



# **The Use of Archives for Research in Migration and Gender Studies**

**Isabel Carrera Suárez and Laura Viñuela Suárez  
University of Oviedo**

**April 2007**

The problematic nature of archival research increases when we are dealing with the activities of marginalized people, those not of the traditional white male elite.  
Helen M. Buss (2001:2)

## Introduction

Traditionally, the use of archives has been closely related to the discipline of history and historical research. Since the material kept in archives aims at giving evidence of the past, historians might reasonably be expected to constitute their primary users. This assumption, however, is not necessarily true today, and there are a variety of users whose goals and purposes differ (see Maymí-Sugrañes 1999). In fact, even the traditional scholar user has changed along with research objects and subjects. The research themes on which we will focus in this chapter – gender and migration- offer a good example of this, and pose questions that need to be addressed regarding archival research.

First of all, there is the fact that both gender and migration relate, in many cases, to contemporary issues (which, as we will see, are not the expected contents of archives) and their emergence as fields of academic study is embedded in historical frameworks such as the feminist movement and the postcolonial/diasporic/‘global’ context. The creation of archives and formulation of archival theory predates these perspectives. In fact, the purpose of archives in their early history was closely related to colonialism/imperialism and patriarchal notions of author/creator and the legitimating of the past (Cook 1997, Cook and Schwartz 2002). Some of this ideology is still present in archives, and its major lines can be traced in the examples that will be analyzed in this chapter. The effect of the historical context on archives and on their conceptualization also becomes evident if we look at how the digitalization of archives and the World Wide Web have revitalized the discussion about archival principles (Bearman 1996). Although this debate will not be considered in depth here, its implications will be briefly discussed, as some of our case studies are strongly web-based.

An analysis of archival research shows that many users of archives have little knowledge about archival theory and principles, although archival theory and its development is fundamental to the way information is organized and to the kind of information to be found. A common complaint by researchers who begin their work in archives is that they don’t know how to find what they need or that they are overwhelmed by the vast amount of information. We may conclude that this confusion about how to approach archival research is a frequent problem, judging by the abundant advice on the Internet (see, for example, *Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers*, [http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416_e.html)). This could reflect the fact that methods and methodology are not commonly articulated in certain Humanities disciplines and are not as articulated as in the Social Sciences.

On the other side of the research process are the archivists and their training. Archivists are the counterpart of researchers and are expected to know the contents of the

archive and to make the information available to the researcher. How much they know about the research subject and how they understand the archival principles will be a key question for the researcher's capacity to profit from the archive.

These matters are closely related to the history of archives and archival science, and we will therefore preface our discussion with a few basic ideas about archives and their purposes, addressing the difference between archives, museums and libraries, though bearing in mind that is not as clear in practice as it is in theory. This will be followed by a brief analysis of archival theory and principles, before we consider some of the issues that arise in their relation to gender and migration research through.

### Definition and history of archives

Archives, libraries and museums are all organizations which deal with information and historical knowledge, but they do so in different ways, although they might share certain functions and goals. Understanding the difference between these three institutions is useful to understand what kind of documentation and data can be found in them. Anne J. Gilliland-Swetland has defined them with regard to the distinct roles they play within society (2000: 5):

Libraries	Museums	Archives
Identify, acquire, preserve, and provide access to the world's published knowledge	Identify, acquire, preserve, and exhibit unique, collectible, or representative objects	Identify, appraise, preserve, and make available documentary materials of long-term value (essential evidence) to the organization or public that the archives serve
Promote equity of access to information	Promote cultural, community, and familial identity and understanding	Ensure the accountability of government by preserving public records and making them available to the citizenry as is legally and ethically appropriate
Promote intellectual freedom	Provide experiences where visitors can make connections between content and ideas	Ensure the accountability of nongovernmental institutions to their shareholders, boards, and other constituents
Support education and continuous learning and research	Serve as memory institutions for a culture	
Support the development of information literacy in society	Support formal and informal learning and research	
Serve as focal points for		

communities and promote community interests	Serve as focal points for communities and promote community interests	Preserve unique or collectible documents  Serve as memory institutions for a culture  Support scholarly, administrative, and personal research
---	---	--

These functions, however, are quite blurred in practice, as we will see when approaching the case studies. A glance at the development of archival science, relating its concepts and practices to the historical context in which they emerge, may help to clarify the definition of an archive and its aims. The Canadian archivist and theorist Terry Cook (1997) gives a very succinct and clear account of the history of archival ideas and paradigms, relating them to the historical and ideological context in which they were created. As reflected in his essay, although archives go back in history, archival principles were first formulated in Europe at the end of the 19th century. In the so-called “Dutch manual” of 1898 (*Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*), by Samuel Muller, Johan Feith and Robert Fruin, the basic concepts of archival theory are explicitly stated for the first time: the idea of provenance (records should be grouped according to their origin and they should not be mixed, that is, records generated by the same creators should be kept separate from those of a different provenance) and of original order (in order for records to provide information about the administrative context in which they have been created, they must be kept respecting their original organization which, in turn, corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it). In 1922 Sir Hilary Jenkinson added another basic concept in his *A Manual of Archive Administration*: that of evidence. “Evidence in the archival sense can be defined as the passive ability of documents and objects and their associated contexts to provide insight into the processes, activities, and events that led to their creation for legal, historical, archaeological, and other purposes” (Gilliland-Swetland, 2000:10). Jenkinson consequently defines the archivist’s role as an impartial keeper of the natural evidence present in records.

Both these approaches are related to positivist ideas of objectivity and emphasize the creator of records (be it either a single person or a public institution) as a monolithic, reliable and trustworthy subject. The focus on records produced by the State explains why legal aspects such as giving evidence of governmental actions become so important. At the same time, the fact that these theorists were working with closed sets of a reduced number of historical documents, produced by already extinguished institutions, explains why they could establish precise rules for the organization of archives and a precise definition of their

purposes and functions. Simply put, they had all the material and they only had to devise a way to organize it.

A different contribution to archival theory was produced in the United States, in dealing with a different context and material. Archivists were faced with a huge and ever-growing number of records related to World War II and to a complex bureaucratic structure, which meant that it was not possible to keep all records. Thus, theories of appraisal had to be formulated and the fiction of the objective archivist was necessarily put into question, notably by Theodore R. Schellenberg (1956). Two main notions were formulated in this context: first, the difference between records (the large original whole of material produced by an administration, and the responsibility of the newly born profession of the “records manager”) and archives (a smaller portion of that material that is considered by archivists to have long-term value); second, the concept of the life-cycle of the documents, beginning when records were first organized and actively used by their creators (which constitutes the primary value of the records) up to the time when they were selected as archival material and kept to be used by subsequent researchers (secondary value). Schellenberg gave more importance to the secondary value of records and, thus, his theory of appraisal focused on the usefulness of records for research. Archivists had to decide what records should become archival material keeping this in mind and working closely with records managers and subject specialists (Schellenberg 1956). This user-oriented approach in determining the archival value of records, however, posed some problems in its practical application and resulted in “a selection process [that was] so random, so fragmented, so uncoordinated, and even so often accidental ... [and one that] too often reflected narrow research interests rather than the broad spectrum of human experience” (Ham 1975, quoted in Cook 1997). Besides, it lessened the importance of provenance for archival appraisal, decontextualizing records from the organic context in which they were created.

Historically, then, there was a close relationship between (public) archives and the state, and the focus of archival practice was to document and give evidence of governmental activities. But from the 1970s onwards a new approach expanded this notion and made room for other types of archival ideas: the societal approach. Hans Booms (1972) states that it is society, and not privileged users or organizers of archives, who must generate the criteria to evaluate which records should be kept in archives and which not, and this should be done through the archivist’s research and analysis of the function of the records creators, assuming that they were those designated by society to realize its needs and wishes (1991). He also stressed the active role of the archivist, as Schellenberg had done before, but underlined the notion of provenance instead of advocating a user-oriented approach. Canadian archivists, Cook amongst them, adopted this view, formulating it both from a theoretical point of view (macroappraisal acquisition strategy) and from a practical one (functional-structural macroappraisal methodology), which states that not only the importance of government functions, programmes, activities, and transactions that cause records to be created should be analysed, but also how all these relate to citizens (Cook 1991). This coincides with the Canadian notion of “total archives”, which stresses the double role of the archive: its official role as guardian of recorded evidence of transactions

and its cultural role as guardian of the societal memory and historical identity in all media. Thus, as Ian Wilson (1995) has put it, the “total archives” tradition focuses more on the records of governance rather than on those of government.

For the themes of this chapter, migration and gender, and the case studies used, the approach developed by Helen Samuels (institutional functional analysis and documentation strategy) is very interesting because it combines societal analysis and functional appraisal with the subject-based/user-based approach. In her book *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (1992), she argues that archivists need to research first the functions of their own institutions in order to appraise their records. This will provide them with the necessary knowledge to engage in a larger “documentation strategy” which will allow them to locate related personal records to complement or supplement the institutional archives. Thus, she advocates that “analysis and planning must precede collecting” (Samuels 1992:15, quoted in Cook 1997). As Cook puts it,

By bridging the world of corporate records archivists with that of personal manuscripts archivists, by focusing on the entire interrelated information universe rather than just a portion of them, by advocating a research-based, functional approach to institutional appraisal rather than the old search for ‘values’ in the content of records, Samuels provides an important direction for copying with the voluminous records of complex modern organizations and contemporary societies, and thus for revitalizing archival theory.

This holistic approach to archives and the emphasis on interrelationships between different sources of records and information as well as between different media, and the combining of approaches (provenance and research) is not only important for archival theory but also, importantly, for the research of issues related to gender and migration.

### **Implications of Archival Practices for Migration and gender**

The theoretical concepts derived from the establishment of institutional archives “have since been adopted by virtually every other kind of archival institution around the world, including even private collecting archives” (Cook, 2000: 5). A number of relevant issues thus arise from the concepts and theories discussed in the previous section, which we will approach in the context of archival research in the fields of migration and gender, as exemplified by our case studies.

A key point is that, given their origins -linked to public institutions with hierarchical organization systems- and their aims -to keep record of the activities of those institutions, both for legal purposes and for historical permanence-, archives were historically created by those in a position of power within the State and, consequently, the selection criteria were defined by the dominant political ideology. The resulting archival material gave the perspective of the hegemonic discourse and this was further perpetuated

in the research derived from these archives, which accepted as neutral and objective the historical evidence provided by records (Cook 1997, 2000). Of course, political hegemony itself changes, and the principles organizing specific archives may be modified by the evolution of a State, or the political or social composition of a nation and its related institutions. Degrees of state control also vary from one country or moment to another, and this may be reflected in archival practice. Special attention must be paid, therefore, to the historical context of the creation and the evolution of particular archives if we are to assess their contents critically.

In recent history, social movements such as workers' revolutions, feminism and ethnic groups have questioned the objectivity and universality of hegemonic values and introduced the notions of class, ethnicity or gender, among others, into academic research. Feminist and postcolonial or diaspora studies have demonstrated that hegemonic discourse excludes the perspectives which differ from it, and Foucault's influential analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge is reflected in accounts of the impact of feminism in the academic realm (Stanley 1997; McCallum and Radtke, 2001). These perspectives were also addressed in archival science, and the founding principles of archival theory were revised and discussed in their light. However, as is the case with other disciplines and institutions, the discussion has not translated straightforwardly into archival practice and, when analysing examples from different countries, we still find that national politics, historical contexts and archival traditions play an important role in the persistence of a traditional logic of archives. Particularly when dealing with public archives, it is important to remember that, as Jacques Derrida eloquently put it in *Archive Fever*: "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (Derrida, 1995).

## Using archival material to research migration

An important issue for our analysis both of migration and gender is that traditional archives are not organized or created in relation to a specific subject, that is, in relation to the content of the records kept. In the traditional definitions, as we have seen, archives are related to the producers of the documents they contain, be this organizations or physical persons, and so the content of their records will address a diverse range of issues. Although this might, at first sight, hinder the task of the researcher, requiring some amount of pre-search in order to locate relevant records, it is also a useful means to preserve and organize records in a way that serves all research interests. Within the archive, finding aids (“archival description, through inventories and registers”, Gilliland-Swetland 2000: 19) can be used to locate records, and, of course, another valuable source of help in the research process is the archivist. In theory, the archivist has the best knowledge of the records kept and ideally of about the history and organization of his or her institution, although this, is not always necessarily the case.

However, prior to reaching the archive, there is further tool that will help scholars interested in migration and/or gender to find the archival material they need: Documentation Centres. These are defined in the website of the European Environment Information and Observation Network (<http://www.eionet.europa.eu>) as centres “for assembling, coding, and disseminating recorded knowledge comprehensively treated as an integral procedure, utilizing various techniques for giving documentary information maximum accessibility and usability”. Thus, Documentation Centres are essentially data banks whose aim is to provide citizens with access to existing information. They mediate between the information and documents kept in libraries, archives and museums and the citizen, and so constitute a helpful tool for research. Documentation Centres are subject-focused and usually concentrate a catalogue of resources related to their particular theme.

As we shall see through the examples, many so-called archives, physical and/or virtual, are in fact Documentation Centres. However, the issues that will come up in the analysis are closely related to the archival principles mentioned in the first section of this chapter and will help us to understand the kind of things to be taken into consideration when approaching archival research. We will analyze these issues through four examples: two Spanish institutions (*Fundación Archivo de Indianos* -<http://www.archivodeindianos.es> - and *Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña* MHIC - <http://www.mhic.net>); a German documentation centre and museum (Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany *DOMiT* – <http://www.domit.de>) and an English virtual documentation centre, *Moving Here* - <http://www.movinghere.org.uk>. All of them deal with issues of migration.

In Spain, the theoretical perspective on archives is tied to its State-controlled tradition and mostly links archival practices to disciplines such as history and law (Fuster Ruiz 1999). The relationship between the State and archives is very close: government regulations structure the content and organization of public archives as well as the procedures for record appraisal very strictly (*Royal Decree 1164/2002, of November 8th*,

which regulates the preservation of documental patrimony with historical value, the control of the elimination of other documents of the General State Administration and its public organisms and the preservation of administrative documents in a format different from the original). Thus, the kind of material available in Spanish archives is inevitably linked to political control. As regards the migration context, a significant change is taking place: Spain has a long history of emigration (both to Europe and to Latin America), but currently the perspective is shifting. Having become the “southern border of Europe,” in the terms used by international reports (Gil Araújo 2001; Amnistía Internacional 2005), it is a site for immigration via northern Africa. The (Spanish) cities of Ceuta and Melilla are on the northern African coast, and the Strait of Gibraltar is an easy geographical point of entry, together with the Canary Islands, situated across the sea from Mauritania. Colonial links with Latin America have stimulated a longer history of immigration, both exile and economic, but the latter has recently increased. Spain is reversing its flow and turning into a country of immigrants.

Two Spanish archival institutions are related to migration: the *Fundación Archivo de Indianos* and the *Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña*. The *Fundación Archivo de Indianos* (<http://www.archivodeindianos.es>) is situated in the northern region of Asturias, in the small town of Colombres, and was constituted in 1987, promoted by the Regional Government of Asturias, the Savings Bank of Asturias and the University of Oviedo. It is a Private Cultural Foundation with the aim of supporting the study, research and documentation on emigration, thus creating a wide database for research on the Spanish emigration to America during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Foundation has two aspects: the first is the Archives, Documentation Centre and Library, and the second the Emigration Museum. The material available comes from the personal archives of emigrants and from donations made by overseas organizations, especially from *Centros Asturianos*.

In the period between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, many Asturians migrated to Latin American countries looking for a better life. Overseas, some of these emigrants became rich and established important communities, organising themselves in associations known as *Centros Asturianos*. These Centros carried out social and cultural activities and had economic and political power, which made them very influential. Such institutions still subsist worldwide ([www.fica.es](http://www.fica.es)). Some of those initial emigrants, the wealthy ones, returned to Asturias and developed cultural and philanthropic activities in their land of origin. They were known as “indianos”, since “Indias” was the name given to America. The influence of these *indianos*, both overseas and in Asturias, explains the establishment of the *Fundación Archivo de Indianos*. The investment of returned emigrants from Colombres meant that this little country town had, at the beginning of the 20th century, the same services as a city. Thus, the origin of this documentation centre is related to financial and political power and provides the views of those who succeeded in their migration experience. Among the promoters and funding institutions for this museum are those who hold power in the region (local and regional governments, regional bank, university), as well as some national institutions (State Secretariat for International Cooperation and for Latin America, Direction of National Archives and Archivo de Indias among others) and the Centros Asturianos of Madrid, Mexico and

Buenos Aires. Here we see that, although migration is the main focus of the centre, we are still looking at a Western and hegemonic perspective in the way this phenomenon is documented and constructed through the archive, as it centres mostly on the Asturian migrants themselves, often in a 'heroic' narrative tone.

More recent in its creation is the Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña –MHIC (Catalonian Museum for the History of Immigration), which was established in 2004 as the first museum dedicated to immigration in the country. The MHIC will contain a Museum building, still under construction, and a Documentation Centre. At the moment, the MHIC is functioning virtually through its website: <http://www.mhic.net>. The material of the online museum is made up of photographs and testimonies from the people who were involved in the immigration phenomenon. There is a permanent online exhibition, organized on two different levels: thematic (origin, travel, arrival, work, housing, everyday life, women and children) and chronological (old Catalonia, from ancient times until the end of the 18th century; modern Catalonia, 19th century; and contemporary Catalonia, 20th and 21st centuries). The aim of the MHIC's Documentation Centre is to become a focal point for researchers interested in the field of migration in Catalonia, and this will be achieved, among other means, through the establishment of contacts and agreements with Catalonian universities. At the moment, the material is still being gathered and it is not accessible online.

Catalonia is one of the richest regions of Spain and one which attracts important numbers of immigrants. However, the main focus of the MHIC is not contemporary immigration but historical immigration to Catalonia from other Spanish regions. The director of the Museum, Imma Boj, states that one of the aims of the Documentation Centre is "to disseminate the documentation about the history of immigration through exhibitions, conferences and promoting the research in this field of historical immigration, because nowadays there is much more work done regarding the present phenomenon [of immigration] than there is from a historical point of view" (*Àrea Besós* Nov. 2004 Año VIII - número 93, p. 4). This shows in the permanent exhibition of the virtual museum, where, although the last chronological stage (contemporary Catalonia) mentions that contemporary immigrants come mostly from Africa and Latin America, the photographs that accompany the screen all reflect internal migration, mostly from Andalusia.

This perspective aims at reinforcing historical knowledge about the region, and is related to the nationalist ideology pervading Catalonia. It is symptomatic that the permanent exhibition online, and many of the temporary exhibitions, are available only in catalán. Also, the focus of the Documentation Centre is strongly restricted to the geographical limits of Catalonia, as are the universities with which cooperation agreements are to be signed. The ideology underlying the creation of the MHIC is similar to that of the *Fundación Archivo de Indianos* in the sense that it offers the point of view of those in a power position and that the institution is promoted by the regional and local authorities. The idea of the MHIC is not so much to give voice to "the experience of others" as to enhance and reinforce the concept of Catalonia as an autonomous region with a specific history. However, it is must also be said that the MHIC is an ongoing project and its

construction (physically and virtually) is still underway. It is expected that the building of the museum will be finished in 2007.

The fact that group immigration is quite recent in Spain probably relates to the lack of archival material and resources regarding immigration from the perspective of the incoming communities and it is likely that this will change in the future. The number of second-generation immigrants is still low and this second generation is yet young. In interesting comparison to this stands the Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany – DOMiT (<http://www.domit.de>). The recent history of Germany as a country hosting immigrants is longer than that of Spain. In fact, many Spaniards, along with people from other nationalities, migrated to Germany to work during the second half of the 20th century to fill in for the shortage of workers after World War II. The DOMiT exists since 1990 and its purpose is to provide resources and generate knowledge about the immigrant phenomenon in Germany. The origin of DOMiT was in the Centre for Documentation and Museum on Migration from Turkey, established by first-generation Turkish immigrants, but since 2002 its focus has expanded to include material related to the history of immigration from Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, ex-Yugoslavia, Morocco, Tunisia, South Korea, Vietnam, Mozambique, and Angola. The idea of creating DOMiT began in the 1980s, with the process of the settling of migrants in Germany (Kocatürk-Schuster 2001).

As can be seen, two main aspects differentiate DOMiT from the Spanish examples: first of all, its point of view and the impulse for its creation came from the immigrants and not from the state. This is reflected in its aims as they are stated on the web page: “DOMiT’s goal is to preserve the heritage of the immigrants for future generations and to make it publicly accessible – for research as well as for self-ascertainment” (<http://www.domit.de>). This shift in the focus of the institution is also relevant for the second element that is different from the Fundación Archivo de Indianos and from the MHIC: the interest in broadening the geographical limits of the documents and to expand its interests to include other communities. While at the heart of the MHIC is Catalonia, at the heart of the DOMIT is the fact of migration as seen from the immigrants’ perspective.

In order to maintain this focus, the organization and development of DOMiT is structured around six guiding principles in which the independence of the organization from political issues and official institutions is stressed. This is further stated in that “DOMiT accepts only natural persons as members of the organization, corporations cannot become a member” (<http://www.domit.de>). DOMiT obtains its funding from diverse sources, from membership fees to public funds, donations and sponsoring. This expresses a will for independence from official discourse and ideology in the kind of material and approach to the phenomenon of immigration and, in this sense, contrasts with the two Spanish examples. It is the interest of DOMiT to create exhibitions and activities for and with immigrants and, in this light, they are multilingual.

In the UK, the web-based resource centre *Moving Here* (<http://www.movinghere.org.uk>), which is about immigration to England (so far it does not include the rest of the UK), shows a similar ideological position to DOMiT. England also

has an important history of immigration and today has stable immigrant communities which have shaped, as is the case in Germany, the configuration of contemporary society. The purpose of *Moving Here* is to explore, record and illustrate why people came to England over the last 200 years and what their experiences were and continue to be. The vision for *Moving Here* going forward is “to overcome barriers to the direct involvement of minority ethnic groups in recording and documenting their own history of migration, and to ensure this history is passed on to the next generation through schools” (<http://www.movinghere.org.uk>).

*Moving Here* understands itself as a centre of resources for different types of research and does not aim at being an archive. Therefore, it does not gather records from different sources. Instead, “it offers free access, for personal and educational use, to an online catalogue of versions of original material related to migration history from local, regional and national archives, libraries and museums” (<http://www.movinghere.org.uk>). Thus, it contrasts with the other examples in that it only aims at providing information about where records can be found, a description and digitized image of the items and an explanation about the way in which they can be accessed. *Moving Here* is, therefore, an online catalogue about migration. This is very useful for research and the procedure overcomes the problems and inconsistencies that other examples show in relation to the archival principles described in the first section of this chapter. *Moving Here* directs the user from the record to the archive where it can be found, and thus guarantees accountability and reliability of records. Such an approach might be related to the fact that the partners involved in the development of the website are archives and archival organizations, as well as museums and libraries from all over the country. This provides *Moving Here* with access to a wide collection of records and allows for the construction of an important database.

Apart from the catalogue, *Moving Here* offers information and online exhibitions about four groups of communities: Caribbean, Irish, Jewish and South Asian. These are organized in a similar way to those at MHIC and DOMiT. The information about the histories of these four groups is contextualized into a narrative written by specialists from different institutions. These accounts, developed by scholars using archival material, are used as divulgative information to help a concrete type of user: that in search of his or her own personal roots. For this purpose, the section “Tracing your roots” is a tool that gives users tips and suggestions for planning and developing further research, including archival work. Step by step and very didactically, the visitor is guided through the complex world of archives through easy to understand explanations and hyperlinks to other resources. In this sense, the site constitutes a “best practice” example.

## Women/gender and archives

The issue of how gender and archives relate to each other has been raised especially in studies of feminist history, more than in archival science. The close relationship between history and archives has been stated elsewhere in this chapter. Feminist historians, Gerda Lerner among them (1993), have pointed out the exclusion of women from official historical accounts. As in history, women have also been excluded or invisibilised in archival material. As archives were created to preserve evidence of the actions of those in power, with any perspective differing from the hegemonic discourse systematically excluded, it is easy to understand that women's activities in most cases have not reached archives, because records relating to them (if they existed) were not considered relevant for long-term preservation.

As feminist historians have pointed out, information about women has not reached us, either because it did not exist (women did not have access to education and economic resources to produce long-lasting documents) or because it was not considered relevant enough to be kept. Gabriele Earnshaw points out, private records relating to women do not necessarily reach archives:

[A]ppraisal for acquisition in traditional archives has discriminated against records created by women. Although archival theory and methodology for acquisition are not inherently biased, in practice acquisition of private records takes place in a haphazard manner according to the value system of the ruling political ideology ... because of structural and societal discrimination women have not been part of this ruling elite and interest in the preservation of their records has been minimal. (Earnshaw 1994: ii-iii, quoted in Buhlmann 1998).

In the first section of this chapter we have referred to the societal approach to archival practice, especially with regard to the process of appraisal and acquisition of records. Such theories widen the focus of appraisal, taking into account not only the functions and activities of the institutions, but also the way citizens interact with them. Although still focusing mainly on institutional archives, Helen Samuels has expanded the macroappraisal theory in order to include private records and personal archives, and the relevance of this for gender research is obvious: women's activities have been developed mostly in the private realm, so it is more likely that information about them will be contained in such records.

The aim of these more inclusive theories is to give space to different perspectives in archival practice, and this goal is to be achieved through the analysis of the context in which records are created, thus gaining a deeper insight into what kind of records are more relevant for the accomplishment of the cultural role of archives (to preserve societal memory and historical identity of citizens). However, as Jana Buhlmann asks, "Are we

[archivists] informing ourselves as to the activities of women, individually and collectively, within our communities? And if we are ignorant of this context, is it influencing the acquisition process?" (1998). In other words, is this contextual research and analysis that is to precede acquisition done with a gender perspective?

This is a crucial observation since, as Gabriele Earnshaw has suggested, as women have entered the public space and have been more involved in the context of the creation of records through their increasing participation in public activities and institutions, "...traditional archives will automatically catch documentary evidence of women's activities in their net..." (1994: 3, quoted in Buhlmann 1998). And yet, this process is not necessarily carried out with a gender perspective and, therefore, the records which inform us about women will enter an organizational structure created, in the first place, to account for the activities of men. The fact that women have entered this structure still leaves many of women's activities and experiences behind.

When records about women do exist, another problem arises in relation to their use for research: these might be "buried materials" (Buhlmann 1998). Since women are not the creators of the records, references about them may appear in records created by men with whom they had some kind of relationship (husband, father, employer...). This will make it difficult for researchers to access this material. Jennifer Bernhardt Steadman furthers this situation pointing out that "the triple jeopardy of women of color further obscures their lives and texts, which can be hidden in white patron's papers, employers' records, or even under slave owners' names" (Steadman et al., 2002). But information about women in archives might also be "buried" behind the organization of the archive which mirrors that of the institution to which those archives pertain. Institutions are part of the public sphere and have been established by those with political power in order to facilitate control and maintain their position. The logic that underlines them, therefore, is, again, that of the hegemonic patriarchal discourse that excludes women, particularly from institutions, since until very recently, the role of women in the public sphere was almost non-existent, and they had no chance of making decisions about which institutions were to be established and how they would relate to them -women's suffrage was only gained in Europe, after all, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in traditional archives, information about women might be dispersed in several sections, because the logic of archival organization did not apply to women's experiences.

Thus, access to women's material in traditional archives can be problematic and it might require more effort than other types of research, as Helen M. Buss has acknowledged: "research in women's archives demands more than the usual patient search" (2001: 1). Steps have been taken to improve the situation and, in some archives, it is possible to find staff in charge of so-called "women's materials." However, the introduction of the gender perspective into archival practice and the training of archivists is the only way to guarantee that archives are really accomplishing their cultural role as guardians of the memory and historical identity of women.

On the other hand, Women's Studies researchers have stressed the political side of archival research: "Working [on women's studies] in the archives involves confronting the politics of knowledge that govern not only who and what will be preserved, but also who and what merits scholarly attention" (Steadman et al., 2002). Thus, it is not only archivists who hold responsibility for widening and revising the actual configuration of archives, but also feminist activists and scholars. Gerda Lerner informs us about how, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the leaders of the American suffragist movement "were aware of the danger that their movement ... might fall into oblivion if its records were lost" (Lerner, 1993: 269). This led Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage to preserve the records of their activities and compile the *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881-1922), which has provided useful sources for feminist researchers. Another example of political responsibility attached to research in archives is given by Kimberly Springer in her article "Unexpected: women, sources, and histories" (2004), where she tells how her search for materials on black feminist organizations from 1968 to 1980 led her to unexpected places such as attics, underneath beds or garage crawlspaces. From this situation, she reflects on the importance of preservation: "Seeing that the original black feminist organizations' material that have come into my possession make it into either an historical, educational, or activist institution's holdings or become a part of a digital archive, are just as much a part of encouraging the growth of women's history as writing about the materials" (Springer, 2004).

### **The use of personal testimonies**

The use of personal testimonies, either written or oral, of migrants or their relatives is a common feature in the examples analyzed in section two of this chapter. With the exception of the Fundación Archivo de Indianos, which does not have a fully interactive webpage, the other three institutions offer visitors to their sites the possibility of publishing their own experiences of migration.

Testimonies are a key element when it comes to documenting the history and experiences of migrants, and the same is true of women. One of the reasons for this is that neither women nor migrants have been adequately represented in official institutions and, therefore, in official history. Hans Booms, who proposed a societal approach to archives (see section one of this chapter), had proposed at first that archivists should do this through an analysis of public opinion (1972). The difficulty of this task led him to revise his theory and change the focus to an analysis of the institutions, assuming that these represent society and, therefore, will give the archivist an easier insight into society's desires and values. In this way, also, the principle of provenance could still be used for archival organization. However, as we have seen in the previous section about gender and women, not all citizens relate to institutions in such a straightforward way. This may be, then, one of the reasons why testimonies are used in the case studies involved: to complement the information given by archives, as official record creators did not create or preserve the documents that account for the activities and experiences of migrants and women.

There are two other reasons that might explain why this pairing of archives and testimonies is used. One of them is related to the self-perception of the records creator. The documentation of one's own activities is related to a desire for transcendence and also to a sense of self-importance; that is, people and institutions create records of what they do because they think this information is relevant, either for themselves (for example, to protect themselves legally), for others (for example, as a means of constructing a collective identity) or for future generations (for example, in educational terms or to contribute to history). Both these concepts –transcendence and self-importance- are linked to a position of power and, therefore, are alien to migrants and women in general terms. They are consequently less likely to consider themselves as potential records creators. The consciousness-raising process started by the feminist and diasporic / ethnic movements partially modified this, and records about women and migrants are starting to be traced and made accessible (for instance, through Documentation Centres) and also to be created. Still, in many cases, the available records do not give full information about a concrete phenomenon and, therefore, if possible, testimonies of the people involved in it might complete the puzzle.

This leads us to the third reason that might explain why testimonies are an integral part of these case studies. Research about migration and women's issues may be related to contemporary facts and, as we commented in the first section of this chapter, records have a life cycle characterized by two stages: in the first one, records are being used by the creating organization and they do not become archival material until they reach the second phase, when the organization does not need to use them anymore. This means that it takes a period of time for archival material to be created and, therefore, it cannot be used for research about current issues. In this sense, testimonies, again, make up for the lack of available records.

From an archival perspective, testimonies, in the way they are collected in <http://www.movinghere.org.uk> and <http://www.mhic.net>, through an online form, pose some problems regarding their accountability and reliability and, therefore, their possibilities for use in research. The testimonies available on these websites are interesting to read and their web-based character relates in a very dynamic way to the migration phenomenon. However, their anonymous creation through a website makes their use problematic in academic research because, on the one hand, it is impossible to verify stories (we must trust people's goodwill, but this is not enough in academic research), and on the other hand, the gathering of information is unsystematic and the context of creation, other than the fact that it was web-generated, is missing. Going back to the revised principles of archival theory, "archivists try to preserve reliable records in context by ensuring that records are initially created according to acceptable standards for evidence" (Cook, 2000: 6). Since the context of the web-based testimonies is not known, their reliability, from an archival point of view, is weakened.

This does not mean, though, that personal accounts cannot be considered archival material, and the Ellis Island Oral History Program is an example. Ellis Island is well known in relation to the history of migration and the passenger records kept in its archives

are available online at <http://www.ellisland.org>. Besides documents and objects, oral testimonies from immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island are preserved in the archives. Potential interviewees are contacted by the Ellis Island staff and the interviews are recorded and transcribed, in order to make them accessible for researchers. The procedure of collecting these testimonies turns them into more reliable material.

In contrast to the traditional view of archives as related to power institutions and, therefore, preserving the “relevant” information of a society, the use of personal records and testimonies reminds us that “the personal is political.” Research about gender and migration is informed by this idea. “Working in archives involves not only engaging the evidence we find, but also addressing the silences and absences we encounter. ... Silences and absences raise important theoretical issues” (Steadman et al., 2002). Through the analysis of the gaps, of what is missing in archives, Women’s and Migration Studies have turned, in many cases, to the personal accounts of people whose voices have been excluded from the official discourse, giving value to their experiences and points of view. As an example, Geraldine Forbes explains, in her article “Locating and preserving documents: the first step in writing women’s history” (2003), how her research about medical women’s careers in India began with the reading of the memoirs of the “lady doctor” Haimabati Sen. This personal document guided the author into further archival research and the results of her work helped to shed new light on the colonial medical project.

### **Preliminary conclusions**

The relationship between archives and knowledge production is an ongoing and mutually influencing process. Archival principles were first formulated from the perspective of power; when those outside power, and outside the archives themselves, contested the validity of those principles, archives had to be revised to make room for other types of records and archival principles were in turn revised. Archives are a dynamic but integral part of the politics of knowledge, and must be approached as such.

Using archives to research issues of gender and/or migration makes visible a series of assumptions that may not be so clear when they are used for a more traditional kind of historical research. Trying to find material about groups of people who have been situated in the margins of official history highlights the close relationship between archival institutions and hegemonic power. Throughout this chapter, we have analysed how this relationship is translated into the kind of material available in archives and also how some organizations have tried to overcome and/or complement this perspective through the use of personal testimonies.

From the issues addressed, some key aspects can be identified in relation to archival research for migration and gender. First of all, it is important to understand the history, aims and organization of each archival institution in order to understand the kind of

material available and where it will be located. Most crucially, archival material and archives must be approached critically, remembering that there is an ideology underlying their organization, a discourse behind the records, and that these convey the purpose and ideas of the organization that has turned them into archives. Active, critical reading and further research are therefore usually required.

The relation between archival and institutional organization is a fundamental source of information which will reveal not only what kind of records will be preserved in the archive, but also which records will be absent. As regards migration and gender, this matter is of the utmost importance because it will lead to questioning why records about these particular subjects do not exist or are not made available, thus helping the researcher to better assess the archival material and guiding the research towards other sources. Documentation Centres constitute a useful tool for research in gender and/or migration, and can be approached as a first step to plan research.

The evidence of the case studies also shows that archival research should not be used in isolation. Other research methods are needed in order to fill the gaps between records, and to help the researcher to interpret and use the evidence given by archives.

## References

- Amnistía Internacional, 2005. *España Frontera Sur*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.es.amnesty.org/temas/refugio-e-inmigracion/pagina/espana-frontera-sur/> [cited 14 April 2007].
- Bearman, David, 1996. Virtual Archives. ICA Meeting Beijing, [online]. Available from: <http://web.archive.org/web/19990427133904/http://www.lis.pitt.edu/~nhprc/prog6.html> [cited 06 December 2006].
- Booms, Hans, 1972. Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in f the Appraisal of Archival Sources. *Archivaria*. 24. Summer 1987 (translation by Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhower).
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1991. Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity. *Archivaria*. 33. Association of Canadian Archivists.
- Buhlmann, Jana, 1998. Refuelling the Thought Process: Gender and the Creation, Maintenance, and Use of Records. *AABC Newsletter*. 8 (4). Archives Association of British Columbia.
- Buss, Helen M., and M. Kadar. eds., 2001. *Working in Women's Archives: researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier U.P.
- Cook, Terry, 1991. *An Appraisal Methodology: Guidelines for Performing an Archival Appraisal*. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1997. What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1989, and the Future Paradigm Shift. *Archivaria*. 43. Available from: <http://www.mybestdocs.com/cookt-pastprologue-ar43fnl.htm> [cited 6 December 2006].
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2000. Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts. *Archival Science*. 1 (1).
- Cook, Terry, and J.M. Schwartz, 2002. Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance. *Archival Science*. 2 (3-4).
- Daniels, Maygene, and T. Walch. eds., 1984. *A Modern Archives Reader. Basic Reading or Archival Theory and Practice*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives Trust Fund Board.
- Derrida, Jacques, 1995. Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, in Charles Merewether, 2006. *The Archive*.

Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany, <http://www.domit.de> [cited 6 December 2006].

Earnshaw, Gabrielle, 1994. *Preserving Records Bearing on the Experience of Women in North America: The Women's Archives Movement and its Significance for Appraisal and Acquisition*. Master of Archival Studies Thesis. University of British Columbia.

Ellis Island Oral History Program, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/stli/serv02.htm> [cited 6 December 2006].

European Environment Information and Observation Network, <http://www.eionet.europa.eu> [cited 6 December 2006].

Forbes, Geraldine, 2003. Locating and preserving documents: the first step in writing women's history. *Journal of Women's History*. 14 (4). Bloomington: Indiana U.P.

Fundación Archivo de Indianos, <http://www.archivodeindianos.es> [cited 6 December 2006].

Fuster Ruiz, Francisco, 1999. Archivística, Archivo, Documento de Archivo... Necesidad de Clarificar los Conceptos. *Anales de Documentación*. 2. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia.

Gil Araújo, Sandra, 2001. Inmigración en España. Radicalizando la precariedad laboral. *First Press*, [online].  
Available from: [www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/press/108araujo](http://www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/press/108araujo) [cited 14 April 2007].

Gilliland-Swetland, Anne, 2000. *Enduring Paradigm, New Opportunities. The Value of the Archival Perspective in the Digital Environment*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources.

Ham, Gerald F., 1975. The Archival Edge, in Maygene Daniels and Timothy Walch. eds., 1984. *A Modern Archives Reader. Basic Reading or Archival Theory and Practice*.

Jenkinson, Hilary, 1922. *A Manual of Archive Administration*. London (1968).

Kocatürk-Schuster, Bengü, 2001. Who is responsible for the history of migration? [online].  
Available from: <http://www.domit.de/pdf/Who-is-responsible-for-the-history-of-migration.pdf> [cited 14 April 2007].

Lerner, Gerda, 1993. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness. From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maymí-Sugrañes, Héctor J., 1999. Latin American Archival Theory and Practice during the 1970s and 1980s. *Libraries & Culture* [online] 34 (3). The University of Texas Press.

Available at:

[http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/libraries\\_and\\_culture/v037/37.4maymi.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/libraries_and_culture/v037/37.4maymi.html) [cited 14 April 2007].

McCallum, Pamela, and L. Radtke, 2001. Break-Throughs, Break-Ins and Break-Ups: The Impact of Gender Studies Across the Disciplines. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 29 (1-2). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Merewether, Charles. ed., 2006. *The Archive*. Documents of Contemporary Art. London and Cambridge (Massachusetts): Whitechapel and The MIT Press.

Moving Here, <http://www.movinghere.org.uk> [cited 14 April 2007].

Muller, S., J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, 1898. *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, translation (1940) of the 2nd ed. by Arthur H. Leavitt (New York, reissued 1968).

Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña, <http://www.mhic.net> [cited 14 April 2007].

REAL DECRETO 1164/2002, de 8 de noviembre, por el que se regula la conservación del patrimonio documental con valor histórico, el control de la eliminación de otros documentos de la Administración General del Estado y sus organismos públicos y la conservación de documentos administrativos en soporte distinto al original, B.O.E. 274/2002. Available at: [www.boe.es/boe/dias/2002/11/15/pdfs/A40139-40143.pdf](http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2002/11/15/pdfs/A40139-40143.pdf) [cited 14 April 2007].

Sáez, Montse, 2004. El Centro de Documentación de Can Serra abre sus puertas con la presencia de Pasqual Maragall. *Àrea Besós*, [online]. 93. Available from: <http://www.grupoarea96.com/AreaBesos/ABcast.htm> [cited 14 April 2007].

Samuels, Helen W., 1992. *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Society of American Archivists and Scarcecrow Press.

Schellenberg, Theodore R., 1956. The Appraisal of Modern Public Records. *National Archives Bulletin*. 8. Washington, D.C.

Springer, Kimberly, 2004. Unexpected: women, sources, and histories. *Journal of Women's History* [online]. Available from: [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal\\_of\\_womens\\_history/v016/16.4springer.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal_of_womens_history/v016/16.4springer.pdf) [cited 14 April 2007].

Stanley, Liz. ed., 1997. *Knowing Feminism: On Academic Borders, Territories and Tribes*. London: Sage.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, Susan B. Anthony, and Mathilda J. Gage. eds., 1881-1922. *A History of Woman Suffrage*. 6 vols. New York: Fowler and Wells.

Steadman, Jennifer B., E. Engelhardt, F. Smith Foster, and L. Micham, 2001. *Archive survival guide: Practical and theoretical approaches for the next century of women's studies research*.

Available from: <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/legacy/v019/19.2steadman.html> [cited 14 April 2007].

The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., <http://www.ellisland.org> [cited 14 April 2007].

*Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers*, [http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/04/0416_e.html) [cited 14 April 2007].

Wilson, Ian E., 1995. Reflections on Archival Strategies. *American Archivist*. 58.