



# Archival traditions in Latin America

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## Abstract

This paper surveys archival traditions coexisting in Latin America and identifies key moments in the region's development of archives and archival practices. First, different record-keeping practices in pre-Hispanic communities are identified. Second, an Iberian conception of the archive is described in the case of colonial archival practices between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Third, changes resulting from independence movements and the subsequent arrival of the Latin archival tradition are documented. Fourth, the emergence of an Ibero-American archival tradition is posited, which is State-sponsored and institutional and the product of a postwar context. Lastly, the turns and shifts these traditions are experiencing due to social conflict and transformations taking place in the region since the late twentieth century are presented, associated with marginal practices and with close attention being paid to users.

**Keywords** Latin America · Archival science · State security archives · National archives · Personal archives · Community archives · Archival traditions

## Resumen

Este artículo estudia las tradiciones archivísticas que conviven en América Latina y estudia momentos claves para el desarrollo de los archivos y las prácticas archivísticas. Inicia con el reconocimiento de diferentes prácticas de registro de información en las comunidades prehispánicas. En segundo lugar, aborda prácticas archivísticas coloniales entre los siglos XVI y XIX, donde imperan la concepción de los archivos ibéricos. En tercer lugar, estudia los cambios producidos por las independencias y la llegada de la tradición archivística latina. En cuarto lugar, reconoce la formación de una tradición archivística iberoamericana, producto del contexto de posguerra de corte estatal e institucional. Por último, aborda los giros que estas tradiciones están experimentado a partir de los conflictos y las transformaciones sociales que se han

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dado en la región desde finales del siglo XX, donde se reconocen prácticas marginales y centra su atención en las personas.

**Palabras clave** América Latina · Archivística · Archivos de seguridad de Estado · Archivos nacionales · Memoria · Tradiciones archivísticas

## Introduction

Ever since the first archives were created in Antiquity and up until the present day, every community has resorted to practices aimed at preserving records in a systematic way. These practices are determined by ontological and epistemological conceptions, by their respective contexts, and by professional practice, among many other factors. It is to these converging elements that we refer to here as archival traditions. These traditions go beyond specific practices and behaviors in the community implementing them, however. They include subjective values and the less tangible elements of professional consciousness related to the identity and the mission underpinning such behaviors (Gilliland 1991).

Among the different ways of approaching such traditions, attention must be paid to those features that single out specific or idiosyncratic archival practices within a given region. Such specificities are associated with how archival thought and practice have evolved under the influence of historic, social, legal, and geopolitical forces, and the theories that ground them (Cruz Mundet 1998). These traditions have been informed, among other factors, by historical developments in their regions, government administrative structures, social practices, the way in which the archives are used, language, and outside influences (Gilliland 2017).

Consequently, this paper explores archival traditions that have coexisted in Latin America. To that end, a historical survey is presented, beginning with the pre-Hispanic world. Then, we explore the colonization period between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. We move on to the independence movements and the emergence of new Republics between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Then, we go through the consequences World War II brought to archival practice. And, finally, we conclude with the new directions that archival practices have taken as a result of technological and social changes in the region.

## Theoretical framework and methods

Archival practices are situated in ever-evolving social, political, economic, and technological contexts. They are informed by the actions of people and institutions, by the roles they play, and by technological advances at a given point (Ketelaar 2020). It is not possible to speak of the archive without thinking of the action of archiving, and such action is not only carried out by practitioners; it also involves people, institutions, and society at large (Blasco Gallardo 2010).

Every archival tradition in the world exists, in turn, within different archival paradigms. Approaches to the concept of archival paradigm take the notion of paradigm advanced by Thomas Kuhn (1971). A paradigm is understood as an established system or mental model, including beliefs, values, and premises that the scientific community holds regarding a phenomenon or reality. Such a model may be considered valid during the time it effectively answers questions posed by the said scientific community. An archival paradigm is a logical framework that has its own ways of understanding archives and archival science. In this sense, there are different frameworks that do not necessarily exclude each other and, in many cases, coexist with each other. For a discussion, see Bonal Zazo (2012), Gilliland (2017) and Cook (2013). For the purposes of this paper, the notion Cook (2013) proposes is embraced. The paradigms operate at different levels, be them conceptual (theories, principles, conceptions of the archive), functional (archival systems, records management processes, policies), or professional (training and professional practice).

While certain homologous elements are present in archives throughout the world, every archival tradition grounds its practice on distinctive theoretical principles or premises, for instance, record provenance, life cycle, continuum, among others. In turn, archival systems and records management processes are shaped by the political configurations, administrative divisions, and social contexts existing in each country. Those systems and processes will then vary according to epistemological principles and will determine the nature of training, how long it takes, and the resulting professional identity.

Even so, there will always be marginal archival practices, such as those existing in local areas, and the ones implemented by small communities and indigenous groups, which are never regulated or given any consideration under nationwide archival systems. Such practices obey diverse ontological, ideological, or linguistic considerations and are usually reluctant to incorporate methods that have been promoted by governments, the business sector, or religious institutions. While these practices occur in any possible region, they remain understudied.

Standardizing approaches have tended to encourage homogenization in archival practices, so as to enhance the exchange of data, methods, and knowledge. Nevertheless, such an undertaking is impossible to achieve in its entirety, as there will always be local variations and alternative solutions to specific problems (Gilliland 2017).

Therefore, it is important to study the specificities surrounding archival traditions against the background of how a given society deals with cultural difference, power relations, individualism, or uncertainty. Likewise, comparative research aimed at identifying and understanding archival traditions, as well as past, present, and future contexts, contributes to a critical examination of global exchanges, local specificities, and power relations occurring within them (Gilliland 2017; Ketelaar 1997).

While there has been an interest in the history of archives and archival science since the early twentieth century, it was only in the 1970s that materials offering insight into local or regional specificities, archival practices, and changes in the discipline throughout the world caught the attention of scholars. Studies within that framework have focused on documenting the history of archives and the advances in

the discipline and in training, as well as on describing regional archival systems and legislation from the perspective of mainstream methods.

The present work was conducted through a review of the literature on Latin American archival traditions. To that end, different papers, monographs, dissertations, etc., were surveyed in databases such as Emerald, EBSCO, Scopus, Cambridge, Dialnet, as well as institutional repositories, digital libraries, and Google Scholar. Institutional Web sites of national archives and of universities offering training programs in archival science in different Latin American countries were also explored.

For the purposes of this research, a matrix was designed, following the factors described by Gilliland (2017) based on which archival traditions are constituted: historical context, social practices, the use of archives, outside influence on archival theory and practice, and academic training.

The literature review described above resulted in a general overview of the archival traditions coexisting in Latin America. While certainly not a homogenous territory, the conceptions and practices related to the archive presented here do share a common ground, which will be presented next. The work presented here focuses on the Spanish-speaking areas of the region.

## Results

The results presented here correspond to two themes: (1) predominant State-based archival traditions in Latin America from the pre-Hispanic period to the early twenty-first century and (2) the renewal of those archival traditions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### Predominant archival traditions in Latin America

Influences from different archival traditions have reached Latin America throughout history. These influences have shaped contemporary conceptions of the archive and have guided archival practices taking place in the region. Among these traditions, we find: the Iberian archival tradition during the colonial period; the Latin tradition, which associates archives with an altar to the nation during the nineteenth century; the American records management system of the mid-twentieth century, and, more recently, the Australian tradition of records continuum.

The region we refer to here as Latin America is made up of the territories between the Rio Grande in Mexico and Cape Horn in Chile. Before the European conquest, the region was inhabited by countless indigenous communities, with varying development levels.

Archeological research has documented instances of record-keeping in different forms and mediums by indigenous communities. In the case of Central America, the Aztec, Maya, and Mexican cultures developed writing systems, combined with ideographic, pictographic, and phonetic elements used for the development of calendars, counting systems, and historical, cartographic, or religious record-keeping, through the use of stone, bone, wood, or animal skin in the form of codices (Whittker 2016).

Along the Andes, the Inca established an information transmission system to support bureaucracy and administrate the Empire. The system was based on a network of roads covering territories belonging to modern Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, and Chile. It depended on networks of messengers called *chasquis* and *quipucamayuc*, in charge of transmitting oral messages or messages recorded using *quipu*, a set of cotton strings tied together used to administrate tributes and to keep count of people, lands, stock, and harvests. Similar systems were implemented by governments all over the world to keep control and surveillance over different social sectors (Yeo 2021).

With the advent of colonization, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these lands were incorporated into European states and their administrative, political, religious, and military structures were developed. This in turn resulted in the elimination of the indigenous system, with the concomitant extermination of the population and its regrouping in new communities.

In order to administrate the colonies overseas, the king had resource to two peninsular institutions: the *Casa de contratación* (1503), in charge of trade issues and passenger crossing, and the Council of the Indies (1524), which served as an advisor to the king in legal, religious, and governmental matters. In turn, a total of four viceroyalties were established in the Americas (the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, established during the sixteenth century, and the viceroyalties of the New Kingdom of Granada and Rio de la Plata, established during the eighteenth century).

Each viceroyalty was constituted by a *Real Audiencia* (some viceroyalties such as those of Peru and Mexico had several *audiencias*), a collegiate body serving as a tribunal and enforcing the ordinances issued by the king. Governorates were administrative subdivisions of viceroyalties. Military captaincies corresponded to territories not directly under the control of the viceroyalties, which were in turn administered by *cabildos*. In addition to these, there were also *pueblos* or villages, which were home to the indigenous population and were under the administration of *corregidores* (Lucena 2005). Only European or creole whites were allowed to occupy public office, with wealthy *mestizos* occasionally being an exception to this practice (Herrera 2002).

The colonial administrative system was highly bureaucratic, a characteristic of centralized States. It replicated in the Americas every institution existing in the mainland and resorted to documents and records to establish a link between Spain and the territories overseas (Rubio 2006).

In colonial archives in the Americas, a scribe kept written records of administrative actions as they occurred in different offices and levels of command. The services of a scribe were required by the king and all the way down to the *cabildos*. In some cases, a scribe could also certify documents, or in other words, act as notary public (Rubio 2015).

Following orders from the Spanish monarchy and emulating Spanish custom, records produced by colonial institutions were kept in wooden boxes called “three-lock chests,” which were under the care of the corresponding scribe.

From the sixteenth century onward, and during the colonial period, Spanish monarchs were constantly issuing laws concerning the handling, preservation, and

description of records in archives belonging to different corporations. These regulations were to be followed by colonial officials.

Consequently, Spain brought its own archival tradition along with its institutions and officials. The Spanish enlightened absolutism used this tradition to implement administrative control, enacting in the American territories a tradition of preservation and secrecy, which ultimately ensured both the upholding of the rights of the white population (Spaniards and creoles) as well as the administration of social, political, military, and religious matters from afar. At the same time, such an overzealous approach to the archives of the *cabildo* set the stage for an archival tradition that acknowledged the role of local archives from early on (Rubio 2006).

During the nineteenth century, independence campaigns in Central and South America radically changed the governmental systems in the Latin American territories, and the now independent republics structured new forms of government. Once they had left their former colonies, the Spaniards transferred many of their records back to the mainland, among them those related to botanical expeditions, Inquisition tribunals, and viceroalties. However, the archives belonging to administrative subdivisions, such as the *cabildos*, governorates, and *audiencias* remained in their original locations and continued the traditions and practices inherited from the colonial administration, now in the service of the new republican institutions.

The nascent republics of the nineteenth century then lived through a period of civil wars and political unrest, while at the same time their leaders built the new institutions, laws, and the State's administrative apparatus. Two specific needs rose as a challenge to these leaders: creating the new States and legitimizing their power. In spite of the models for the State that the creole elites had at their disposal (the notion of "Neoclassical republic" and the USA), Latin Europe, the European nations with a Roman-derived culture, served as a referent and model from which they were to adopt their institutions, technical innovations, cultural establishment, etc. Somehow, the Latin American leaders of the new republics managed to maintain an outside source for their own legitimacy, by promoting the conviction that Europe was the cradle of civilization and the goal that the new nations should reach. The Latin American elites turned to Paris as their focal point in Europe, even though England was the greatest world power at the time. It was there that the notion of Latin America first emerged, as homologous to that of Europe, a continent where several races converged, chief among them the Latin race, and its offspring the Hispanic race, the greatest source of civilization (Martínez 2001).

Even so, European ideas were not merely incorporated into the new republics as they arrived. They went through a process of transformation and adaptation, according to local needs. In their own way, all the countries developed eclectic administrative models based on the imaginaries that each one of them had built around Europe.

It is at this point, when European-styled institutions were being adapted and each nation exalted its own emerging identity, that the first national archives appeared in Latin America. These archives were established from the colonial archives left by the Spaniards, whether they were located in one single place, such as in the capital of the viceroalties (Mexico, Peru, Bogota, Buenos Aires), or recovered and compiled by the new republics that were far away from former government centers. Some of the new republics established their national archives based on local

**Table 1** Date of creation of national archives in Latin America

Country	Archive	Date of creation
Mexico	Archivo General y Público de la Nación (Gene	1822
Brazil	Arquivo Público do Império	1838
Cuba	Archivo General de la Real Hacienda	1840
Guatemala	Archivo General de Gobierno	1846
Peru	Archivo Nacional	1861
Colombia	Archivo Nacional	1868
Nicaragua	Archivo General del Gobierno	1896
El Salvador	Archivo General	1865
Paraguay	Archivo Nacional	1870
Venezuela	Archivo General	1877
Honduras	Archivo Nacional	1880
Uruguay	Archivo General Administrativo	1880
Costa Rica	Archivo Nacional	1881
Bolivia	Archivo Nacional	1883
Ecuador	Archivo Nacional	1884
Argentina	Archivo General de la Nación	1821
Panama	Archivo Nacional	1912
Puerto Rico	Archivo Histórico de Puerto Rico	1919
Chile	Archivo Nacional	1927
Dominican Republic	Archivo General de la Nación	1935

*Source* compiled by the author, with information found on the Web sites of each country's general archives

archives that were complemented with records located in the viceregal capital cities. That was the case in the Captaincies of Chile or Uruguay, which formerly depended on the Rio de la Plata viceroyalty. Many Central American countries depended during the colony on the Viceroyalty of New Spain, centered in Mexico City.

Conversely to what had occurred when the colonizers were leaving the former colonies and archives were transferred to the peninsula, the new national archives were supplemented with transcriptions of records located in Spain, and to that end several commissions were sent to Europe.

Table 1 shows the dates when national archives were created throughout Latin America.

As observed above, most national archives in Latin America were created after the second half of the nineteenth century. They were perceived as instrumental in the pursuit of civilization and national legitimacy, and responded to an emerging interest in the collection of records as historical sources. While in general terms European national archives served as referents for the constitution of their Latin American counterparts, it was the Latin archival tradition, with its focus on the “historical archive,” that served as the main model for them (Duchéin 1992). National archives were headed by prominent members of the intellectual elite, such as writers

and historians, which promoted the ideal of the archivist with a vast knowledge of history (Berger 2013). In Latin America, the term “archivo” refers both to the institution and to the collection of current records and records selected for permanent preservation. The term “archivo histórico,” historical archive, refers to records destined for permanent preservation (Universidad de Antioquia 2020).

The earliest regulations for these archives during the first decades of the twentieth century followed criteria advanced by S. Müller, J. A. Freith, and R. Fruin in *Handleiding voor het Ordenen en Beschrijven van Archieven*, a text that had already been translated into French by 1910. It dealt with organization and description processes for archives based on the provenance principle. Archives were also created in Latin America with the goal of providing administrative support to the new States; such goal, however, only became a concern for archivists after the second half of the twentieth century (Silva et al. 2017).

The Latin American archival tradition went through additional transformations after the end of World War II and its geopolitical effects on the region. During the 1940s, at the urging of the USA, Latin American countries participated in the creation of regional organizations intended to foster peace and the defense of the Americas. The goal, among others, was to deter foreign threats and promote exchanges within the Americas. Among those organizations were the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (1947) and the Organization of American States, OAS (1948) (Hartlyn and Valenzuela 1997).

In that context, the Committee on Archives of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History’s (PAIGH) Commission on History appeared in 1947, with the goal of contributing to the preservation, organization, and awareness of archives in the Americas. The committee appointed Theodore Schellenberg to organize the first Inter-American Archival Seminar which took place in Washington, D. C., in 1961, which was attended by representatives from Spain and the Americas. While preparing for the seminar, Schellenberg traveled to South America, where he gave lectures and taught courses. It should also be mentioned that the PAIGH published in 1958, in Cuba, the first Spanish translation of Schellenberg’s manual, *Modern Archives: Principles & Techniques*. As a result, his ideas on records management, that is, keeping control of records during their life cycle and the American appraisal method, were first introduced to Latin America (Oporto 2011).

During the 1970s, technical meetings took place concerning the development of archives in Latin America. The Inter-American Center for the Development of Archivists, with headquarters at the University of Cordoba, Argentina, was created in 1972. Other events took place during this decade, such as seminars about archive organization and preservation, expert meetings, and new associations; among these was the Latin American Association of Archives (1973), a regional branch of the International Council on Archives. At the same time, several assessments of national archives and projects promoting microfilming were sponsored by the OAS and UNESCO (Silva et al. 2017).

One of the results of these meetings was the *Charter of American Archives* (1972), a document that condenses the conception of archives in Latin America at the time. The charter declares records and archives to be a part of a nation’s heritage, made up of both public and private records, from the moment of their



production to its definitive preservation (Cortes 1981). Even though the charter states the importance of archives for a nation's history, it underscores the role they play in its current and future development. It also encourages the protection of records, through the passing of legislation during all the stages of "creation, management, and final custody" (Cortes 1981, p. 404). Furthermore, attention to matters of record preservation and protection of documentary heritage is also promoted. Additionally, it recommends the creation of a centralized administrative unit in every country safeguarding documentary heritage, enforcing legislation, keeping records and inventory, and ensuring access to public and private archives of interest to the nation. Finally, the charter highlights the role of archivists as advisers to administrators and researchers, and as guardians of the nation's heritage, encouraging professional training (Cortés 1981).

The Charter also insists on the relevance of the Inter-American Center for the Development of Archivists. An entire generation of Latin American archivists was trained there, most of them with scholarships from the OAS. Instructors came from the *Escuela de Archiveros*, the archivist training school at the University of Cordoba under the leadership of Aurelio Tanodi. The Center also offered technical advice to public agencies along the continent, and it published—between 1974 and 1990—the periodical *Boletín Interamericano de Archivos*, later to become the *Anuario Interamericano de Archivos* (Fenoglio 2012). Several leading figures of the field were active during this period, when the multiple archival traditions converged: Theodore Schellenberg (United States), Elio Lodolini (Italy), Aurelio Tanodi (Croatian based in Argentina), and Vicenta Cortes (Spain), among others.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Latin American Association of Archives became involved in several events organized by the International Council on Archives. Such involvement and the resulting international exchanges made it possible to discuss issues related to records management, electronic records, specialized archives, standardization, accessibility, and user studies in the Association's seminars and publications. Through the Association's work, many of these topics became known in each of the member countries and were gradually incorporated into legislation and training. Such prolific work by Latin American institutions guided the development of archives during the final decades of the twentieth century. It also spearheaded the reconfiguration and restructuring of national archives, the modernization of archival legislation, the creation of archive systems and training programs, and it directed attention to records management and archive management.

Such a trajectory attests to the conjunction of multiple components in the Latin American archival tradition during the twentieth century, a tradition that sees the archive both as an institution and as the collection of administrative and historical records. Consequently, the work of archivists, which goes from records creation to their permanent preservation, is noticeably oriented to implementing records management processes. Such an approach has resulted in a major role being given to the institution of the public archive, so that national archives in every country have become the cornerstone for archival practice. They are not only the guardians of the nation's heritage, but also the regulators of local practice. While many of these ideas are common throughout the region, the ways in which the archives have developed,

as well as archival legislation, training, and professional practice, vary from country to country.

During the final decades of the twentieth century, influence from Spanish institutions became evident in the development of Latin American archival science. For instance, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation promoted training courses in the *Escuela de Archivos para Ibero-América* in 1991 and established an archivist training center, the *Centro Iberoamericano de Formación Archivística* in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Likewise, the Ibero-American Records Management Group (1989) published, through collaborative work, the volumes *Archivos administrativos iberoamericanos. Modelo y Perspectivas de una tradición archivística* (1996) and *Hacia un diccionario de terminología archivística* (1997) (Oporto 2011).

Likewise, an Ibero-American cooperation program supporting the development of archives, currently called *Iberarchivos* (1997), funds archive intervention projects directed toward all the archives in the region. Work in this front has led to the configuration of an Ibero-American archival tradition, which has also resulted in the publication of collaborative work addressing the problems found in the region, such as the volume coordinated by José Ramón Cruz Mundet, *Administración de documentos y archivos. Textos fundamentales* (2011). The Ibero-American archival tradition has found its basis in the historical relations and ties between Spain, Portugal, and the Latin American countries. Considering that these countries experienced the same practices and conceptions regarding the archive during the colonial period, Conde y Jardim (2012) claim that despite current differences, they share common practices regarding records management, particularly in the public sector, as a result of the work that took place between the 1950s and the 1970s. At the same time, this shared ground also resulted in exchange programs for practitioners, training programs for Latin American archivists with Spanish instructors, and the circulation of literature produced in Spain, which served as the basis for legislation and training in the field by the end of the twentieth century.

By the early twenty-first century, developments in archival science in Latin America have focused on responding to the demands of public and private administration concerning records management, electronic records management, information access, and data processing. These new directions become evident in the syllabi offered by training programs in the field, which to date amount to around 44 university programs. These university-level training programs (ranging from 4 to 5 years) are mainly located in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina. The remaining countries have around one or at most two training programs. Countries such as Honduras or Nicaragua have no university-level training programs in archival science. Additionally, there are graduate programs in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, México, Paraguay, Bolivia, among others. They are also evident in the standardization processes that different sectors within the field have implemented, such as the adoption of standards ISO 15489 and ISO 30300–301, and the recent implementation of the records continuum principle of the Australian tradition and its eventual use in local contexts (Alves 2020; Castillo et al. 2019; Viana et al. 2016). Other standardization initiatives point to the same direction, such as the Inter-American Model Law on Document Management, which has the specific goal of ensuring that Latin

American records management policies are in line with information access, transparency, open government, and open data policies (OAS 2021).

## Toward a renewal of archival tradition

Next to the dominant archival traditions in Latin America, there have been other forms of keeping records and preserving information about the daily life of non-majority peoples or cultures. These practices are both diverse and largely unknown, and yet, they persist and have come to light due to the recognition they have recently received from researchers in the field.

The devastating political and social conflicts experienced in Latin America have encouraged communities, indigenous peoples, peasants, and many other social groups to become the main agents in the defense of their own rights, the production of their own knowledge, and the strengthening of educational processes to overcome marginalization and find peace. In this context, archives have played a major role in the communities, not only as a testament to their daily struggles, but as a space for resistance and memory, contributing to pedagogical processes and cultural transformation against forgetting, annihilation, and indifference on the part of society (Osorio 2019).

Looking at these practices turns our attention to the people (creators, agents, custodians, users), in their relation to records. This approach benefits from looking at recent theoretical developments and concepts coming from the humanities, such as radical empathy; the ethics of care; affect and emotion in relation to the creation, management, and use of records (Cifor 2016); intimacy and trauma, disability, race, or indigenization (Douglas et al. 2021), and the study of archival imaginaries created by people in situations in which archives are missing (Gilliland and Caswell 2016). These new approaches try to find ways of acknowledging and reconciling people, establishing new relations to the archives to increase trust, and a plural memory may be collectively built. Likewise, these approaches provide greater interpretive strength to archival practice, archive use, professional identity, and archivist training (Perpinyá y Cid 2020).

With democratic transitions in different Latin American countries, civil society has fought to know the truth, and find ways to acknowledge and reconcile with one another, so that wounds may be healed after a history of conflict. In this context, the efforts to recover collective memory and the emergence of institutions created to this end (such as truth commissions and centers for historical memory) have set the stage for a new approach to archives and the way they are managed (Alberch 2008). In the case of Colombia, the peace process with the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the internal conflict going on since the mid-twentieth century (Gómez 2013) signaled a turning point in archival practices and the way archives were used.

There have also been efforts to recover State security archives and make them available to society at large. As a result, systematic practices of record security classification, restriction, concealment, and even destruction to avoid access have come to light, as well as their eventual role in the processes of punishment, reparation,

and overcoming serious human rights violations, genocides, war crimes, or crimes against humanity perpetrated by those governments (González 2009). Some of the archives that have been made available are those corresponding to Operation Condor (Paraguay, 1992), the Guatemalan National Police Archives (2005) or the archive containing the Dictatorship's secret records in Brazil, called *Memórias Reveladas* (2009) (Alberch 2008; Blanco 2012). These archives are unique in that they bring to light the repressive actions of the State, on the one hand, and on the other, they call attention to the victims and to the actions of their families and social organizations in the defense of human rights. They have also served as evidence in legal proceedings, as resources to advance the cause of victims' rights, and as places of memory, retelling the story of a past that had been erased (Da Silva Catela 2002).

Along the same lines, the work by survivors to reestablish their rights reveals the role of personal and community archives in the construction of a plural history in Latin America. Personal archives, for instance, created by individuals to defend their rights or those of their families, have proved to be fundamental in legal proceedings, for social activism and memory recovery processes. Examples of these are personal archives preserved by the Memoria Abierta organization in Argentina, as well as those preserved by some of the founding members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and by lawyers and other activists in the country. In Colombia, the Fabiola Lalinde y Familia fond was created to document a mother's search for her son whose disappearance was perpetrated by the Army in the Department of Antioquia during the 1980s; likewise, the Mario Agudelo archive records Agudelo's participation in the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and documents, among other things, his participation in the group's disarmament process as well as the work he has done supporting demobilization and reparation processes. Both archives have been relevant for the justice and truth processes that took place in Colombia (Giraldo and Tobón 2020).

Likewise, communities compile records as a form of political action, particularly in groups that have been socially marginalized, underrepresented, or ignored by official archival traditions; their goal in this sense is to be able to control the way in which their stories are told (Caswell 2014). This work has been relevant in truth and memory recovery processes taking place in Latin America. Such a "bottom-up" perspective has brought to light many marginal archival practices that had not been considered by traditional State-centered conceptions. In this sense, research carried out in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Guatemala should be mentioned. As an example, we find the Trans Memory Archive and the Madres Plaza de Mayo Archive, in Argentina; The Memory Project in Bolivia; in Chile, Londres 33 and the Student Association Archive and Document Center at the University of Chile; In Puerto Rico, the Memorias de Canóvanas (Archivistas en EspanGLISH 2021). Finally, in Colombia, we find the Asociación Caminos de Esperanza-Madres de la Candelaria Archive, in Medellín, and the Asovida Archive, in Granada, Colombia, among many others (Giraldo 2019).

By the same token, working with indigenous communities and their records also constitutes a challenge to traditional approaches to archives particularly with respect to information access, provenance, and record production, although efforts are still incipient. This is only a recent research topic in Latin America, despite the considerable indigenous population. The research that has been conducted has focused

primarily on understanding the way in which indigenous communities have been portrayed in colonial archives or has brought forward proposals for the creation of indigenous archives. Among these studies, which have taken place in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, we find research on the Mapuche people's archives (Menard 2012); on archives to recover archeological vestiges in communities such as the Huarpes, Mapuches, and Quilmes peoples in Argentina (Crespo and Tozzini 2011); on personal and family archives from indigenous populations in Chile (Choque and Díaz 2015); or on the perception of indigenous communities in Colombian archives between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Pérez 2015) and in Mexico (Dorotinsky 2007).

Finally, another area of interest is the study of archives in the highly interconnected societies we live in now in the twenty-first century, where life in all of its dimensions (political, economic, social, cultural, personal) is made easier through interactions among people and institutions through digital information networks using the Internet (Gilliland 2014). This situation intensified due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic since the end of 2019, in terms of social distancing. Responses to this event resorted mostly to the use of digital platforms to conduct everyday activities related to work, social life, leisure, shopping, or education. This has resulted in many current events being documented instantly through these media: from political decisions, activism, to citizen demonstrations in response to rights violations, whether that has been women's rights, the right to protest government policies, etc. Archivists have been tasked with keeping records of these events, so as to provide as thorough and plural a record of contemporary society as possible (Blanco 2019). These archives transcend the context of institutional use and turn citizens into the main agents and creators of their own records, in which they freely and spontaneously express their opinions, agreements, and disagreements (Perpinyá y Cid 2020).

Several archival projects on that front have emerged throughout the regions. One example is the *Ricky Renuncia Project* in Puerto Rico, which tried to collect and preserve digital material produced in relation to the social movement that called for the resignation of Governor Ricardo Roselló on corruption grounds in 2019 (Blanco 2019). Other examples include the counter-cultural archive of the social outburst in Chile, which brings together audiovisual recordings of artistic performances between 2019 and 2020 (Registro Contracultural 2021), or the project *Hacer eterno lo efímero* (making eternal that which is fleeting), which intends to collect and preserve digital records related to the national strike that took place in Colombia starting April 28, 2021 (Escuela Interamericana de Bibliotecología 2021).

These political and social transformations have signaled a turn in archival traditions in Latin America, which has been reflected in academic research, legislation, and curricula in training programs in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, among other countries. These changes have been largely motivated by contemporary archival thought that challenges an understanding of records as meant to be objective and of archivists as ideally neutral. Instead, traditional theoretical principles are being reformulated, acknowledging diversity and plurality in archival work. The works of philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and archivists Terry Cook, Eric Ketelaar, Verne Harris, among many others, have been relevant to this perspective

(Giraldo 2019). As a result, new conceptual approaches see the archive as a social construction informed by multiple forms of expression through records. Archival science, in turn, becomes a discipline that studies the interaction of a plethora of elements: records, archives, contexts, and users (Jaramillo 2021). In this context, archivists should consciously participate in the construction of collective memory, contribute to social justice, and foster the recognition of alternative approaches to records-keeping (Giraldo 2019).

## Conclusion

There is no one way to understand archival science in the world. In Latin America, conceptions of the archive have adapted to specific contexts and to historical developments, resulting in a variety of conceptions, practices, and a wealth of archival scenarios, which are all necessary to understand how each specific context has developed. Conceptions of the archive based on a Latin tradition became predominant due to two factors: colonization and the nation building models. As a result, the way in which archives were understood was reproduced in every one of the colonies, which left an everlasting mark in the conceptions, practices, and uses of the archive.

The end of colonization paved the way for new republics that adapted European institutions, archival practices among them. These elements resulted in the construction of emblems, symbols, and national histories that served to legitimize the new nations.

Later, in the aftermath of World War II, and the subsequent political reconfiguration of the world, public administration underwent great transformations, and with those changes came the US ideas of modernization and the consolidation of the records management system, which rapidly spread through initiatives in the region.

All these factors may help to understand why archival tradition in Latin America runs parallel with the actions of the State and has mirrored governmental and official practices. Through these, the institution of the archive plays a major role in configuring and disseminating local traditions by means of the establishment of archival systems and policies.

Even so, in the final decades of twentieth century and during the early twenty-first century, new transformations have affected archival traditions. These transformations have been caused by political, social, and economic changes, especially those related to armed conflicts, democratic transitions, migration, etc. These processes have resulted in movements demanding the recognition of human rights, collective and individual identities, diversity, and difference. New personal, community, and indigenous archival practices have come to light, which contribute to a more plural perspective on the role that archives play and requires a different understanding of their use and significance, and challenge traditional archival practices. Such a turn contributes, in multiple ways, to reconciliation, empathy, and social justice processes.

To that end, it is critical to acknowledge the multiple specificities archives have in every context. Such an approach contributes to understanding the different conceptions, practices, forms of professional practice, and local training traditions. It also

offers an insight into other worldviews in a global, interconnected world. As a result, the construction of a new professional identity becomes possible, with new generations of archivists who are aware of their surroundings and their own contexts, sensitive to social demands, and empathetic to those who coexist with them. In sum, it becomes possible to bring to light the contributions that archival science in all of its dimensions offers to society.

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