

Latin American Archival Theory and Practice during the 1970s and 1980s

Héctor J. Maymí-Sugrañes

Latin American cultural values during the 1970s and the 1980s maintained most of their hierarchical restrictions on information access. A cultural elite conceived of itself as the intelligentsia who created and analyzed knowledge for the rest of society. As such, they exercised the exclusive right to use archive information for their purposes. This hierarchical conception of information access to archives is an historical tendency, one that functioned in archival theory and practice even in the 1980s. Historians, social scientists, archivists, librarians, and others use social and cultural power to restrain other sectors of society from information access in archives.

This is a comparative study of Latin American countries' archival theory and practice concerning information access in the 1970s and 1980s. I limit the period of study to these two decades because Latin American archival literature is more plentiful and available during these decades, and because these countries underwent similar economic and political problems during these years, although not in the same magnitude. During the 1970s Latin America endured the worst authoritarian experience in its history. Since 1980, however, these countries have moved toward democratic government and have tried to build more egalitarian societies.

I will not use all the literature available concerning these topics in Latin America; I will use journal articles, monographs, and interviews with archivists of some Latin American countries. I will focus on the theoretical discussion concerning information rather than practical issues. Therefore, the framework of this research fits within the tradition of intellectual history as defined by Dominick LaCapra:

Intellectual history shares with disciplines such as literary criticism and the history of philosophy, however, an initial focus upon complex writing texts and a need to formulate as a problem what is often taken, deceptively, as a solution: the relationship between texts and their various contexts. (LaCapra, 1983, 16)

In this study I will consider the general context of practices and texts. Chief among these is how space—not only geographical, but also ideological, philosophical, and existential—influences human actions and ideas dialectically. Another important point concerns the ways in which time—not only in terms of calendar periods but also in terms of historical perspectives and concepts—influences human actions. This point will be taken up later in the discussion.

I understand that topics of cultural values and intellectual bias have been discussed in other fields, including history, sociology, anthropology, and ethnology, among others.¹ However, in archival theory and practice in Latin America these topics have been dealt with in a very superficial way.

The contribution this research may add to archive studies lies in its discussion of Latin American archival theory and practice in relationship to cultural values and the intellectual bias of information access. I understand that a new approach may lead to misunderstanding and criticism; however, I will take that risk. The importance of these topics and the continuing discussions about them resonate not only in Latin America but also in other parts of the world (especially the United States), thus justifying the risk. The United States is home to the most extensive, but not conclusive, debates on these topics.²

This paper attempts to prove the following hypothesis: cultural values in Latin American countries have constituted obstacles for creating a consciousness of equal information access for all citizens in archival theory and practice. Therefore, information access is much more restrictive in these countries than in other parts of the world, such as the United States. Although the region has seen progress with respect to democracy, ideas prevail which reinforce a hierarchical conception of information access.

In this paper, I use several terms whose meanings I would like to specify. The first concept is *access* or *accessibility*.

The problems of the accessibility of archives are inextricably tied to a whole complex of legal problems (definition of public archives and private archives, the right to information, the right to privacy, the protection of state and private interests, etc.), and also to a whole series of technical and administrative problems (the organization of archive services and the transfer of administrative files to archive repositories, systems of arrangement and listing, etc.) and practical problems (premises for receiving the public, manpower for archive services, provision of microfilming equipment, etc.). It would be vain to expect that all these problems might be resolved in identical fashion everywhere. Inequalities of economic and

cultural conditions is [sic] considerable among the various countries in the world, as are their legal and administrative traditions. (Duchein, 36)

Access or accessibility does not only involve the restrictions that archives prescribe for their different users; nor are these restrictions limited to access to records. Restrictions in access or accessibility are related to a series of different aspects and legal parameters in each country or region. Other factors also come into play, such as how well organized are the administrative government apparatus and the systems which transfer government records from the agencies to the archives. Legal control over government records and individual manuscripts is also crucial. And finally, the norms or principles that archivists follow in the development and arrangement of the collections are determined by archival theory.

Another factor concerning access or accessibility is archival personnel. How well trained they are directly influences access to the records. Cultural traditions of different countries toward the right to information and knowledge establish a hierarchy of access. The ideas and beliefs of archive workers also affect accessibility—especially the ideas they have concerning who should have access to the archives.

The concept of user is extremely vague. Hence, it is necessary to define what “user” specifically refers to in this paper. César A. García Belsunce presents three categories of users. First is the academic user, who uses the archives for speculative reasons and who is a scientist, professional, or technician. Next comes the practical user, whose motives are operative. The practical user is an administrator. Third is the popular user, who uses the archives for informative reasons (62–3).

These categories of users present problems because they are not mutually exclusive. For example, scientists can use the archives for practical reasons if they work for an institution that requires them to do technical work. In the same way, a scientist, a professional or a technician may use the archives for informative reasons and not for speculative ones. Likewise, a layman can use the archives for speculative reasons. Furthermore, the word “speculative” presents difficulty since it implies that intellectual work does not have practical implications. Therefore, I prefer to consider users according to their purposes in using the archives, rather than to differentiate them in categories.

Other difficulties concerning information access arise in Latin American archives. For example, most Latin American archivists consider that only intellectuals, historians, students, and social scientists should be allowed to use the archives. Other people are not considered legitimate researchers.

In formulating this study, several questions come to mind with respect to the cultural values in Latin America. What kind of culture has developed (and continues to do so) in Latin America within these values? How was it created during the 1970s and 1980s? How does it influence archival theory and practice in information access in Latin America? Leopoldo Zea's ideas help illuminate the problem:

Latin America is a multicultural region with different races. There one finds, of course, Hispanic America, that is, the group of countries that resulted from the Spanish colonization; one also finds Brazil that was colonized by Portugal. Brazil, together with Hispanic America is what we call Iberoamérica. However, this part of America is also known by another name "Indoamérica." This name is limited and refers to regions of America with big Indian and mestizo populations. The denomination "Latin America" is broader because it includes the concepts of the Latin origins of the countries that colonized it, including the French (11).

Latin America is a very complex region, not only because different European powers have colonized the region since 1492 but also because prior to colonization great and important Indian cultures already existed.³ These groups still constitute a fundamental part of Latin American culture. Likewise, Africans were enslaved and transported to America, adding another component to Latin American culture. Furthermore, if we add some of the non-Latin American countries in the region, such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and others with important cultural similarities, the analysis I propose becomes even more complicated.

The notion of Latin America as a "melting pot" hides great racial and social contradictions. It does not matter that Latin America shares many of the same cultural values, colonization, exploitation, and underdevelopment experiences that have created widespread social and racial bias in these societies. In Latin America, in most cases, cultural domination comes from European traditions of the predominantly White elite. Other races and cultural traditions have also influenced Latin American culture to a certain degree. However, the control over and paradigm for society stems from the White European sector, which has developed a hierarchical elite that manipulates economic, social, political, and cultural areas.

The trend toward hierarchical domination by the European elites started long ago, in 1492. However, it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that many Latin American elites consolidated their power, during which time they created or determined the cultural patrimonies of Latin American countries. These cultural patrimonies

reflected the needs and ambitions of these elites and their desire to control the rest of society. Hence, many Latin American countries' national identities result from the intellectual and cultural maneuvering of the elites.⁴

As a region, Latin America shares a common cultural identity. What are the elites, which control the culture in this region, made up of? Hernán Godoy Urzúa argues that Latin American intellectuals, in most cases, come from the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie (116). John Gillin observes that

For the Latin American, the universe, including human society, has traditionally been arranged in a series of strata, and the culture is still strongly influenced by the values which he attaches to hierarchy. The political, social, and religious structures of the colonial era were highly stratified entities. A rigid political structure, ultimately controlled from the Iberian peninsula, imposed upon the colonies a system of political ranks and powers. (61)

Gillin also argues that the middle strata (intellectuals and other sectors) of Latin American countries play an important role in this hierarchical, cultural tradition (57).

For the purposes of this paper, intellectuals represent a great variety of people who in one way or another are producers of knowledge. This category includes historians, social scientists, "hard" scientists, writers, artists, philosophers, and, in some ways, librarians and archivists. Part of this elite actually has no direct contact with the social masses. In contrast, others work and do research on topics closely related to the masses.

In his research on Latin American intellectuals, Hernán Godoy Urzúa found that this elite, when working on topics that directly affect all sectors of society, adopts an extremely paternalistic attitude. They hold the opinion that interpretation, analysis, and comprehension of society in general is under their control. Through these activities the intellectual elite creates myths, symbols, ideas, and ideologies with which the rest of society identifies itself (125).

One of the intellectual elite's sources lie in documents that provide it with the information needed for the interpretation, analysis, and comprehension of reality. In Latin America archives function as places where such documents are collected. Historians (one sector of this cultural elite) are the most frequent users of these archives.⁵ Historians were the original founders of many of the archives in the region, especially the national archives (Carrera Stampa 1952, 11).

Historians and other cultural elites in Latin America collect documents for a number of purposes. According to Néstor García Canclini,

elites make collections in Latin America because through these they can create the cultural patrimony to wield control over society (177, 181). If the cultural elite controls the prevailing ideas, myths, symbols, and ideology, it also builds these collections to manipulate history for its own purposes. The country or region will appear according to an elite blueprint.

Amilkar Rocha Moncada, a Nicaraguan archivist, explains some of the practical relationships between intellectuals and archives.⁶ First, many Latin American historians or researchers want to control the documents so that no one else can use them; they like to physically possess the documents. Second, many directors of Latin American archives are historians who do not have archival training. Often, they have agreed to serve as directors in order to work with greater ease on their own private research. These directors promote a development and arrangement of the collection which coincides with their research interests. The historian's tradition of collection development and arrangement according to a specific interest—rather than according to archival theory—is shared by some Latin American archivists. This idea and practice has affected Latin American archives throughout all of its long history. Roscoe Hill notes that

At least five of these [national or general] archives have already served their countries for more than a hundred years. The century group includes Argentina, founded in 1821, Mexico in 1823, Bolivia in 1825, Brazil in 1839, and Cuba in 1841. A second group of countries that set up national archives during the latter part of the nineteenth century includes Haiti, 1860, Colombia, 1868, Paraguay, 1871, Honduras, 1880, Costa Rica, 1881, the Dominican Republic, 1884, and Nicaragua, 1896. The remaining institutions were founded at a later period as follows: Panama in 1912, Venezuela, 1914, Peru, 1919, Chile, 1927, Uruguay, 1927, Guatemala, 1937, and Ecuador, 1938.⁷ (1945, xi)

Latin American archive tradition began before Spanish colonization.⁸ The Spanish destroyed most of the documents and other means of preserving information the Indians had (e.g., paper rolls, codex, pictorial hieroglyphic).⁹ This pre-Spanish archive tradition was supplanted by the European practice. The colonial archives, and later the national or general archives, represent an important cultural institution for the power elite to establish a national patrimony, since they are places that collect and preserve the heritage of the countries or regions. In Latin America there are different kinds of archives, including administrative (public or private institutions), municipal (the archives with better continuity in

the region), provincial (in countries with federal government systems), cathedral, diocesan, parish (very important archives, since they keep birth, marriage, and death records), business, university, and personal archives.

Before entering into an analysis of information access during the 1970s and 1980s, I would like to focus briefly on the theoretical and practical situation of information access in Latin American archives prior to those years. Manuel Carrera Stampa of Mexico, in his book *Archivalia mexicana (Mexican Documents)* of 1952, discusses the need to create support, in the form of public opinion, in favor of the archives. This meant generating a consciousness in all laypersons that archives collect and preserve the national patrimony for all people (12). However, when he characterizes good archival organization, functions, and services in Mexico, he considers them important only to the educated elite (16).

The Argentinian Aurelio Tanodi analyzes five possible document users of archives, establishing a hierarchical structure among them. According to his point of view, the first users of any archive are officials of the institution which created the documents. The second users are historians and other kinds of researchers, such as social and "hard" scientists. These people use the documents in order to obtain information concerning their research topics. The third users are those researchers interested in the history of documents, studying their veracity and authenticity. The fourth user is the archivist interested in the history of some specific institution or document. Finally, laypersons use the documents to prove a legal right. Tanodi writes that this last group uses the archives on an irregular basis and in an unsystematic way. The first four types of users, he argues, use the archives in a systematic way (1961, 27-8).

In a recommendation to the Archive Committee of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, a special division of the Organization of American States, Mario Briceño Perozo of Venezuela suggests the need for an international card assigned to researchers in their home countries, and approved and issued by the director of the national or general archives. The director would then keep a record of the researcher and would send a copy to the Archive Committee of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History.

Likewise, Briceño Perozo indicates the need for uniform user norms in archives. One of his interesting suggestions is that when users request a document, they should write statements declaring the purpose of use of the document. If the user went to the archives to do research for someone else, he or she would need to indicate the name and purpose of the other person. Each document would be used by only one individual at a time, avoiding any type of group work, except by direct authorization by the archive director. Briceño Perozo states that these suggestions would

help researchers and historians. He also makes clear that only historians or other researchers—and not laypersons—are the users of historical archives (1965, 289-94).

Manuel Carrera Stampa, Aurelio Tanodi, and Mario Briceño Perozo conceive of archives users' information access in a limited and elitist way. Only the cultural elite, historians and other scholarly researchers, enjoy most of the privileges of getting access to archive information. Tanodi alone mentions laypersons as possible users of archives. However, his hierarchical structure reveals prejudice against this kind of "unsystematic" and "unusual" user. When he stratifies users according to their importance to the archives, he places laypersons at the bottom of the scale. It is obvious from these examples that a powerful elite controlled the information access in Latin America prior to 1970. However, Hill relates,

Access everywhere is fairly easy. Permission of the director must be secured and in many cases that of corresponding minister must be obtained. Sometimes the interpretation is on a very strict basis. Copying and photographing documents usually requires the additional consent of the director of the archive and in some instances notes may be censored. (1945, xix)

But in a survey of the access restrictions of the twenty Latin American republics mentioned in his book, I found that in eleven there are still restrictions; only three had no restrictions; and six did not mention if some kind of restriction existed. Restrictions involve requiring permission to use the archives. However, in some countries (Argentina, Mexico, and others) the right to use these archives is reserved for a specific type of user. In addition, in some archives there is a close censorship of the information jotted down by users.

It seems to me that this contradiction in Roscoe Hill's book stems from a triple bias. First, many unpleasant situations and practices were hidden from Hill in order to present a better face to the visitor. Second, Hill is originally from the United States of America, which from its foundation as a nation in 1776 has never experienced an authoritarian government. Government intervention in Latin America and in the United States differs greatly. In the Latin American authoritarian tradition, the governmental apparatus extends to all parts of society, a circumstance that does not occur in the United States, although government regulation does exist. In Latin America many countries share a long tradition of political persecution and curtailment of liberty. The restriction of having to ask permission of the director of an institution strongly limits freedom of information access. Furthermore, in Latin

American countries ministries tend to be heavily bureaucratic. The problems that a researcher encounters when trying to reach the minister to process a permit are difficult to surmount. Also, it is not fair to limit access to all but specific scholarly researchers, like historians.

Censorship of research notes offers another obstacle to access. This is the third bias that Hill analyzes with respect to Latin American national archives, because at the time that he wrote this book (1945), censorship of researchers' notes was also practiced in the United States. It was not until the 1960s that the majority of access restrictions were abolished (Geselbracht 1986, 150). In addition, Hill's observations about information access to Latin American archives were shaded by other discriminatory situations in the U.S., including racial discrimination blocking the use of the archives to African American people, especially in the southern United States. Although in the 1960s this racial discrimination began to change (Ruhig Du Mont 1986, 504), it is important to emphasize that some forms of discrimination continue into the present (e.g., racial, language, religion, sexual preference, and other).

The Latin American countries created, in practice, a barrier to access to archives in at least eleven countries prior to the 1970s and 1980s. To my mind, there is no doubt that in the six countries where Hill did not find information on restrictions, some kind of restriction must have existed.

In order to proceed with a discussion of the hierarchical concept of information access to archives in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, it is necessary to establish the status of the political and economic situation during that time. In the 1970s a contradictory situation arose in terms of the political and economic situations in Latin America. The region was devastated by the worst political conditions. Only three countries could claim democratic regimes: Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. The rest of the countries experienced some kind of non-democratic system, in the form of dictatorships or authoritarian governments. Although the economic situation during the first part of this decade was good, it did not last long. In the late 1970s the economic situation worsened, and the nondemocratic governments began to be overthrown.

In the 1980s political and economic conditions once again followed contradictory patterns. Politically, Latin American countries entered one of the best stages in their history. All of the Latin American countries, except three (Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico), had democratic governments during this decade. In contrast, the economic standards of the Latin American region faced the worst situation in its history. Government debt and bankruptcy became two of the major threats to democratic stability.¹⁰

Several questions surface when archives are considered within the economic and political context sketched above. How did all of these political and economic changes affect information access in Latin American archives? Was the hierarchical perception of the elite changed so as to open the archives? Did the cultural values of the previous years change in order to allow non-elite users into the archives? Did Latin American archival theory change its conception of what kind of users could exercise the privilege of using the archives? How much of this theory contradicts itself? How many archival usage restrictions were changed? How similar or different are the theoretical and practical implications of these changes?

A major event focusing on archives during this period was the establishment in Washington, D.C., in November 1972 of the *Seminario Interamericano sobre la integración de los servicios de información de archivos, bibliotecas y centros de documentación en América Latina y el Caribe* [Inter-American Seminar on Integration of Information Services on Archives, Libraries, and Documentation Centers in Latin America and the Caribbean]. The seminar's two main functions concerned Latin American archives. Its first goal was to serve as an information center for historical and other types of research that create knowledge, while its second function aimed at helping archive administrators in its fulfillment as a research center (*Seminario Interamericano 1974*, 125). Most of the renowned archivists of the Latin American region came to this seminar. Noticeably absent from consideration was the topic of availability of archives to the general public. The seminar made clear that archive services were only meant to be used by the controlling and intellectual elite.

During this Inter-American Seminar a significant discussion arose concerning the type of user to whom the archive offered its services. The United States representative argued that any member of the general public had the right to use the archives and the information contained in them. Spain's representative argued against this point, stating that archives were not meant to be used by everyone, but rather should be reserved exclusively for the use of scholarly researchers, especially for historical research. One of the representatives from Argentina strongly agreed with this position (*Seminario Interamericano 1974*, 127).

To understand the position of the Spanish and Argentinean representatives during the Inter-American Seminar, it is important to examine some of the user restrictions in a Spanish institution. Institutions such as the Spanish National Library act as a paradigm (in organizational and administrative matters) for national libraries in Latin America. In the same way, the Spanish National Archive parallels Latin American national archives.

In 1987, the Spanish National Library spelled out these user restrictions:

1. To reduce National Library use, it will only be opened to scholarly researchers.
2. Only a scholarly researcher with National Library user identification card is allowed.
3. Library use will be only for specific research, not for reading.
4. In order to obtain a user identification card the following requirements must be met:
 - a. over 21 years of age
 - b. a brief summary, not less than three pages long, describing the research topic
 - c. a letter of recommendation
 - d. the user identification will be issued for one year only
 - e. users who do not require a user identification are librarians, archivists, museum workers, university professors, and graduate students
 - f. others (Normas de acceso 14-8)
5. The National Library will allow a temporary admission pass for short-term scholarly research.

In 1972, archival experts meeting in Washington wrote a “Carta de los archiveros americanos” [American Archivists Letter]. The American archivists (mostly Latin Americans) established a hierarchy of users, putting scholarly researchers at the top. These were immediately followed by laypersons using the archives for their legal, cultural, and informational needs.

Inter-American archival theory during the 1970s and 1980s embraced a preset notion of whom archival users should be. On one hand, the United States supported the idea that archives should be open to all kinds of users. Latin American archivists, on the other hand, maintained the cultural value which mandated that archives should only be available to a selected elite. These different conceptions of user access held by the United States and Latin America are explained by an analysis of the U.S. model.

It is easy to pinpoint a major difference by considering the United States’ democratic constitutional traditions since 1776. The legal system is set up so that the rights of the citizens are well represented. Hence the United States was less restrictive and less elitist regarding information access in archives than Latin America. In contrast, Latin American history is one of colonialism, authoritarianism, despotism, and exploitation in a region where democracy has just started to emerge. These historical contexts suggest a clear answer to the different conceptions of information access in archives during the 1970s and 1980s.

Mario Briceño Perozo suggests that archives are the historical conscience of each nation. Archives are not closed institutions existing only for the preservation of documents, but rather are institutions that help to create knowledge (1974, 5–6). How do Latin American archivists create knowledge? “The national archives, which were created to serve principally as historical archives, concentrated on facilitating historical studies and research on their respective countries” (Tanodi 1981, 90).

According to Aurelio Tanodi the archive’s mission was—and still is—to cater to those who create knowledge, specifically, scholarly researchers. He argues that archives should be arranged according to researchers’ needs, not archival theory. Furthermore, he still thinks that archives are exclusively for scholarly research (1981, 91).

The publication of complete texts of many documents series and collections has greatly facilitated access to important historical sources and helped researchers in their work, thereby making a considerable contribution to historical studies (1981, 92). Likewise, when Tanodi analyzed the importance of archives’ publications in promoting the use and accessibility of collections, he had in mind scholarly research use. Documentary editing of complete texts or total collections is clearly directed toward an elite audience. This editing for scholarly use is a common tendency in Latin American archives’ publications.¹¹ For example, the *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación* (Argentina) and *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* (Venezuela) each dedicate two-thirds of the publication to editions of complete historical texts and collections, while the remaining sections deal with archival theory and practice. The publication *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* (Mexico) is completely dedicated to historical texts and collections. Tanodi relates that

Their internal organization, moreover, corresponds to the requirements of historical research, the documents being classified by research subject and era rather than according to modern archival principles of arrangement based on source and natural order. . . . The historical emphasis, which used to predominate and which to a certain extent persists to the present day in the majority of national archives, is reflected in the services provided, which are primarily aimed at supporting historical research carried out by members of academies, councils, institutions, university professors with their teams of assistants and students, etc., and, to a large extent, by senior archive staff. (1981, 91)

In 1981, Aurelio Tanodi critiqued the Latin American archives’ practice of arrangement according to users and of not following archival theory. He explained how this user elite orders and uses the archives according to its interests. It is important to note that senior archivists form part of this cultural elite.

Lucía S. Príncipe conducted an international survey of access practices for the general public. Her data is from 1978, and it includes two hundred archives from all over the world. She divided Latin America in two parts, South America and Central America, and found in both subregions that documents were not freely accessible. Latin American archives in 1978 continued to practice some restrictions, such as asking for letters of presentation that explained the reasons and topics of the research. The Latin American region was similar in its restrictions to Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Eastern Europe. No restrictions were found in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada (1984, 132-9).¹² Where a tradition of political and intellectual freedom exists, the restrictions on archives diminish. Place, time, and traditions provide important indicators when trying to measure information access to archives.

Amilkar Rocha explained the different restrictions and problems with information access in Latin American archives: (1) Government offices did not transfer the documents from their institutions to the national or general archives. In most Latin American countries, when the records lost their administrative value, agencies failed to transfer their documents. Some of these government offices had established their own archives, like the military and foreign ministries. This situation created a lot of problems with access because the users did not have a single place to look for the information. Also, most of these government offices restricted access by demanding a permit given by the minister to use the archives. (2) Many personnel records in government offices are not accessible. This situation occurs in authoritarian regimes. In the former Sandinista government in Nicaragua, for example, the government manipulated personnel records to repress the population.

It is important to look at the laws and norms of how users' access to information is controlled. To this end, I have chosen four Latin American countries—Argentina, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela—for a number of reasons. Argentina and Mexico share a long tradition of non-democratic governments. Argentina from 1945 to 1983 endured a wide spectrum of governments, from a semidemocratic system, to authoritarian systems and dictatorships, to a full democratic system in 1983.¹³ Argentina also represents the southern cone (subregion) of Latin America. For its part, Mexico has not had a democratic government during the twentieth century. The Mexican Revolution (the first twentieth-century social revolution) of 1910 created a dictatorship of one party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party], which has controlled Mexico for more than fifty years without any significant challenge.¹⁴ Mexico represents the Central American subregion of Latin America. Since 1948 Puerto Rico has had a fully democratic system. In 1952 the first constitution was established, guaranteeing freedom

and democratic values.¹⁵ For this study, Puerto Rico represents the Caribbean area. Venezuela in 1958 established a democratic government, with a free social system.¹⁶

Strikingly, the differences in restrictions in archival information access between the United States, Canada and Western Europe in contrast to Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Eastern Europe can also be found among Latin American countries. Likewise, these differences often develop for shared reasons. In countries where a long tradition of democracy has been established, there have been fewer restrictions. These democracies, like Puerto Rico and Venezuela, were consistent in their practice of extending information access to all kinds of archives users. Although countries such as these have contradictory practices of access, they have created some limitations. On the other hand, Argentina and Mexico, with weaker democratic traditions, maintain strong restrictions on archives use.

The cultural values in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s were greatly influenced according to each country's level of democratic tradition. Hierarchical cultural elitism of information access in archives was less predominant in countries with democratic traditions. Hence, archives were more likely to open their collections to the general public. But since it is easier to change institutions and norms than ideas and theories, I conclude that archival theory had not changed in its hierarchical conception of information access during the 1970s and 1980s.

The case of Puerto Rico illustrates this thesis. Puerto Rico's governmental institutions functioned within a democratic tradition, and normally archives were open to all kinds of users. Luis Rodríguez Morales¹⁷ pointed out that in Puerto Rico, the policy in archives since 1955 has been to forbid exclusionary restrictions which favor some users against others. However, the law that controls the disposition and management of legal files presents some restrictions that privilege scholarly researchers, who are the only ones allowed (with the exception of those in direct contact with the files, government or private officials) to use these files. Only historians with specific permission from the director of the General Archives are allowed to use the legal files. This rule seems to contradict what is stated in the General Archives rules allowing access to all kinds of users.

Latin American cultural values during the 1970s and the 1980s maintained most of its hierarchical restrictions on information access. A cultural elite conceived of itself as the intelligentsia who created and analyzed knowledge for the rest of society. As such, they exercised the exclusive right to use archives information for their purposes. This hierarchical conception of access to archives is a historical tendency, one that has functioned in archival theory and practice since the 1980s.

Historians, social scientists, archivists, librarians, and others use social and cultural power to restrain other sectors of society from information access in archives. Government and private officials are at the center of many of these restrictions, and thus the general public is the sector that suffers most from the exclusionary policies of archives. It does not matter if the records are in administrative or historical archives; there are always some restrictions for their use.

During the 1970s and 1980s Latin America created a particular cultural value which influenced archival theory and the practice of information access. While democratic traditions worldwide have created significantly more access, in Latin American regions I found little variation in archival practice between countries based on their democratic experiences. All countries share a hierarchical vision about information access.

Information access practices in some countries like Puerto Rico and Venezuela improved during this period. However, this does not mean that there was any change in the elite's conception of hierarchical access. A survey of cultural values helps in the understanding of this apparent contradiction between theory and practice. In order to explain these differences, it is important to remember that cultural values, class vision, elite conception, and other ideas run counter to—and tend to move more rapidly and with greater flexibility than—rules, norms, and practices. Ideas and beliefs do not change with the imposition of some new law that opens the archives to everyone; prejudices remain. These are not only explained by narrow, separate concepts of cultural values, class vision, and elite conception, but must be analyzed in conjunction with other factors, using a more flexible approach.

This study found some variations in archival practices concerning information archival access theory and practice. But these variations among archives in Argentina, México, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela are merely different forms of the same hierarchical vision and conception of information access. These countries' Hispanic hierarchical background continues to play a significant role in their information access practices and theories.

A final question remains: In the archives (in Latin America and other parts of the world) that have had a long history in terms of power issues, how have archivists had to change the hierarchical conception of information? The question is important, since in some ways this elitist acceptance is part of the historical nature of the archives. In addition, if a cultural elite dominates all knowledge production, how have the archives, as institutions that help to create knowledge, escaped the influence of this hierarchical vision of the cultural elite? It is my guess that they probably have not.

In summary, this study attempts to shed light on information access in Latin American archival theory and practices during the 1970s and 1980s. This is important because information access in Latin American archival theory and practice has not been researched in a complete and thorough way. This study represents only a beginning, an introduction to the double challenge which I have proposed.

Notes

1. For a discussion of cultural and intellectual bias in history and ethnology, see Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

2. For additional debate on these topics concerning American archive literature, see Alan Reitman, "Freedom of Information and Privacy: The Civil Libertarian's Dilemma," *American Archivist*. 38 (1975): 501-8; Clark A. Elliot, "Communication and Events in History: Toward a Theory for Documenting the Past," *American Archivist*. 48 (1985): 357-68; Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist*. 49 (1986): 109-33; and Edward Weldon, "Archives and the Challenges of Change," *American Archivist*. 46 (1983): 125-34.

3. Latin America includes twenty republics, three French territories (Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana), and one United States commonwealth (Puerto Rico).

4. For a good discussion of these topics, see Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Grijalbo, 1989).

5. For a good study about historical research trends in Latin America, from elitist history to a Marxist historical study, see Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, "Frecuencias temáticas de la historiografía latinoamericana," *América en sus ideas*, ed. by Leopoldo Zea (México: Siglo XXI, 1986), 23-45.

6. Interview with Amilkar Rocha Moncada on 3 February 1992.

7. In Puerto Rico the General Archive was founded in 1955.

8. Manuel Carrera Stampa, "Los archivos históricos," *Bibliotecas y archivos* 1 (1967): 16.

9. Not every Indian document was destroyed; some, such as pictorial hieroglyphics, remain. Oral traditions have played an important role in the transmission of Indian culture up to today.

10. For background about the political and economic situation of Latin American countries during these two decades (1970s and 1980s), see Larry Diamond and Juan J. Linz, "Introduction: Political, Society, and Democracy in Latin America," *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 1-58.

11. For a complete list of Latin American archives publication, see the appendix section in Aurelio Tanodi, "Latin American archives periodicals," *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship, and Archives Administration* 5 (1981): 98-100.

12. I find the questionnaire used for this survey problematic. In addition, Príncipe did not detail the data from United States, but only summarized it. As I mentioned before, the United States has less restrictive information access

norms, but this does not imply the absence of restrictions or censorship. The fight for freedom of information has a long history. The Freedom of Information Act was not passed until the 1960s. Also from the 1980s to the present, the Reagan-Bush administrations worked very hard against personal information rights. See Donna A. Demac, *Liberty Denied: The Current Rise of Censorship in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

13. For a discussion of Argentina's political and social system during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Carlos H. Waisman, "Argentina: Autarkic Industrialization and Illegitimacy," *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 59–109.

14. For Mexico's political and social order during the twentieth century, see Daniel C. Levy, "Mexico: Sustained Civilian Rule Without Democracy," *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 459–97.

15. For Puerto Rico's political and social history, see Fernando Picó, *Historia general de Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Huracán, 1986).

16. For information on Venezuela's political and social system, see Daniel H. Levine, "Venezuela: The Nature, Sources, and Prospects of Democracy," *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 247–89.

17. Interview with Luis Rodríguez Morales on 28 February 1992.

Works Cited

- Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires. "Doctor Ricardo Levene." Reglamento, La Plata: 1971.
- Briceno Perozo, Mario. "Carnet internacional de investigador y uniformación de las normas de consulta en los archivos históricos." *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 209 (1965): 289–94.
- . "Misiones gemelas." *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 226 (1974): 5–12.
- Carrera Stampa, Manuel. *Archivalia mexicana*. México: UNAM, 1952.
- . "Los archivos históricos." *Biblioteca y archivos* 1 (1967): 15–21.
- "Carta de los archiveros americanos." *Boletín interamericano de archivos* 1 (1974): 15–26.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Writing of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Demac, Donna A. *Liberty Denied: The Current Rise of Censorship in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Diamond, Larry, and Juan J. Linz. "Introduction: Politics, Society, and Democracy in Latin America." Pp. 1–58 in *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, ed. by Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989.
- Duchain, Michel. "Obstacles to the Access, Use and Transfer of Information from Archives." Pp. 33–7 in *Selected Guidelines for the Management of Records and Archives: A RAMP Reader*, ed. by Peter Walne. Paris: UNESCO, 1990.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Elliott, Clark A. "Communication and Events in History: Toward a Theory for Documenting the Past." *American Archivist* 48 (1985): 357–68.

- Fernando Picó. *Historia general de Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Huracán, 1986.
- García Belsunce, César A. "Uso práctico de los archivos." *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación* 9 (1984): 61–73.
- García Canclini, Néstor. *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. México: Grijalbo, 1989.
- Geselbracht, Raymond H. "The Origins of Restrictions on Access to Personal Papers at the Library of Congress and the National Archives." *American Archivist* 49 (1986): 142–75.
- Gillin, John P. "The Middle Segments and Their Values." Pp. 55–73 in *Latin American Politics: Studies of the Contemporary Scene*, ed. by Robert D. Tomasek. New York: Doubleday, 1970.
- Godoy Urzúa, Hernán. "La sociología del intelectual en América Latina." Pp. 107–27 in *El intelectual latinoamericano*, ed. by Juan F. Marsal. Buenos Aires: Instituto, 1970.
- Guía de archivos y bibliotecas*. México: El Caballito, 1984.
- Herrera de Weishaar, M. L., and Carmen Alida Soto. *Guía del Archivo General de la Nación*. Caracas: Archivo General de la Nación, 1984.
- Hill, Roscoe R. *The National Archives of Latin America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945.
- Jaramillo Uribe, Jaime. "Frecuencias temáticas de la historiografía latinoamericana." Pp. 23–45 in *América en sus ideas*, ed. by Leopoldo Zea. México: Siglo XXI, 1986.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts Contexts Language*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Levine, Daniel H. "Venezuela: The Natural, Sources, and Future Prospects of Democracy." Pp. 247–90 in *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, ed. by Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989.
- Levy, Daniel C. "Mexico: Sustained Civilian Rule Without Democracy." Pp. 459–97 in *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, ed. by Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989.
- Leyes de Puerto Rico. *Ley para autorizar el traslado al Archivo General de Puerto Rico de todos los protocolos notariales que tengan más de 60 (sesenta) años de existencia*, 1961.
- Normas de acceso. *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 252–3 (1987): 14–8.
- Príncipe, Lucía. "El hombre común y los archivos." *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación* 9 (1984): 129–41.
- Rangel, Carlos. *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario*. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1977.
- Reglas para uso de la sala de estudios*. San Juan: Archivo General de Puerto Rico, 1990.
- Reitman, Alan. "Freedom of Information and Privacy: The Civil Libertarian's Dilemma." *American Archivist* 38 (1975): 501–8.
- "Respuestas al cuestionario sobre el estado de los archivos nacionales." *Boletín interamericano de archivos* 4 (1977): 79–144.
- Rocha Moncada, Amilkar. Personal interview, 3 Feb. 1992.
- Rodríguez Morales, Luis M. Telephone interview, 28 Feb. 1992.
- Ruhig Du Mont, Rosemary. "Race in American Librarianship: Attitudes of the Library Profession." *The Journal of Library History* 21 (1986): 488–509.
- Sábato, Ernesto. *La cultura en la encrucijada nacional*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1985.
- Samuels, Helen Willa. "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49 (1986): 109–33.

- “Seminario interamericano sobre la integración de los servicios de información de archivos, bibliotecas y centros de documentación en América Latina y el Caribe.” *Boletín interamericano de archivos* 1 (1974): 125–31.
- Tanodi, Aurelio. “Latin American archives periodicals.” *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship, and Archives Administration* 5 (1981): 98–100.
- . *Manual de archivología hispanoamericana*. Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 1961.
- Uslar Pietri, Arturo. “Vasallaje intelectual.” Pp. 239–42 in *Cuarenta ensayos*, ed. by Efraín Subero. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1990.
- Waisman, Carlos H. “Argentina: Autarkic Industrialization and Illegitimacy.” Pp. 59–110 in *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, ed. by Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989.
- Weldon, Edward. “Archives and the Challenge of Change.” *American Archivist* 46 (1983): 125–34.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
- Zea, Leopoldo. *Colonización y descolonización de la cultura latinoamericana*. Caracas: Cuadernos de prosa, 1970.