grammar of memory politics based on the aesthetics and languages of archives.

Latin American queer archives are primarily an urban phenomenon, with over half of the projects located in the capital cities of their respective countries. For those outside the

capital cities, these archives are based in regional capitals, such as Cali, Guayaquil, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Guadalajara, Valparaiso, and Pachuca. Rather than an anomaly, the urban prevalence of these archives reflects LGTBIQ + migratory patterns to big cities and global trends of associating queer/trans experiences to the urban landscape (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014: 758). While urban archives might always be at risk of invisibilising rural LGTBIQ + experiences, this does not mean that this archival activism ignores other spaces. Due to the migrant nature of these collections and the thematic expansion of archival activism to preserve LGTBIQ + heritage beyond activism, many archives capture a diversity of life experiences that move beyond the binary urban/rural. For example, in Sara Lugo's personal collection from the Archivo Memoria Trans México, a photo from 1966 depicts the neighbourhood of Azcapotzalco, in Mexico City. Today it is densely populated, but in the photo's description, Sara notes: "It was my grandfather's house; when they arrived in Azcapotzalco, it was much less populated."[3] In the photograph, we can see an adult with a child in a rural setting. Documents like this one capture the difficulties in establishing a strict distinction between rural and urban because these archives work with lives that move across those boundaries, and are located in cities where these two universes are blurred.

Quantifying the regional disparities in the extension of this phenomenon is central to locating LGTBIQ + archival activism in relationship with local traditions of memory activism. There is a clear predominance of archival initiatives in Argentina (thirteen), followed by Mexico (eight), Brazil (six), Colombia (four), Chile (four), and Ecuador (four). Except for Costa Rica (two), Central America and the Caribbean exhibit a pattern of one archive per country, with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. A Pearson correlation analysis between the number of archival projects per country and their population suggests a moderate positive linear correlation of 0.51, particularly among the most populous countries. However, certain factors challenge the assumption that population size directly correlates with the number of archival projects. Argentina, for instance, leads with 13 initiatives, double the number in Brazil, which has nearly five times Argentina's population. This disparity is also evident in Mexico, which has eight initiatives, despite having half the population of Brazil.

When combining the geographical disparities with the temporality of the development of this archival boom, we noticed that rather than being geographically isolated projects or local branches of a global archival turn, regional circulation played a key role in configuring this specific form of archival activism. The visualisation of the evolution of this boom (Figure 2) contrasts with the Global North temporal narrative about the archival turn - which argues that this process happened in the 1990s and the 2000s in the academia and arts (Callahan, 2024; Marshall and Tortorici, 2022). It also contrasts with the temporalities proposed by scholarship on the 'community archives' movement in the anglophone world, which located the origin of these practices in the English nineteenth-century antiquarian societies and its grassroot transformations in the 1970s and 1980s (Flinn, 2007: 155–156). In contrast with the Anglophone movement rooted in the protest cycles of the late 1960s - which included "antiwar, feminist, civil rights, gay, and student activism" (Sheffield, 2017: 352), the Latin American boom is premised on a political context shaped by human rights movements and activism against dictatorships and its legacies (see next section.)

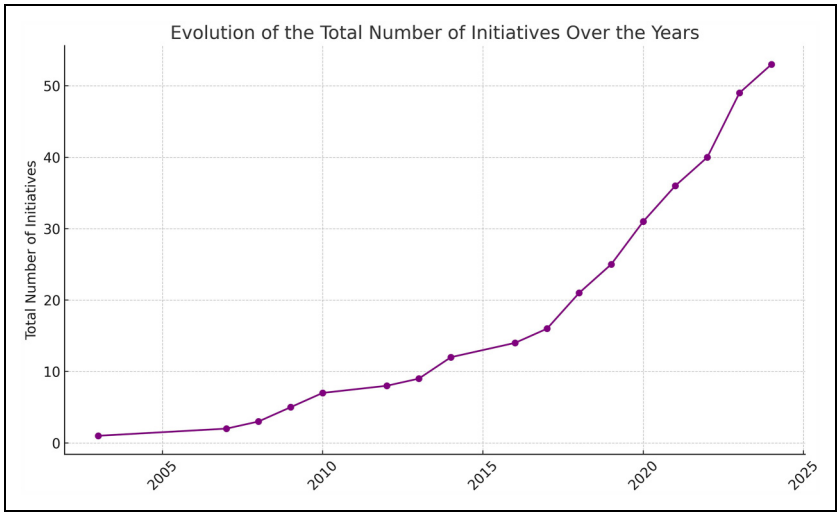

Figure 2. Evolution of archives over the years.

The exponential growth of archival projects since 2014 can be explained by different factors. One is related to the exponential development of new digital infrastructure and the accessibility to archival training online. Also, this may have been directly boosted by the circulation and reinvention of the model proposed by the Argentine AMT. Their influence is referenced by several archives, such as *Honduras Cuir,*[4] *Archivo Memoria Trans México,*[5] and the *Museo Nacional Cuir* (Chile),[6] who openly acknowledge their relationship in their presentation statements. The influence of the AMT, is also reflected in the predominant role that trans women and travestis have had in this boom (having a predominant role in at least 35% of the projects) - as more recently reflected in the 1st Latin American Trans Archives conference.[7]

The circulation of the AMT model also mobilised a radical question about national temporalities associated with democratisation processes. This is reflected in the frequency of the term "memory" in the name of these archival projects, which could be based on the role of memory politics in democratisation (Jelin, 2003). These archives, as many LGTBIQ + activists did in the 1980s and 1990s, have worked in dialogue with the human rights advocacy against the authoritarian legacies in the new-born democracies - calling attention to the continuity of repressive practices against gender and sexual-non conforming communities. How these archives display these documents acts as a challenge to a cis-heteronormative temporality of democracy that supposed a binary distinction between authoritarian and democratic times, usually overlooking the experiences of those who experienced state violence. Concretely, the AMT archival activism model became effective for those seeking to radically reconsider the content of the concept of democracy itself by raising questions about who has been welcomed and considered full citizens of those democracies.

This memory and archival turn of LGTBIQ + politics resonates with how memory politics have shaped archival discussions in Latin America within the contexts of transitional

justice and human rights claims (Giraldo Lopera, 2017). As shown in many of the archives' presentation statements, activating an LGTBIQ + past became a tool to reinvent concepts of justice, memory and democracy usually constrained by cis-heteronormativity. For example, the *Archivo Digital del Sindicato Afrodita de Valparaíso* (Chile) presents the project as the "result of a long struggle by the trans community in Chile and the elderly survivors of the dictatorship."[8] *Las Maricas No Olvidamos* (Ecuador) narrates the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1997 with the repeal of Article 517 in the Ecuadorian Penal Code as a vital but insufficient step, as the legal change did not translate into an automatic improvement of life conditions for the trans community.[9] *Honduras Cuir* also situates its archival work within a broader historical context of violence and erasure faced by LGBT communities, as well as within the contemporary political scene (Fraccaroli et al., 2025), where former president Juan Orlando Hernández declared defenders of LGBTQ + rights, women's rights, and environmental protection as enemies of national independence in 2021.[10] This orientation is also evident in specific activities within archival projects that emerged before the 2014 boom. Formed in 2010, *Acervo Bajubá* (Brazil) has been gathering testimonies about the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964–1985) that engage with queer and trans perspectives on time, politics, and re-democratisation since 2022.[11] In one testimony, Neon Cunha, a Black and trans activist, critiques the Brazilian National Truth Commission: 'Let's stop with this nonsense. Because I am a daughter of the dictatorship until the 2000s […] So to say it ended in 1985… for whom? I continued to be Black, poor, and trans."[12]

The model of the AMT is also expressed in hybrid formations like "memory archive" or "museum of the memory", which reflect not only the circulation of a particular regional model but also a broader Latin American historical context in which notions of archive are permeated by what we call the open grammar of memory politics. Simply put, if the AMT model of archival activism has circulated (though not the only driving factor nor an "authentic" model), it seems logical to infer that certain cultural, political, and historical conditions have created space for it.

This contested use of memory is more than shaping different accounts of the past; the materials these archives preserve and how they organise and display them challenge the mainstream representation of the archive itself. In contrast with official archives in which LGTBIQ + histories have usually been constrained to records of police detention or medical examination, archival activism has amplified what is deemed worth archiving - from photographs of parties to beauty contest sashes. The investment in other types of objects, usually neglected by state-owned archives, opens possibilities to create different affective relationships with the past in which repression coexists with solidarity and joy. Notwithstanding, these expansions of the shape and operation of the archive do not mean a total disfiguration from the traditional archival forms. In fact, despite the scarcity of resources and different levels of professionalisation, the archives we analyse usually follow what is commonly known as an archive in everyday language. This stretching of the forms of archiving differs from the usual metaphoric use of the archive as a concept of cultural critique (Cifor and Wood, 2017).

In summary, queer archival activism in Latin America hinges on the ability to gather ephemera from the past and to establish and sustain it as a platform for current political

action, advocating for alternate political futures grounded in a shared sense of community. This process depends on three main factors: (i) the availability or potential creation of relevant records, (ii) the political conditions that support such archival work today—encompassing organisational, representational, and economic aspects, and (iii) the cultural recognition of this archival practice as a legitimate form of political engagement.

Shared grammars of (LGTBIQ+) memory

In March 2024, an Argentine tribunal sentenced ten state agents for their involvement in the persecution and violation of human rights against trans women during the last dictatorship (1976-1983).[13] This recognition did not occur as a passive extension of the political category of the victim to include trans people. It was the result of activists' political pressure, with trans archival activism playing a crucial role. According to the director of AMT, the archive contributed eight key testimonies to the case. These testimonies, gathered and published strategically at critical moments, made their way to prosecutors and were subsequently incorporated into the trial (Fraccaroli et al. 2025). A few months before the trial decision, in November 2023, the province of Santa Fe passed a bill entitled "Historical Reparation Law for Post-Dictatorship Travesti-Trans Survivors," which established a monthly pension equivalent to two minimum wages for those trans women who were victims of state violence between 10 December 1983, and 10 June 2010. The *Archivo de la Memoria Travesti/Trans de Santa Fé* had a key role in supporting the working group of trans activists promoting the bill (called "Mesa de Reparación Travesti-Trans Santa Fe").[14] These examples of archival activism show how trans movements have been mobilising their community history to achieve social and economic reparation. As other scholars have pointed out, trans claims for historical reparation invite a reconsideration of the concepts of "democracy" and "citizenship" (Rizki, 2020b).

Based on the analysis of the archives' presentation statements, we identified that they critically used human rights as a framing discourse to claim the recognition of LGTBIQ + as victims of state and social violence. This reinvention of the rhetoric of memory and human rights is expressed in how these archives use the verbs prefixed with "re" (e.g., recuperate, recover, reconstruct, recompile) to signify their action over memory. These demands for LGTBIQ + acknowledgement propose a reconfiguration of the traditional discourses of human rights and social memory, challenging its cis-heterosexual bias by making visible the experiences of these communities on their own terms. As we argued, by highlighting how these categories excluded LGTBIQ + people, archival activists use and produce new contested meanings of memory and human rights. For example, the *Archivo Digital del Sindicato Afrodita de Valparaíso* asserts:

This event is the result of the activism of the trans community in Chile and elderly survivors of the dictatorship, who have historically denounced the omission of their survival testimonies, the lack of social recognition and the absence of reparation for the systematic violence experienced before, during and after the military regime that ruled the country between 1973 and 1990.[15]

As other scholars have proposed, "memory agents" are not neutral; they act over collective memory organisation and configuration and it is through these interventions that they challenge and transform how memory is socially conceived (Lifschitz, 2014). By

articulating archival work conveying oral testimonies and personal collections (particularly under the genre of life story), archival activism shares and reconfigures the political grammars of social memory across different contexts. An example of this can be seen in the statements of the *Archivo Memoria Trans México,* which emphasises the importance of reconstructing memory as a path to denounce state violence.[16] The Peruvian *Archivo Marica* turns to the past to "listen to the ancestors" and "register collective memory," reclaiming it as a shared resource for social justice.[17] As in the Peruvian case, many archives usually deploy notions of ancestrality and family that move beyond cis-heteronormative frameworks to identify the intergenerational nature of their work. Archival activism becomes a vehicle to build queer and trans kinship, bridges between the living and the dead in which the past is reimagined and belonging is reconfigured in the present. In this sense, these archives go beyond the idea of bloodlines—as has been critiqued by scholars who argue that a focus on blood ties and a bio-essentialist mapping of those disappeared by dictatorships in Latin America has limited the understanding of trauma, preventing a broader engagement with its social and collective dimensions (Sosa, 2014). However, LGTBIQ + archives also work with living people who usually contributed with their own personal collections. As Angel Natan from *Acervo Bajubá* argues, archival also involves practices of care and intergenerational learning, in particular through the embodied recognition of people beyond their historical or political importance. In her own words

preserving objects is important, but people are also memories. There is no point in setting up an archive for it to remain tucked away, or to exalt a living person as merely an object, without acknowledging and celebrating that person. It's like the need to give flowers in life. (Fraccaroli et al. 2025: 102–103)

In Cali (Colombia), *Estrellas Fucsias/Historias Enraizadas (Fundación Santa María)* paints pink stars on the streets with the names of trans victims of social violence, reconfiguring a practice of the National Traffic Institute of marking accident sites with yellow stars. This initiative frames collective and individual memories as vital tools for defending the human rights of trans women.[18] The organisation played a central role in a historic case where the Colombian State became the first in the Inter-American human rights system to issue a public apology for the death of a trans person, Raiza Isabela Salazar.[19]

As expressed in the last section, these archives' shared and contested uses of memory are usually framed around a narration of the past coded in what they defined as their "own terms". This epistemological position challenges multiple mechanisms of knowledge construction and representation, such as the historical narration of queer/trans bodies from the perspective of science and/or the tabloid stigmatising portrayals of queer life. Archival activism reclaims the power to label, produce and curate a past on their own terms. These archives frame their work as an effort to make present—through preservation, narration, or archival evidence—what has been systematically subjected to violence, discrimination, and erasure. *Archivo Qi'Wa* (Bolivia) captures this urgency by describing LGBTIQ + history as "threatened and burned,"[20] emphasising the need to preserve these documents; a mission shared among all the initiatives. Thereby, it is in this arena that, beyond the denouncement of the State, the press and journalists are also identified as significant contributors to both LGBT + invisibility and hypervisibility, often shaped by

stereotypes and prejudiced portrayals. A striking example of this critical stance toward the media is found in the Museo LGBT/Guadalajara (Mexico), which defines itself as a space dedicated to examining "how the media saw trans, gay, and lesbian people."[21]

This exercise of reframing LGTBIQ + history builds upon a grounded methodology in which the reference to a common-memory/past overtakes identitarian discussion about categorisation - a theme frequently represented by scholarship in debates about hemispheric queer/cuir and travesti/trans studies (Pierce et al., 2021). *Archivo Qi'Wa* is the only one to integrate Indigenous cosmology as a core element of its archival framework, with *qi'wa* being a Quechua concept referring to a person embodying both masculine and feminine traits.[22] In critiquing Global North categories, the *Archivo Histórico del Movimiento de Lesbianas-Feministas en México, Yan María Yaoyólotl* (Mexico) defines itself as a lesbian feminist movements archive, explicitly excluding categories such as "GLBTTTI, drag, trans, non-binary," and "especially queer."[23] The rationale provided is that these groups, as part of the so-called sexual diversity, have access to substantial resources to document their histories. Other examples are the *Archivo Memoria Marica* (Peru) which proposes the study of *marica* as a "more contextual response than the queer, that clearly is born in the Anglo-Saxon context, and that needs to be adapted to our Peruvian reality".[24] On a different note, *Cubanecuir* acknowledges that "none of these terms come from the Cuban imaginary, but they help us describe the experiences of our community in a dignified and accessible way".[25] Finally, although not explicitly in the description of its purposes, some archives incorporate the notion of "cuir" in their names, such as *Honduras Cuir* and *Colombia Trans Cuir*, as a reappropriation of concepts crafted in the north, making gender and sexual non-conforming experiences legible in their contexts.

Another common trend in archival activism discourse is a reference to memory as an embodied living experience through terms such as *memoria viva* (living memory) or *encarnada* (in the flesh). The conception of memory as a living practice also translates into how these archives interrogate the documents they preserve and how these documents can be activated and mobilised to produce something else. A compelling example of this embodied memory/archive paradigm is the *Archivo de La Memoria Transmasculina* (Mexico), which defines itself as a

space for producing self-defined forms of knowledge" that not only "seeks to trace the past through efforts to search for and verify historical information […] but also to build memory based on embodied experiences shared during the lives of transmasculine people.[26]

Similarly, the archival project *Traviarcado - Documentando La Cultura Travesti* and the *Archivo Memoria Trans Paraguay*, both based in Paraguay, emphasise the importance of "producing self-defined narratives to grant autonomy, transforming travestis into active narrators of their histories," and the "need to remember all our experiences and to continue exercising collective memory," respectively.[27]

In summary, LGTBIQ + archival activism in Latin America shares and contests political grammars of social memory with human rights movements. By mobilising the past and claiming a new status in narratives of social reparation, these archives invite us to reconsider the reach of the historical conceptualisation of democracy, archives and LGTBIQ + history itself.

Final words

In this article, we have analysed the rise of an LGTBIQ + archival boom in Latin America and the Caribbean. By combining a mapping exercise with a discourse analysis of their digital content, we show that these cultural practices (archiving and displaying) became possible by articulating previous traditions of queer and trans archiving, and that they became legible in post-dictatorial contexts through their interactions with discussions about human rights and democratisation. By sharing but also contesting the social meanings and materiality of memory and stretching the ways in which LGTBIQ + people are socially remembered, these archives are configured as a new form of political activism that challenges universalising conceptualisations of archives, democracy and LGTBIQ + history itself.

In summary, our research shows that this archival boom has grown in urban spaces particularly strongly since the 2010s, but that was only possible by reconfiguring previous activists' practices of archiving and memory. In our goal to challenge the reduction of the Latin American and the Caribbean case as a branch of a global archival turn (referring this to queer archives or not), we identified south-south dynamics playing a key role, in particular, the impact of the AMT model in the multiplication of archival projects in the region. We are not arguing here that this boom should be considered as something totally autonomous, but instead, we advocate for weighting the local dynamics and contexts that made it possible as a path to conceptualise our approach to archival activism. This means to consider this phenomenon not as a subjugated branch of a turn defined in the Global North, but rather an invitation to scholars in the anglophone world to also situate their conceptual turns in the global cultural landscape. To see the northern archival turn as (a very influential) one of the multiple turns happening across the globe.

This article is an invitation for an open research agenda that considers LGBTBIQ + archives as a zone of contact between the past and the future. While acknowledging the role that these community archives have in the advancement of historical knowledge, we call to ponder their potential for mobilising new imaginations of the past and making more joyful futures possible.

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Notes

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