Report

International Survey on Claims of Displaced Archives

Report to the International Council on Archives' Expert Group on Shared Archival Heritage

Presented by

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Contents

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from the survey on displaced archives claims in Latin America, conducted by the EGSAH. It provides some background information, the methodology used for adapting the survey, and its implementation in Latin America. The results related to survey access, completed forms, and the limited number of valid responses are shown. It follows with a reflection on displaced archives in Latin America, linking the response rate to the region's historical context, and concludes with recommendations for addressing the issue, aiming to design a future new survey.

2. Background

Since the late 1990s, international surveys have been conducted aimed at investigating claims related to archives, disputes involving archival documents, and the recognition of what has been termed "migrated archives" or "displaced archives." Initially, the focus was on countries and their national archives. However, academic research on the topic and the recognition of various additional causes expanded the survey to include private entities, indigenous peoples, subnational governments, among others (Lowry, 2020).

There were three studies carried out in an international context: the first in 1961 by Robert-Henri Bautier (Bautier, 1963), the second between 1997-1998 led by Leopold Auer, and the third conducted between 2017-2018 by James Lowry for the ICA-EGSAH. While these studies were applied internationally, no information from Latin America was reported (Lowry, 2020).[1] Other works promoted by the ICA and UNESCO have also addressed the topic internationally, such as Kecskeméti (1977), which provides a framework for claims regarding archives between states, and ICA (1998, 2005), which discusses the interdependence of archives and compiles a series of documents on the restitution of archives and related claims.

[1] It is important to mention that in the survey conducted between 2017-2018, two countries from the American continent participated: Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago (Lowry, 2020). On this particular topic, see also: Bastian (2001, 2003). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the only known case of restitution of colonial archives in South American countries was that of Suriname by the Netherlands (Dijk & Fooh, 2022).

There could be various reasons why these surveys were not conducted in our region. Two could be highlighted. One of them may have been the fact that both surveys were conducted in English, while Latin America is a Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking region, where fluency in English is not widespread, and where the archival community, composed mainly of professionals working in archives, lacks proficiency in a second language.[2].

The other cause is related to the lack of recognition. However, this phenomenon is more evident in Spanish-speaking America, as Brazil has recognized cases of displaced archives, and studies have already been conducted on this subject. As Laureano de Macedo explains:

> "One of the first approaches to the phenomenon was the subnational case of the Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto [Municipal Archive of Ouro Preto] and the Arquivo Histórico de Minas Gerais [Historical Archive of Minas Gerais], whose symposium ("I Simpósio Nacional de Políticas Arquivísticas – acesso, jurisdição e domicílio legal de documentos" ['1st. National Symposium on Archival Policies – Access, Jurisdiction, and Legal Domiciliation of Documents']) was held in 1996. The concept of 'displaced archive' is found in the dictionary: Camargo, A. M. de A., & Bellotto, H. L. (Eds.). (1996). Dicionário de Terminologia Arquivística. Associação dos Arquivistas Brasileiros, Núcleo Regional de São Paulo; Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, p. 6."

He further mentions that, for example, during the *I National Symposium on Archival Policies – Access, Jurisdiction, and Legal Domiciliation of Documents*, which addressed the case of the Municipal Archive of Ouro Preto and the Historical Archive of Minas Gerais, the term "displaced archive" was not used. Instead, a form of restitution known as "domiciliação legal do documento" [legal domiciliation of the document] was discussed—a concept and term unique to Brazil (i.e., not used in Portugal) (Laureano Macedo, personal communication, May 23, 2024).

In this sense, it is important to emphasize certain elements related to the archival tradition and historical context of our region. The dominant archival tradition in Latin America is classical and traditional in nature, where the State archive prevails. Since the mid-20th century, this tradition has placed significant importance on the administrative function associated with recordkeeping. From this perspective, archival science tends to be linked to the technical

[2] This reality has been changing in recent years due to the expansion of university and postgraduate education in archival studies, which requires basic proficiency in a second language. Furthermore, there is an academic community dedicated to research and publishing, an activity that at least demands reading competence in English.

processes of records management, both analog and digital, often neglecting reflection on the political, social, and cultural dimensions of archival pratices. This reality is also reflected in training processes, which, in most cases, are practice-oriented and do not develop research processes.

This paradoxically contrasts with a historical context in which archives, as in many other parts of the world, have been at the center of processes such as decolonization, internal conflicts, wars, state secessions or irredentism, migrations, and many others in which archives were clearly displaced. Nevertheless, in the last decade, driven by this same context of political and social transformation, the region has seen significant changes in the way archives are conceived, the role of archivists, training, and research in the field. These changes deepen the relationship between archives and the exercise of power, social justice, human rights, and more, stemming from contemporary archival thought. This perspective challenges the objectivity of documents and the neutrality of archivists, seeking to reform traditional theoretical principles by recognizing the diversity and plurality of archival practices (Betancur, 2021, 2022; Blanco-Rivera et al., 2020; Carnevale, 2019; Da Silva Catela, 2002; Giraldo, 2022; Osorio, 2022).

In this regard, the issue of displaced archives in Latin America, which arises from new questions about the history of our archives and archival practice, has emerged as a possibility, first, to recognize an existing yet unacknowledged reality, and second, as a way to bring the issues and challenges facing Latin American archives, with their regional particularities, onto the international stage.

3. Methodology

The survey on claims regarding displaced archives in Latin America was based on the questionnaire used in the 2017/2018 EGSAH Group survey, led by James Lowry. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish and Portuguese to ensure its applicability in all countries in the region where these two languages are spoken as primary languages.

Although the original survey was international in scope, it was designed within an Anglo-Saxon archival framework, considering events related to the European context while overlooking certain aspects of the Latin American reality. For instance, Question 3 of the original questionnaire, which addressed the origin of the claim, World War II was included, an event that had no direct impact on the displacement of archives in Latin America. This reference was removed from the Spanish and Portuguese versions. Additionally, the term *independence* was included alongside *decolonization* in the same question, as the independence movements of the 19th century led to events involving the displacement of archives.

Another adjustment was the normalization of the term *archive* to encompass both public and private collections, as well as administrative and historical records. In Latin America, the term is broadly used to refer to all these types of archives (Betancur, 2022), unlike the distinction implied by terms such as *private papers* in other contexts. Additionally, in the case of Question 6.2, option d., concerning the preparation of a legal document involving international or regional organizations, the original version included international entities from Europe, Africa, and Asia, and only mentioned the Organization of American States (OAS). Therefore, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR/MERCOSUL) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) were added.

For the Spanish version of the survey, the questionnaire was translated and reviewed with the assistance of Dr. Mercedes de Vega, a Mexican historian with extensive experience in the field of archives and a participant in the EGSAH group. The Portuguese version was translated from Spanish, reviewed and adapted to the Brazilian context by archival science professors Cinthia Aparecida Chagas and Adalson de Oliveira Nascimento from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) in Brazil.

An attempt was made to conduct a pilot test of the survey. The questionnaire was sent from the email of the Latin American Association of Archives to individuals in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia who are connected to the field of archives, with academic experience

and expertise in the topic. However, only one response was received, which did not provide any feedback or suggestions for improvement.

Both versions were presented to the EGSAH expert group, where they were approved for implementation. Once the questionnaires were finalized, EGSAH coordinator Njörður Sigurðsson agreed with the ICA Secretariat to use the organization's designated survey software and established the following timeline:

Survey application: January 12 to March 10, 2024
Results submission: March 12, 2024
Report preparation: March to June 2024

The questionnaire was accompanied by an invitation to participate, which included a brief definition of displaced archives, an explanation of the survey's purpose, information on the sponsoring organizations, and background details in both Spanish and Portuguese (Annex 1).

The survey was disseminated through the social media platforms of the Latin American Association of Archives (ALA). The ICA promoted it through its social media accounts, website, newsletter, and via multiple direct emails to its members. Additionally, the EGSAH coordinator shared the survey with the coordinator of the *Forum of National Archivists* (ICA/FAN) to be sent to the directors of national archives in Latin America. It was also shared within the History of Archival Science in Ibero-America Group (GTHAI) of ALA, which comprises around 40 representatives from Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, as well as to academic contacts in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Paraguay, who shared it within their academic networks.

A virtual discussion on displaced archives was also organized and held. The event aimed to introduce the Latin American archival community to key conceptual aspects related to displaced archives and to present examples and potential scenarios in the region. Supported by ALA and ICA in terms of technical assistance and promotion, the event featured Dr. Mercedes de Vega and Laureano Macedo as guest speakers, with moderation by the author of this report.

Broadcast via Facebook Live, the event attracted approximately 30 participants from various Latin American countries and had around 400 views at the time of this report's preparation[3]. It is noteworthy as the first outreach event addressing this topic in the region.

The report on the completed surveys, provided by the ICA, included three files: an Excel table compiling all responses and two PDF files — one containing all survey entries and the other with the fully completed questionnaires (Appendix 2).

4. Results

The survey received a total of 303 entries, of which 282 were in Spanish and 21 in Portuguese. This data does not allow us to determine whether each entry corresponds to a different person who attempted to fill out the survey, or if there were multiple attempts by the same person. However, the data itself allows us to infer that the survey was adequately disseminated and had a significant reception, leading to a significant number of people to access and attempt to complete it. Still, the fact that attempts do not match fully completed records may indicate that those who entered the survey were unclear about what constitutes a displaced archive or about the purpose of the survey. It is also worth questioning the level of participation in the Portuguese version of the survey, which was low, in relation to the significant archival community in Brazil. Although it is not possible to determine the causes, these results require reflection on future dissemination strategies with this community.

Another possibility could be due to difficulties with the form. Regarding this aspect, it is important to keep in mind, as mentioned in the methodology, that the Spanish and Portuguese versions of the survey correspond to the form used in the 2017/2018 international survey. This survey was designed with a focus on the existence of claims, whether official or not, and in contexts where claims already existed, especially in Africa and Asia, mostly in decolonization processes where the displacement of archives was recognized. In Latin America, in addition

[3] The discussion can be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/ArchivosALA/?locale=es_LA.

to the lack of recognition of the phenomenon, there apparently are not many precedents regarding claims, as will be discussed later.

Based on this reality, some people who attempted to fill out the form reported that it was not intuitive, that it was more oriented towards institutions, and that their understanding of displaced archives differed from what the survey asked. This is corroborated by some of the completed responses that attempted to fill out the form but whose answers were not about a specific claim, but rather aimed at expressing an opinion on the topic. Furthermore, as highlighted by Laureano Macedo, it is important to emphasize that "the survey was not designed to address cases of shared archival heritage, which prevents the visibility of successful cases that have occurred in the region and will remain invisible. For example, in Brazil, the 'Projeto Resgate Barão do Rio Branco' (https://www.gov.br/bn/pt-br/central-de-conteudos/projeto-resgate), the 'COLUSO Comissão Luso-Brasileira para Salvaguarda e Divulgação do Patrimônio Documental' (https://www.gov.br/conarq/pt-br/conexoes/coluso/a-coluso), just to mention a few." (Laureano Macedo, Personal Communication, June 23, 2023).

4.1 Countries That Completed the Survey

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Latin America is composed of 33 countries (ECLAC, 2024). Of these 33 countries, nine completed the survey: Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Additionally, two entries were recorded from Spain (Lleida and Madrid). Two other entries did not clearly specify the country. It is worth questioning the lack of participation from countries active in the regional archival scene, such as Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, among others.

4.2 Completed Surveys

Out of 303 entries, only 21 fully completed the survey, with two serving as test entries. Among these, 17 responses did not provide information on specific claims but attempted to complete the survey, seemingly because respondents believed the instrument was intended to gather opinions on displaced archives.

Among the 21 complete entries, only five aimed to report claims related to displaced archives.

Two of these five entries do not align with the survey's definition of displaced archives. The first, submitted by *Fundación Cineteca Pública* (Santander, Colombia), requested the *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC) to release images related to events from Colombia's internal conflict, taken in Barrancabermeja in the 1990s. However, these images are owned by the BBC and available for purchase. Based on the provided information, this is a case of intellectual property rather than displaced documents produced by Colombian entities.

The second entry was submitted by the CEO of Ilirothrak, an Albanian private organization dedicated to preserving Albanian history, rare books, and archival documents related to public figures. In the survey, the organization offered the ICA documents from Albanian intellectual Isuf Luzaj, who taught in Argentina during the first half of the 20th century. The collection includes correspondence with key figures from Latin American leftist movements in the 20th century. Although negotiations with archives in Argentina are mentioned, the nature of these negotiations is unclear, as the collection does not qualify as a displaced archive.

The third entry pertains to displaced archives but is not associated with a formal claim. It was submitted by the director of PAPYRUS TECHNOLOGIC SRL, a company offering records and archives management services in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. During archival recovery projects, the company reportedly identified documents belonging to the *Estado Civil Gobernanza 1492–1844 Fonds* of the General Archive of the Dominican Republic in Haiti. The entry does not specify the location or entity where these documents are held. These documents were identified during a project focused on recovering Haitian archives. The director also mentioned the existence of Dominican documents in Spain and Cuba but did not provide further details or identify the entities involved.

The proximity between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, their shared colonial history, Haiti's invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1822, subsequent independence, and various U.S. interventions throughout the 20th century likely contributed to the displacement of archives between the two countries.

It is worth emphasizing that this report was provided by a private entity offering records and archives management services. In Latin America, as in many parts of the world, recordkeeping processes and the recovery of accumulated public archives are often outsourced to private entities due to the lack of qualified staff in public archives. Consequently, such private organizations often possess more information about the collections they handle than the public institutions themselves.

Only two entries reported specific claims. The first pertains to a parish archive in Costa Rica, while the second involves documents displaced from the General Archive of Puerto Rico.

4.3.1 Costa Rica.

Documents from a Private Archive located in a Public Archive.

The Historical Archdiocesan Archive Monsignor Bernardo Augusto Thiel of San José, Costa Rica, has lodged a formal claim with the Municipality of Alajuelita regarding a book from the parish of Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, dated to the early 20th century, which is held in the municipal archive. Despite the formal request, the municipality has not responded.

4.3.2 Puerto Rico.

Documents from a Public Archive transferred to another Public Archive due to war and foreign intervention.

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the General Archive of Puerto Rico reported a formal claim made to the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) for documents transferred in the 1970s. Although the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is considered part of Latin America, it has been an unincorporated territory of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898, and its residents have held U.S. citizenship since 1917. This dependent relationship has led to the displacement of archival materials.

The survey reports that the displaced documents are part of the "Washington Documents" *fonds*, later formally designated as the "Spanish Governors' Records." These records, organized and described by NARA staff, are identified as "Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico (Record Group Number 186)", and span from 1747 to 1898, encompassing 77.97 linear meters. They pertain to the Spanish administration of Puerto Rico[4].

The claim arose due to requests from researchers and historians. The General Archive of Puerto Rico, through the Executive Directorate of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, formally requested the return of documents from the Office of the General Governor of Puerto Rico during the Spanish regime. However, the originals were transferred to the U.S. in the late 1970s. While there has been communication and the initiation of bilateral negotiations, the documents have not yet been returned. Only part of the collection has been microfilmed by NARA and FamilySearch. The process of transferring originals and copies remains ongoing, with some originals already partially returned.

Since these documents constitute Puerto Rican documentary heritage and are essential for research by scholars on the island, it is considered necessary to adopt bilateral measures. The involvement of organizations such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and UNESCO is recommended. Additionally, the production of copies and finding aids should be prioritized until a definitive agreement is reached.

[4] There is an inventory of the *fonds* at: https://www.icp.pr.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GE_RecGroup186.pdf

5. A Reflection on Displaced Archives in Latin America[5]

It is worth reflecting on the fact that the survey yielded so few complete responses, despite being widely disseminated. One might initially assume that there are few cases of displaced archives in the region. However, certain factors related to archival traditions in Latin America, the understanding of the phenomenon, and the historical context suggest that the reality is more complex. These issues indicate that the topic should be explored through different approaches to better understand the situation.

The silences present in the survey may be attributed to several factors. First, the understanding of the concept of "displaced archives" appears to be new within the Latin American archival community. It is not widely recognized as a distinct category within archival practice or as a reality specific to the Latin American context. Furthermore, although cases of private archive transfers are sometimes publicly denounced, it remains unclear who has the authority to make official claims for their return[6]. In many cases, there is a general lack of awareness about this reality. To delve deeper into this matter, it is essential to consider how scholars have defined displaced archives and relate these definitions to aspects of the Latin American historical context.

According to Lowry (2017, p. 17), displaced archives are those relocated from their place of creation, with such transfers publicly legitimized by "states, regimes, or exiled groups, rather than individuals." However, as the author points out, the understanding of this archival reality varies according to the context. Macedo (2021, p. 1) provides a broader perspective:

> "The restitution of cultural assets removed from indigenous communities is a current and controversial issue that divides societies, institutions, and academic and professional circles. The causes of this phenomenon can be diverse. They may occur in contexts of armed

[5] This section aims to propose a reflection on displaced archives in Latin America. The contexts presented herein do not assert the displacement of specific archives, as this remains a subject that unquestionably requires further scholarly investigation. The data provided are not the result of a systematic study encompassing the entirety of Latin America on this matter. Nevertheless, the objective of this section is to initiate a discussion on displaced archives within a region where the topic has not yet been the object of sustained academic inquiry.

[6] According to Laureano de Macedo, regarding the case of Brazil: "There are claims from individuals and institutions widely reported in Brazilian newspapers about the transfer of private archival collections of prominent Brazilian architects to Portugal (specifically to Casa da Arquitectura in Matosinhos), particularly the case of the Lucio Costa *fonds*." (https://noticias.r7.com/brasilia/arquivo-publico-quer-transferir-acervo-de-lucio-costa-para-brasilia-25102021/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3Toeztxq30EAo0BTQt6iIhJ-HWjQQv5b0_8UobyzeXUJE52qtAQn4Cn1I_aem_AdAUgykMn8z6MQuTNdA0VpregsNVXHT7eZ7amVAXxTMg5IVNWgIU65wF3mmCkwN-oUFMEh-ncXVTTPCQpoEsncKV) y otros arquitectos (https://www.publico.pt/2020/09/10/culturaipsilon/noticia/arquitectos-brasileiros-criticam-doacao-acervo-paulo-mendes-rocha-portugal-1931062). (Personal communication, May 23rd, 2024.)

> conflicts, forced migrations, secessionist or decolonization processes (with consequences on the political-administrative reorganization of the territory), or decisions *ope legis* issued by the central power of the state, enforced repressively or through bureaucratic means. This phenomenon can occur in both international and subnational contexts."

Considering this definition, the interpretation of displaced archives is inherently tied to the specific context of each case and is not devoid of controversy. In this regard, the instances of displaced archives are highly diverse. For example, certain cases have been considered within decolonization contexts, even when the transferring entities claimed legal ownership over the records, as in the case of the United Kingdom during the decolonization process in Africa (Lowry, 2017). Similarly, private archives that have been lawfully relocated elsewhere have also been recognized as displaced: "it is common for the archives of prominent figures in the arts, literature, and politics, among others, to be acquired by North American and European cultural institutions" (Macedo, 2024).

Thus, displaced archives do not conform to a single definition or interpretation; rather, each case challenges traditional archival paradigms. Although the study of displaced archives entails identifying the nature of the physical displacement of records, the core of the debate reaches considerable depth, as the displacement of documents prevents the communities represented within them—and subsequent generations—from enjoying direct, effective, and dignified access to the information that underpins their identity.

The use of the term "displacement" in Latin America is common and is generally associated with the forced displacement experienced by people in conflict situations, where they are forced to abandon their homes as a way to escape violence and human rights violations. The most dramatic cases occur in Colombia, Venezuela, Central America, Nicaragua, and Haiti. In addition to these specific cases, there are movements of people from Latin America, Asia, and Africa who cross the continent toward the United States (UNHCR, 2023).

Although the term is widely recognized in everyday language, the archival community in Latin America has not associated it with the displacement of archives in the sense proposed by Lowry and Macedo, as scholars and archivists in other parts of the world have done. This is paradoxical, especially when compared to certain historical moments that highlight such

processes. As an example, some facts, that may help illustrate this situation, will be pointed out.

The first example dates to the Spanish and Portuguese conquest and colonization of Central and South America. From the late 15th century onward, following what historiography calls the Conquest, the Iberian bureaucracies established themselves in the American territories, creating a complex network of administrative entities to control overseas territories. Within this bureaucratic framework, archives played a crucial role.

It is important to clarify that during the period of Spanish domination, there were no formal policies of documentary transfer, nor any systematic policy of archival displacement between administrative entities in the Americas — such as the viceroyalties, *audiencias*, or *cabildos* — and central repositories like the Archive of Simancas or the General Archive of the Indies. In large part, local archives remained in their places of origin. As Moran (2025) observes, "the volume of documents preserved in the national archives of Latin America is significant. For example, the General Archive of the Nation in Mexico holds 4,651 linear meters of records produced prior to the country's Independence. In the case of Peru's General Archive of the Nation, the figure is 1,846 linear meters. Bolivia's ABN holds 250 linear meters. In Argentina's General Archive of the Nation, there are 3,193 files in the Accounting Section and 3,951 files in the Government Section for the period in question. The *fonds* from the Spanish era in Colombia's General Archive of the Nation amount to a total of 2,676 files" (p. 5).

The Crown implemented a policy of records centralization on the Iberian Peninsula, ensuring that all actions overseas were recorded in archives in Spain and Portugal. As a result, the American viceroyalties did not establish large-scale archives like the General Archive of the Indies, created in 1785, and the Portuguese Crown's administrative body, the Ultramarine Council, established in 1642. This policy, typical of a colonial empire, ensured control over the information generated by the empire's center, not only during centuries of Spanish and Portuguese domination, but also up to the present, where many aspects of Latin American history still depend on Spanish archives for clarification[7].

[7] Translator Note: in the case of Portugal and Brazil, see the *Resgate Project* in http://resgate.bn.br/docreader/docmulti.aspx?bib=resgate&pagfis.

In addition to administrative bureaucracy, ecclesiastical *fonds* played a significant role during the colonial period. Documents from religious orders, such as the Jesuits, and records from various Inquisition tribunals in the American territories are now housed in institutions such as the National Historical Archive in Madrid, the Jesuit Archive in Alcalá de Henares, and the archive in Toledo (Tovar, 2009). Similar cases occurred in Brazilian territory[8]. However, as Moran (2025) explains, "Regarding the records of the Jesuits originating from the houses and missions in the Americas that are preserved in the National Historical Archive, these derive from a private donation made in 1872 by Francisco Javier Bravo. The national archives of Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay, Colombia, and Ecuador hold a substantial volume of Jesuit records" (p. 4).

Nonetheless, asserting that there were no official policies of archival displacement does not imply that such cases did not occur. The relationship between the functions of an institution, their execution, and the archival record left behind is not straightforward. The General Archive of the Indies holds not only the records sent to the Americas by central institutions such as the Council of the Indies or the House of Trade, but also a considerable number of records sent from the Americas. These include materials resulting from administrative processes, official visits, and consultations, among many other records that are not always preserved in local archives (Tovar, 2009). In this regard, Ann Stoler's (2010) argument gains particular relevance: colonial archives must be "read against the grain" in order to discern what is said, what is left unsaid, and the power relations embedded within them as they pertain to the control of information.

Later, in the 19th century, during the Wars of Independence, when Spanish power was still present in the territories, many documents related to the "reconquest" or "pacification" efforts, in which the Spanish tried to regain control of the colonies, were transferred to Spain. Notable among these documents are the archives of the Naval Museum, the Royal Academy of History,

[8] Translator Note: The Portuguese Crown created the Ultramarine Council, by Decree of July 14, 1642 (Silva, José Justino de Andrade e (1856) *Collecção Chronologica da Legislação Portugueza 1640-1647.* Lisboa. Imprensa de F.X. de Souza, pp 151-154). The Regiment of the said Council, of the same date, included bookkeeping and recordkeeping rules. Nevertheless, the events that allowed the transfer of the Capital of the Portuguese Crown to Rio de Janeiro in 1808 led to the transfer of the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Territories archives, having returned to Lisbon, with exceptions, in 1821, following the return of King João VI. Since the second half of the 19th century several bilateral agreements, treaties and collaboration protocols between Brazil and Portugal, have been providing for the exchange of documents and safeguard and dissemination of documentary heritage by means of Microfilm and Digitization plans (Portugal. DGLAB.AHU. *Conselho Ultramarino Fonds*: https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/details?id=1119329; Brasil. Fundação Biblioteca Nacional. *Project Resgate Barão do Rio Branco*: https://www.gov.br/bn/pt-br/central-de-conteudos/projeto-resgate).

and the National Historical Archive in Madrid, which preserve records on the campaigns of Generals Pascual Enrile Alcedo, Pablo Morillo, and Pascual de La Torre (Tovar, 2009).[9]

But in Latin America during this period, internal displacements of archives were also evident. One such example is the case of Colombia. The archives of the Viceroyalty of the New Kingdom of Granada were transferred, at the onset of the independence revolution in 1810, to Panama, where the viceregal seat was temporarily established. Later, it was moved to several cities within the territory now known as Colombia: to Santa Marta in 1813 and to Cartagena in 1816. When the reconquest process, also known as pacification, began—during which the peninsular government sought to regain control of the colonies by military means—the archives were returned to Santa Fe, the capital of the Viceroyalty, in 1818 (Gutiérrez, 2016). Later, the archives were abandoned during the flight of the peninsular authorities in 1819, after the victory of Simón Bolívar's liberating army. During the retreat, the defeated Spanish authorities in the Wars of Independence also transferred many documents, such as correspondence from the viceregal authorities, which were periodically sent to Cuba, one of Spain's last overseas strongholds (Gutiérrez, 2016). Many viceregal archives were not taken to Spain, as the war and persecution made this impossible. However, the imperial policy sought to take as many documents as possible, a practice followed across all viceroyalties.

One of the few known claims regarding this issue, related to Colombia, was made by the Colombian Academy of History in 1902, during the celebrations of the first centenary of Independence. The academy formally requested, through diplomatic channels, that Spain return the documents related to the Independence period between 1810 and 1816, which were taken to Spain by General Pablo Morillo during the reconquest process (Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1902, p. 14-15). However, this request went unanswered and received no response from the Spanish authorities. Ten years later, the request was still under processing, but it was reported that it had not been resolved. Currently, there is no trace of this request in the Colombian chancery.

[9] "the documentation that guards the National Historical Archive of the period of the wars of Independence of the Latin American republics referred to in the report, that of the campaigns of General Pablo Morillo, is actually the archive of Miguel de la Torre Pando, who had succeeded Morillo as head of the Spanish troops displaced to America. This documentary collection preserves the official and private correspondence maintained by Miguel de la Torre Pando with his predecessor in command, Pablo Morillo, and with the military authorities, those of finance, justice, marine, health, town halls and other administrative positions. Well, this file was purchased from the heirs of Miguel de la Torre Pando by the Ministry of National Education of Spain in 1951." (Moran, 2025, p. 4-5)

As Vega (March 8, 2024) states, there is a lack of awareness in Latin America regarding the history of archives. In her words, “We have not asked ourselves how certain historical events may have caused the displacement of archives.” The dissolution of the viceroyalties, the systematic separation of states in the 19th century, and the subsequent creation of republics such as Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, Belize, among others, are scenarios in which such phenomena took place. This, combined with the fact that the processes of colonization and decolonization in Latin America are temporally distant from those in other regions of the world—where the issue of displaced archives has already been addressed—has contributed to the lack of engagement by the Latin American archival community with these topics.

It is important to recognize, in terms of the relationship between Spanish and Latin American archives, that since the late 19th century, there has been a connection that has fostered cooperation in activities such as the dispatch of copies, digitization, and, since the mid-20th century, financial support, staff training, and project funding through entities such as Iberarchivos or the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation.

As Moran (2025) states, there is a "long history of the Spanish State Archives facilitating access to digital copies of documents preserved in Spanish archives to other brother countries that share the aforementioned common past. This is the case with the Memoranda of Understanding that have been carried out with the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, to give an example from recent years. Currently, a Memorandum is being promoted to facilitate access to the documents of the Audiencia and Viceroyalty of Santa Fe, which includes the current geographical boundaries of Colombia, but also other neighboring countries, as a result of bilateral cooperation with Colombia for the commemoration of the fifth centenary of the founding of the cities of Santa Marta and Cartagena de Indias" (p. 5).

But it is clear that access to Spanish archives containing information about Latin America presents challenges that renew, as Zambrano (2008) mentions, the colonial ties. Not everything is digitized, and physical access is complex, meaning traveling to Europe from Latin America, realities that do not depend exclusively on the archives in question but do highlight the symbolic and material power of the institutions that hold the documents. As Bastian (2023) states, the tension between custody and access is present in the critical relationships between

archival documents and communities. The control and power of one entity over another suggests that the forces of colonialism can still take many forms today.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize other contexts different from the decolonization processes in Latin America that may have led to displaced archives. In the 19th century, for example, republics were established in the region that attempted to maintain the territorial divisions that had followed the former viceroyalties, and their archives were included. One example of this was the Federal Republic of Central America (1824), formed by the current territories of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Mexican state of Chiapas, where part of its colonial archives and some republican ones ended up in the General Archive of Central America[10], located in the city of Guatemala, which today is part of Guatemala's documentary heritage (Vega, March 8, 2024).

In the 20th century, just to mention other contexts, we can count: totalitarian governments in the Southern Cone and Central America, various internal conflicts such as the one in Colombia, and interventions by the United States in countries like Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama, which may have also caused the displacement of archives at both the international and subnational levels, histories that still need to be investigated from an archival perspective. This is without mentioning the operations of private entities such as religious orders and multinational corporations[11], which also contributed to the displacement of archives.

6. By way of conclusion

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the number of responses provided by the surveys conducted. However, despite providing few concrete data on displaced archives in Latin America, the silences revealed by this survey are quite eloquent. It is a fact that the category of "displaced archives" is poorly understood, both as a theoretical concept and as a historical

[10] The archive can be accessed at: https://ahgua.ufm.edu/agca/

[11] As an example of displaced archives from multinational corporations in Brazil, Laureano de Macedo presents the case of: "the restitution of electronic archives displaced in the cloud in the case of Fernando Rosenthal vs. Apple Brazil (https://www.conjur.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/condenacao-apple.pdf)," cases that are more common than often believed. (L. S. Ascensão de Macedo, Personal Communication, May 23, 2023)

event. As mentioned earlier, both the existing official claims regarding displaced archives and the academic works and their dissemination have primarily occurred in Anglo- and Francophone contexts, with little effort to establish outreach bridges with Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries. This highlights the lack of circulation of new archival knowledge in Latin America and, in turn, confirms the need for closer dialogue with archivists in the region.

The different archival traditions that converge in Latin America have largely relegated questions about the history of archives to the background. This does not mean that such questions do not exist; however, they have not been a priority on academic research agendas or institutional goals. Among the reasons for this phenomenon is the context demanding the application of records processing techniques, both analog and digital, to address the everyday problems of archives. This focus has sidelined a deeper reflection on the relationship between archives and the historical processes in which records have played a key role in the exercise of power.

Moreover, in this context, the issue of language plays an important role. While distance and language barriers are real, the increasing advancement of information and communication technologies, as well as advances in artificial intelligence, contribute to the possibility of more direct communication. It is a fact that proficiency of English allows people from different language backgrounds to communicate. However, it is also true that it is unreasonable to expect archival communities in developing countries to have these foreign language skills. In this regard, initiatives such as the EGSAH's application of the survey in a language other than English are small steps toward recognizing differences in our archival traditions and seeking ways to meet and communicate that begin with the recognition of plurality.

Archive studies, as proposed by Caswell (2021), are undergoing a profound renewal internationally. The theoretical, technical, historical, and technological aspects of the profession are now interconnected to crucial contemporary issues such as social justice, human rights, and relations of power. Additionally, concepts that were once considered immutable, such as archival principles, description processes, and the foundations of the

profession, are being questioned in the pursuit of a discipline that reflects plurality. In this regard, questions about displaced archives go beyond the recognition of the physical transfer of documents. They reflect a critical acknowledgment of processes such as colonization, independence movements, construction of national identities, foreign interventions, conflicts, and dictatorships, among many others.

In this context, the results of the research, when contrasted with the historical context of the region, suggest that the topic needs to be addressed through pedagogical and outreach strategies that contribute to raising awareness, both within national archives and the public and private archival communities in the region, as well as in academic circles. Likewise, it is essential to promote an academic and professional discussion, supported by international bodies such as the ICA, that has the sensitivity to address these issues with the necessary diplomacy, while also publicly recognizing that there is still work to be done. Finally, it is crucial to carry out a new survey, one that does not focus exclusively on official claims, but on the recognition of the phenomenon and, furthermore, allows for the identification of cases of shared archival heritage.

7. Recommendations

As outlined, the lack of recognition of the phenomenon of displaced archives in Latin America requires addressing it from multiple perspectives. It is clear that the responsibility for this does not fall exclusively on EGSAH or ICA, but their strategic role can contribute to mobilizing the will of ALA, national archives, and academic communities in the region, so that this issue can be effectively addressed. The recommendations presented here aim only to suggest possible paths for including Latin America in a global discussion on the topic.

7.1 Pedagogical and Outreach Work.

A starting point for the recognition of displaced archives is outreach and pedagogical engagement. A program of seminars or discussion forums on the subject, with international guests (with the possibility of simultaneous translation) and regional experts offering contributions to specific themes, would be one course of action. These seminars could address theoretical aspects and key processes in the displacement of archives, such as colonization, decolonization, independence, wars, totalitarian governments, private operations, among others.

Likewise, the possibility of offering a course or seminar aimed at university professors in archival studies could help disseminate the topic among future archivists in the region.

7.2 Academic and Professional Discussion with ICA's Support.

Promoting the discussion of displaced archives within the Ibero-American archival community is a necessity. To this end, disseminating the report to ICA/FAN could contribute to this goal. Additionally, promoting the subject at international and regional events would help put it on the agendas of Latin American national archives.

7.3 Designing a New Survey.

Once the dissemination efforts on the topic are advanced, work can progress on designing and applying a new survey that seeks to identify the relationship that is established in Latin America with the concept of displaced archives. This survey could potentially focus on specific target groups, helping to identify concrete cases that are not necessarily related to official claims, as well as considering appropriate techniques for each particular archival community.

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