Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the programme of Feminist and Sexed-Gendered Political Memories, known also by the name Sex and Revolution (Sexo y Revolución). This programme is part of the Centre for Documentation and Research on Leftist Culture (Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas or CeDInCI for its acronym in Spanish). CeDInCI is a documentation centre (library, newspaper collection and archive) located in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and devoted to the preservation, conservation, cataloguing and dissemination of political and cultural productions of Latin American lefts from its beginnings, in the second half of the 19th century, up to the present day. The programme has many objectives: to create visibility for the materials that CeDInCI has available for public consultation; to attract donations; to establish and consolidate cooperation relationships with other existing or potential archives that are especially devoted to political feminist and sexed-gendered memories; to develop the study of and debates about the relationship between women’s movements, feminist and sexed-gendered groups and the wide spectrum of left movements; and to become a concrete working space for critical thought on feminist and sexed-gendered memories, as well as a key promoter of activities connected with these areas of interest.

Keywords: archive; Leftist culture; memories; gender; sexualities; CeDInCI
‘To float up from the reservoirs where we were supposed to sink’
‘Tan de reaparecer en los estanques donde hubimos de hundirnos’

Néstor Perlongher

The programme of Feminist and Sexed-Gendered Political Memories, referred to as Sex and Revolution (*Sexo y Revolución*), was founded at least 18 years ago when a small group of people, including its current director, Horacio Tarcus, promoted the creation of the Centre for Documentation and Research on Leftist Culture (*Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas* or CeDInCI for its acronym in Spanish).

CeDInCI is a documentation centre (library, newspaper collection and archive) located in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is devoted to the preservation, conservation, cataloguing and dissemination of political and cultural productions of Latin American lefts from their birth in the second half of the 19th century up to the present day. Its collections include materials from different left theoretical currents (Anarchism, Socialism, Communism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Guevarism, New Left, revolutionary nationalisms, etc.) and social movements (workers, students, women, human rights and peasants’ movements) along with artistic and intellectual groups. It also has important library and newspaper archive documents and collections from other political trends and tendencies (Liberalism, Radicalism, Conservatism, Christian Democracy, Christian Socialism, Peronism and other Latin American nationalist groups).

The centre started off as a not-for-profit civil organization and is currently part of a network of institutions under the National University of San Martín. Since the opening of the first branch in April 1998, the initial collection has grown substantially through some purchases and, mainly, through donations.2

The acronym CeDInCI involves many goals: being more than just an archive, researching preserved materials, bringing the margins to the centre, considering culture as much as politics, contributing to the production of the document that will write history and, over all, conceiving a plural left without impeding the controversial construction of left movements but rather aiming to recover their intense legacy. It has conceived of left movements that go beyond the promise of revolutionizing economic structures and ending labour exploitation. It has envisioned left movements that are capable of reconsidering life in all its manifestations, from sleep to leisure time, from food to sexuality and from dressing to the use of time and the body.

The programme continued to expand every time a book on sexual pleasure, fatigue or utopia; a pamphlet on homosexuality; or the flyer of a small feminist association reached CeDInCI. The programme, still bearing no name, consolidated these materials with the collection of memory-driven left movements. They did not occupy a minor shelf nor were pushed to the background with a tiny label.

Another detail makes up the underground history of the programme: CeDInCI has never been a mere archive of ‘Important Books by Great Men’. It is also a reservoir of precarious volumes, ephemeral leaflets, petty photocopied pamphlets and cheap paper periodicals. After all, are there any boundaries to the fetish of keeping objects? CeDInCI is also the refuge of old ID cards of affiliation to political parties, notebooks, newspaper clippings stuck with glue or hidden in books, multicolored pins, sepia portraits, bus stickers, handwritten notes and – the last straw of intellectual necrophilia – the death mask of an author and its bow tie.

The rescuing efforts of memory’s material footprints lead us to respect those who zealously keep objects. As mentioned before, these are not only ‘Great Men’ who are confident that the future has a place for them. The collection also provides a space for innumerable actors, actresses and players in history who – apart from agitating, marching, starting and enlivening assemblies and internal committees, holding secretariat positions, breaking ranks organizing demonstrations of their own and new groups, waving multicolored flags and suffering exile, repression and death – wrote and edited or cut out and archived.

Last year the programme finished materializing when Juan Pablo Queiroz showed up with questions, promises of donations, periodicals under his arm and with his own memory and hoarding obsession. The only thing we had to do was to look for a way to channel so much enthusiasm and summon those persons we knew are engulfed by a similar fixation and honor the material footprints of their past and
present militancy. Hence, I currently have the honor of coordinating an advisory group composed of renowned figures of the academy and local activism: Mabel Bellucci, Virginia Cano, Nicolás Cuello, Lucas Morgan Disalvo, Francisco Fernández, Marcelo Ernesto Ferreyra, María Luisa Peralta, Juan Pablo Queiroz, Marcelo Reisman, Catalina Trebisacce and Nayla Vacarezza.  

CeDInCI was aware of the rescue and preservation of documents deemed undesirable by the State archives. Said documents, worthy of razzias, were at the mercy of the police’s whim and jeopardised by the bonfire of censorship. Yet, the challenge now was different: making more room for the wide array of unpleasant letters of feminisms, homosexual and gay activist groups, the lesbian revolutionary visibility, the radical menace of trans identities, as well as their respective ephemeral and intense relationships with left movements. Hence, to achieve our goal, we set forth a few ambitious objectives. Firstly, the programme seeks to make visible the materials that CeDInCI has available for public consultation by specifying their names and assisting anyone interested with the search process across our catalogues. Secondly, the programme especially welcomes interested parties who wish to make donations and provides them with guidance regarding the outcome, conservation, guidelines for the access and consultation of their documents, journals, photographs and books in order to preserve materials at risk of loss or which remain in private archives that can barely be accessed. Thirdly, the programme sets out to establish and consolidate cooperation relationships with other existing or potential archives that are especially devoted to political feminist and sexed-gendered memories. In the fourth place, we strive to further develop the study of and debates on the relationship between women’s movements, feminist and sexed-gendered groups and the wide spectrum of left movements. Finally, we expect the programme to become a concrete work space for critical thought on feminist and sexed-gendered memories, in addition to a key promoter of activities connected with these areas.

In order to attain the general goals and promote the activities set forth by the programme yearly, the work of each area plays a fundamental role at CeDInCI, as all of these areas are involved in the various stages of material-processing, which grows rapidly in number.  

When the programme started, with the invaluable support of Juan Pablo Queiroz, we received part of the personal archive of Sara Torres, a well-known feminist and sexologist. She has been organizing the National Women’s Meetings (Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres) since 1986. She is the founding member of ATEM, namely the Association of Women’s Work and Studies (Asociación Trabajo y Estudio de la Mujer), Woman’s Place (Lugar de Mujer), Sexual Politics Group (Grupo Política Sexual), the Raquel Liberman Assembly (Asamblea Raquel Liberman) (Women Against Sexual Exploitation), the National Network of Prevention against Domestic Violence (Red Nacional de Prevención de la Violencia Doméstica) and the International Network against Sexual Exploitation (Red Internacional contra la Explotación Sexual). In addition, she is the President of the Anti-Sexual Slavery Network (Red No a la Trata), which was founded at the beginning of 2004. The collection is an important testimony of the development of the feminist movement in Argentina and it includes documents related to the emblematic Argentine Feminist Union (Unión Feminista Argentina or UFA) and the Homosexual Liberation Front (Frente de Liberación Homosexual or FLH), in which Néstor Perlongher, one of Sara’s friends, also participated.

There are also various reports and proclamations of the association Woman’s Place, which, along with other documents, reflect the agenda of feminist activism in the eighties. In addition, it is worth noting that there is an important documentary volume on the different editions of the National Women’s Encounter and the V Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter. On the other hand, the collection has numerous dossiers on sexuality, abortion, human trafficking, feminist theory, legislation on violence, child protection, etc. Finally, one can also find several feminist publications from the 80s (92,000) from Argentina, Brazil, Spain and Uruguay.  

Juan Pablo Queiroz’s second contribution resulted in the creation of the Marcelo Manuel Benítez Collection. Benítez was born in 1951 in the city of Buenos Aires and grew up in the town of Avellaneda, where he currently lives. He is a psychologist, poet and painter. From a young age, he was committed to the left Trotskyist militancy through the Workers’ Socialist Party (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores or PST) until he joined the Homosexual Liberation Front, where he befriended Néstor Perlongher and Eduardo Todesca. He wrote for the Somos journal of said Front. After his retreat during the dictatorship,
he participated in journals such as El Porteño and Nueva Presencia. He joined the gay groups that emerged in 1983, such as the Federative Gay Group (Grupo Federativo Gay or GFG) along with his former partner from the FLH, Zelmar Acevedo and later he joined the Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA, in Spanish). He quit in 1990. Later, he wrote in the digital journal La Tecla Eñe.

The collection constitutes an important record of the first Argentine gay and lesbian organization from the 70s and 80s. Regarding the pioneering Homosexual Liberation Front, for example, circulars, stickers (to be fixed in buses), a flyer illustrated by Marcelo Manuel Benítez and an article from the journal Así from the FLH are included in the archive. The collection contains internal documents and a flyer from the Federative Gay Group. In connection with the Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA), one can also find circulars and a copy of Vamos a andar mujer (the only one participating within said organization). Also, one can find a document of Gays DC, another organization that was founded by Carlos Jáuregui. In addition, there are newspaper articles regarding topics such as pedophilia, homosexuality, AIDS, etc. One may also come across notes from courses taught by Tomás Abraham in the 80s and other handwritten notes. Furthermore, CeDInCI protects documents issued by various conservative groups and a document repudiating John Paul II’s visit to Argentina in 1987.

There is also a broad card file with press archives classified by subject and sorted alphabetically, which have recently drawn the attention of those who consult the collections for research purposes. Another contribution from Juan Pablo Queiroz allowed us to open the archival collection of Sam Larson, who was born in India, grew up in the city of Catamarca and currently lives in Jersey City, United States. From 1990 up until 1998, he was a member of Act Up Americas, a New York Act Up committee. Act Up Americas was composed of a group of activists who were devoted to disseminating information on the treatments available to battle AIDS and standing up for the rights of persons living with AIDS in Latin America. At the beginning of the 90s, he started publishing ka-buum in Jersey City, a home-made publication on LGBT activism in Latin America, which consisted of seven issues and was distributed across the Latin gay community living in the USA and sent to Latin American militant groups.

This collection includes documents that illustrate the development of LGBT activism in Argentina and Uruguay, especially during the 90s. The material was gathered by Larson during his stay in Argentina, where he actively participated in different gay and lesbian groups. Furthermore, there is a literary publication of a clandestine circulation titled Gay: breviario samizbat, edited in 1981.

There is another set of important documents dating from 1990 to 1996 that belong to the Argentina Homosexual Community. These include announcements and letters (which circulated in Argentina and abroad) regarding the claim for legal status (denied by the Court) as well as its struggle to retain its office. It also includes a ‘report of current situation’ drafted by the Buenos Aires Lesbian Front (Frente de Lesbianas de Buenos Aires) in 1993, in which the CHA participated. In addition, there is an important press dossier regarding the media repercussions of the first five ‘gay, lesbian and transsexual pride parades’ that took place between 1992 and 1996.

Finally, there are some spare documents of a different nature, such as the project Archive and Library of Lesbians and Different Women (Archivo y Biblioteca Lésbica y de Mujeres Diferentes), signed by the lesbian activists Chela Amadio and Alejandra Sardá; a document describing the activities of the Argentine Society for Gay and Lesbian Integration (Sociedad de Integración Gay Lésbica de Argentina or SIGLA, for its acronym in Spanish) from 1995; and a document from the II National Meeting of Sexual Minorities (II Encuentro Nacional de Minorías Sexuales), which was held in Salta in 1997 and promoted by the Arco Iris Group (Colectivo Arco Iris).

Regarding the Marcelo Ernesto Ferreyra Collection, it was the own producer and participant of the programme’s advisory group who donated it. He is an architect and has been social activist since the 80s, first in Buenos Aires and then in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Argentina, he participated in the Argentine Homosexual Community and Gays for Civil Rights (Gays por los Derechos Civiles) and contributed to the changes in the legislation of the city of Buenos Aires and the inclusion of the subject of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. He was one of the main promoters of the Gay Pride Parade in Buenos Aires. He collaborated in various international organizations such as Interpride, where he served as vice-president and director for the area of Latin America and the Caribbean. Since then,
he has been involved in intense work with agencies on an international level. This is one of the most complete collections when it comes to studying the history of the various organizations and associations of Lesbians, Gays, Trans, Bisexuals and Intersexuals of Latin America, from their first appearances to the present day. The digital documents in this collection have been organised by the producer, who arranged the folders by country. Inside each folder, documents are sorted chronologically.

Two other collections kept by the programme’s producer can be said to have resulted from the Ferreyra archive. One of them is that of Oscar López Zenarruza, who was born in 1946 and currently lives in the province of Jujuy. He is the author and director of 56 stage plays already performed. He worked as a drama teacher in Escuela de la Inmaculada Concepción in the province of Santa Fe. He also worked as an actor, assistant director and in the field of cultural management, among other activities. The collection is a vast compilation of documents that show a variety of topics related to the discourses and practices regarding sexuality in Argentina. Moreover, it helps rebuild a network of circulation of publications in less explored itineraries such as the city of San Salvador de Jujuy.

Another collection is that of Eduardo Antonetti, who was a renowned activist until his death in 1996 in the Argentine gay community. He participated in the Argentine Homosexual Community and in the Church of the Metropolitan Community of Buenos Aires (Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana, ICM). During his involvement with the CHA, he was in charge of the STOP RAZZIA campaign. Hence, he kept a record of police abuses. In addition, he monitored the discriminatory policies adopted by the Argentine Church which he then reported to the Gays for Civil Rights organization. Based on this information, the organization followed a policy of condemnation against the discrimination manifested by the religious authorities and it filed two lawsuits against Cardinal Quarracino on the grounds of discrimination.

He was closely linked to human rights organizations, being a friend of Madres de Plaza de Mayo Laura Bonaparte and Nora Cortiñas. This is why the claim regarding the derogation of police edicts, set forth in the Code of Misdemeanors of different cities in the country, was one of the first battles given by vindication groups of sexual diversity in our country. This collection shows the detailed record made under this campaign between 1989 and 1992. With more than 90 cases, the two minutes books record various situations in different parts of Argentina, especially in the city of Buenos Aires, in some towns of the province of Buenos Aires and in the city of Rosario. These are handwritten notes, each one of them being entered as a ‘case’, written consecutively with an associated number.

Finally, by contacting Guadalupe Maradei, Daniel González Rebolledo provided us with materials that allowed us to kickstart the Emma Barrandeguy Collection. She was a writer who was born in Gualeguay, in the province of Entre Ríos. She graduated as a teacher with a high school diploma and later studied philosophy and took language courses in French, English and Italian. She worked as a journalist in Crítica and Vea y Lea, where she was the secretary of the writer (linked to local anarchism) Salvadora Medina Onrubia. She participated in the Biblioteca Claridad, within the homonymous association, located in the city of Gualeguay, Entre Ríos, as a secretary to the Board of Directors of said association, chaired by Dr. Roberto Beracochea, in which the writer Juan L. Ortiz also participated. This collection sheds light on the various activities performed by Barrandeguy, especially in her home town and her involvement within the cultural life of her city. It also informs us of the contacts the writer had within the anarchist, socialist and communist movements in the city of Entre Ríos. The mail kept in this collection includes a remarkable number of letters that reveal the most intimate circle of the writer. It also has documents that belong to the Claridad Association (Agrupación Claridad) of the city of Gualeguay. On the other hand, there are typed articles, manuscripts and newspaper articles written by Barrandeguy plus articles – most of them from Entre Ríos newspapers – with comments on some of the writer’s works: Crónica de Medio Siglo, Refacciones, Camino hecho, and Habitaciones. Administrative documents regarding her work in the newspaper Crítica (such as credentials, pay slips, etc.) are also contained in the collection. There is a list that specifies the dates of her monthly contributions and special and weekly articles that the writer published in said newspaper.

As we celebrate the creation of these collections, we continue receiving plenty of queries from persons who wish to think about the destiny of their archives, the safeguard of their documents and, especially, the possibility of sharing them. We tell them all that CeDInCI provides a public guarantee
of institutional safeguard and is willing to help disseminate and make available the donated materials for consultation. Likewise, we are always receiving partial donations of books, publications and printed material that result from the activities carried out by the prolific local and Latin American activism.

Another ongoing process involves the acquisition and addition of feminist, lesbian, gay movements and LGBT periodicals by means of donation. Similarly, one of the short-term goals of the programme consists in completing the collections already in our catalogue. Periodicals are highly valued at CeDIinCI, not only with regard to their preservation, but also as the object of study of a Research Project devoted to the regular publications of left movements during the 20th century. This Project is financed by the National Agency of Scientific and Technological Promotion (Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica).

One of the most visible results of that institutional effort is AMERICALEE, the Portal of Latin American Periodicals. This free-access virtual platform is rapidly expanding and has already more than 50 periodicals in the fields of culture and politics of Latin America. To date, the programme has included five publications with their respective indexes: Somos (FLH), the periodicals Postdata (Federative Gay Group), Sodoma (Gay Action Group), Persona (Feminist Liberation Movement), the bulletin LA HORA Lésbica, gay, travesti, transexual and Mariel, which was started by Reinaldo Arenas, among other Cuban writers, when in exile.

In addition, the formal presentation of the programme took place in parallel with the inauguration of the exhibition ‘Deviated graphics, underground pleasures: Fanzines in punk counter-culture as spaces of political representations of the body’, especially designed by Nicolás Cuello, Lucas Morgan Disalvo and Verónica Tejeiro. The exhibited material came from independent initiatives and editions and consists of a number of counter-cultural graphic experiences which typically fail to draw the attention of institutional archives. At the end of the exhibition, a great number of fanzines, pamphlets and flyers will be available in our centre for consultation in an attempt to offer a new gateway to the last decades.

As part of this project, we believe that archival material cannot be out of sync with oral memory. This is why we organise encounters referred to as ‘Transmission, Contacts, Continuation’ in which we bring together the people involved in the various events that shaped the history of the movements. In December 2016, we decided to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the First Lesbian, Gay, Transvestite, Transsexual and Transgender National Encounter, which took place in the city of Rosario (Argentina) in April 1996, by organizing a collective talk with the members that participated in this mythical meeting. The outcome was recorded and edited in dialogue with audiovisual archival material consisting of home-made footage and means of communication of the period.

This programme emerges within a context of heightened memorialization propelled by various local and international archival undertakings. In a thoughtful text on the archives of the LGBT movement, María Luisa Peralta reminds us that ‘unlike other partisan and students’ movements or unions, where militants were generally persecuted for their ideas, words or proposals, LGBT militants and the LGBT community were generally persecuted for what they were and she tells us that, for this reason, every compilation and protection practice is a battle in itself against the erasure of identity and the oblivion of those memories. Peralta is part of the programme’s advisory group and was involved in the construction of the archive of the lesbian activism Dyke Power (Potencia Tortillera). Therefore, she knows firsthand the efforts it takes and the limits that have to be overcome to create and maintain an archive of one’s own: ‘This is a clear reflection of the lives that get into and come out of the closet, of personal efforts, biographical incidents, of the decentralised organization of the militancy and the imbrications of alliances with other movements that account for the overlapping and shared spaces.’

Some of our feminist and sexed-gendered memories are in dialogue with left movements. Discovering this dialogue and adopting a stance regarding its consequences nowadays is a challenge that poses many questions: Are we quitting this dialogue, given that we are dealing with a traditionally patriarchal and homophobic left? Or is it that there is another left? Are we escaping from its attempt to absorb us or should we see to it that left movements face their homo, feminine, transvestite and tomboy manners? Should we give up doing them this great favor or should we recover the powerful tradition that claims the end of capitalism and criticises the ruses it uses to co-opt and tame identities? While the documents of
the left strove to gain legitimacy – and CeDInCI was part of this process – should we embrace a similar legitimacy for feminist and sexed-gendered memories, in exchange for decorum and good presence or should we forcefully promote those biographies that have previously been labeled as pseudo-Leftist, transfeminist, anarcho-queer, anti-gay homo, and lesbian-Marxist?

Our interest in challenging questions does not prevent us from taking action; on the contrary, it is a kind of constructive vacillation and hesitation that pushes us forward. Somehow, this is how CeDInCI has grown, as a centre which does not pretend to celebrate the memory of pure, non-problematic or aligned left movements. Inaugurating this programme is part of that project and it means continuing to draw up the lively map of present and past dissent, rebellion and emancipations.

Author biography
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Declarations and conflict of interests
The author is currently based CeDInCI/UNSAM where she leads the Academic Department and serves as the coordinator of the programme.

Notes
1 Néstor Perlongher. ‘Por qué seremos tan hermosas’, 58–9.
4 Karina Jannelo, who is responsible for the library and newspaper collection, together with Eugenia Sik, who works in the archive section, are especially committed to the development of the programme. We also have the assistance of volunteers. At present, for example, Pablo Luzza helps with the cataloguing of material.
13 Morgan et al. Contactos y Continuidades. A 20 años del Primer Encuentro Nacional GLTTB. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsLFXP6gKy8.
References