

**A BUNDLE OF GESTURES: PERSONAL ARCHIVES, FAMILY, AND HISTORY ON  
THE MEXICAN STAGE**

by

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## Abstract

The archives of Delfina Garmendia (1877-1952) and Arturo Monroy (1865-1917) have been bypassed by historians of Mexico even though their contents suggest that they were actively involved in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and mingled with some of its key figures that appear in most history books. These private archives reveal a form of life writing in which family life is imagined and performed as a way to navigate and transact class positionality in the public sphere, but also as a way to insert oneself in the narrative of the newly defined nation. The performativity captured in these archives shows how notions of history and memory are not necessarily mutually inclusive, and how there is not much of a divide between private and public life. As is the case with the Garmendia-Monroy archive and other family archives found in institutional repositories, most of the material found in them is composed of official documentation and a large collection of photographs and letters addressed to friends and acquaintances originally intended as tokens of appreciation, known in Spanish as *detalles*. Honing our attention onto these type of archives reveals the epistemological processes involved in the act of archiving, and by extension how history works: for those who create the archive, for those who inherit it, and for those who come into contact with it.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis looks at the private archives of Delfina Garmendia (1877-1952) and her husband, Arturo Monroy (1865-1917), focusing on Mexico at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It looks at how people used their family archives to position themselves in society, and in the nation's history, by carefully creating an ideal notion of family. Many of the items in these collections were used as tokens of appreciation to be handed out to friends and members of one's social circle. This work argues that there was not much difference between private and public life, and that the behavior of the people who created these collections, and those who guarded them later, tells us a lot about what history is and how it works.



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Even though the archives that are subject of this study were disintegrating faster than the speed of my writing, making the choice to attend grad school was without a doubt one of the best decisions I have ever made. It was a grounding and transformative experience that brought the best in me and provided me with a community of like-minded individuals who will be friends for life. I would like to thank Mark Werner for his inspiring energy, love, and friendship, true partners-in-crime from the start, grad school and life would not have been the same without you and Kilroy Abney; Gen Cruz and Eriks Bredrovskis, for being unconditionally caring friends and roommates, I think my family would agree, you are both part of it; Carlos Halaburda, for your love and support since our undergrad; Tom Peotto, for providing the most lively and informative company; Stephen Hay for always lending an ear and a gentle voice, and Sarah Primmer for being the first person I shared a lunch with that first day, and for being my history buddy those first two years.

In all, this thesis is about family, my family, and I could not have done it without the support and love that I always have received from them, the entire Carrillo-Manjarrez clan. I particularly extend my love and gratitude to my father, mother, sister, and three amazing grandparents. I am who I am because of you. Gracias. Thank you, Melissa for your love and support. Namaste.

## **Dramatis Personae:**

DELFINA GARMENDIA - My paternal great-great-grandmother, born in 1877 in Oaxaca, Mexico. Married to Arturo Monroy.

ARTURO JOSÉ MONROY—My paternal great-great-grandfather, born in 1865 in Guanajuato, Mexico. Died in 1917.

HERMINIA MONROY GARMENDIA — Daughter of Delfina Garmedia

HECTOR MONROY GARMENDIA — Youngest son of Delfina Garmendia

LETICIA “LETY” MONROY CHANONA—Granddaughter of Delfina Garmendia.

JORGE ANTONIO CARRILLO— My father, born in Mexico City in 1964.

## **Preface**

I was four and it was late at night when the phone rang and my father got off the couch to answer the call. It was news that his grandmother, Herminia Monroy Garmendia, had passed away in Mexico City on July 1991 at the age of 86. Crying inconsolably, he hung up the phone, approached my mother and me, and embraced us. His grandmother had meant a lot to him; she had always privileged him amongst his siblings and cousins not only because of his resemblance to her late husband, or because he was the oldest, but because my father took care of his six younger siblings and his mother after his father left them. According to him, his grandmother had always been a rebel, living her young years in multiple parts of Mexico during the 1930's and 1940's. Theatre was in her veins. Her love for acting, dressing up, writing and staging her own plays, made her a performer who enjoyed challenging the notion of the passive domestic woman. She was widely known for taking pictures of herself holding a gun as she explored the jungle. She also opposed her family by marrying a humble dark-skinned musician, tainting the white genealogy of the family. In the months before her passing, she gave my father a large old chest containing her collection of family photographs and documents. Inside there was another set of personal objects from the generation before, the archive of her mother, Delfina Garmendia, a woman whom the family said was actively involved in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and who came into contact with revolutionary icons, most notably president Venustiano Carranza (r.1917-1920). My father's grandmother trusted him with the preservation of this collection, after a particular incident in which one of her daughters burned a number of family documents and other objects when she found out that they had no monetary value. My father would make sure that this parting gesture from his grandmother and, by extension, his great-grandmother, would be kept safe, maybe too safe.

Fast forward to 2011. I was in an undergraduate course on archival sources and how historians interpret them with Alejandra Bronfman at the University of British Columbia (UBC). For our final assignment we had to find an archive that had been overlooked by historians and write history from that archive. With the deadline only a week away and still no archive, I suddenly remembered my father's collection of documents and photographs, knowing that they had once belonged to his great-grandmother who "lived through" the Mexican Revolution. It was an archive that I only remembered seeing once when I was young, and one that my father did not want to leave in Mexico when we immigrated to Canada in 2000. He has been guarding it since. Emphasis here on the word *guarding*, because for years dad hesitated to show me this family archive again out of fear that its contents would get damaged, or worse, that some of its contents would go missing—being the history "enthusiast" that I was. After approaching him to discuss my project and the chances to access his grandmother's collection, he said "no", that this collection was, "not that kind of archive." I assured him that this did not matter, that I was not entirely sure what I would write about until I saw the archive anyway, and told him that perhaps this would be an opportunity to seek professional advice on how best to care for it, something that eventually led to some of the most fragile material be placed in binders and on paper holders. Only after I showed interest in its preservation rather than interpretation did he reluctantly agree to let me see what he had been protecting.

No longer inside the heavy chest, the collection was now inside an old television box in my parents' poorly lit basement in East Vancouver. Inside it were three parcels, three bundles of material wrapped around layers of department store bags from the 1990s that did little to protect the contents against the humidity and dust of the storage room. The biggest parcel contained a stack of almanacs and magazine issues dating from the turn of the twentieth century to the mid 1920s. These publications served as reference material for the modern Mexican household, disseminating fashion

trends that emerged from western metropolises like Paris, New York and London, but also outlining the latest domestic practices such as farming and midwifery. The second bundle contained a number of family photographs and individual portraits with personalized dedications handwritten on the back of them that had been exchanged among family members, friends, and loved ones as gestures, or tokens of appreciation. The last bundle, the smallest of the three, and for my father, the most valuable, contained only a worn out folder with a series of frayed, loosely organized, and yellowed papers. These documents included brief correspondence and telegrams addressed to Delfina Garmendia, three political essays authored by her (one which was delivered as a speech in 1917 during Venustiano Carranza's triumphant entrance into Mexico City), and a series of official appointments addressed to her during the period of 1915-1917. I skimmed the contents and to my surprise I recognized in some of them the signature of president Venustiano Carranza. My father then told me that these papers were the most valuable part of the archive, not only because of their antiquity, but because they were part of Mexico's national history, they were material evidence from the Mexican Revolution and our family's involvement in it.

Instinctively, I wanted to know who Garmendia was and what happened to her, but the interactions with my father also triggered a desire to understand his relationship to this archive and its allure. The final assignment became an attempt to encompass these two stories; for that to happen, the life of the archive had to be at the centre of the study. By extension, the work that follows continues to explore some of the epistemological processes that occurred, and continue to occur, since the creation of this archive, examining how the archive was conceived, transacted, and transferred and translated to future generations. Positioned in this story as a descendant and member of this family, and as a junior historian, I recognize that some of the complexes and anxieties brought to the surface in this analysis, particularly those about appearances, continue to play a role in my family's



life and in my own. My intention from the outset has been not to objectify the decisions and actions of my ancestors based on a presentist analysis, but to be able to tell what mattered to them then, and what matters to their progeny now, through the presence of objects and papers that continue to survive the test of time. I believe that being a member of this family is actually beneficial to acknowledging these continuities; if it appears that I am being self-indulgent, I am only a means to an end.

## Act 1: Cesar Rubio

### i. Papers

In 1938, the Mexican dramaturgist, Rodolfo Usigli, wrote *El Gesticulador*. Hastily translated into English as, *The Impostor*, it tells the story of Cesar Rubio, a history professor from the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City, forced to move with his family to a rural town in northern Mexico after struggling to make ends meet in the cosmopolitan capital, much to the resentment of his two adolescent children. Set entirely inside the Rubio house, the opening scene of the play finds the family in their living room unpacking. Rubio, however, is distracted by his collection of “historical documents,” an extensive amount of material from the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) that he has collected throughout the years and which he prides himself on possessing. Miguel, his first-born, notices Rubio’s distraction and lashes out at him. For Miguel, the voluminous pile of boxes reflects the affliction caused by his father’s profession because, while professors are highly regarded in Mexican society, the material and social conditions that he and his family live in are incongruent with the social capital that the title carries. Irritated, Miguel vocalizes the family’s frustration to Rubio in the opening minutes of the play:

“I want to live the truth because I am tired of appearances! It has always been the same. When I was young and I didn’t have shoes, I couldn’t go out on the street because my father was a university professor and what would the neighbours have thought. When it was mom’s birthday and we had guests, the chairs and the cutlery were borrowed because we had to protect the good reputation of the university professor’s family, and whatever was drunk or eaten was always fronted, but what would people have thought had there been nothing to eat or drink? ... it is *la apariencia*, the lies, what makes

me feel like this... It was comical, you were not fooling anyone, and if they didn't laugh at you, it was because they lived the same way and did the same things, but it was comical.”<sup>1</sup>

This scene is interrupted when Oliver Bolton, an American travelling through Mexico, stops by the Rubio house to ask for roadside assistance. Rubio wants to make a good impression with the foreigner and invites him into the house despite the family's hesitation. As he enters the house Bolton spots Rubio's pile of documents and expresses his curiosity to the family. The American reveals that he is a professor of history at Harvard doing research in Mexico about Cesar Rubio, a (fictional) missing hero of the Mexican Revolution. Rubio, seeing this as a perfect opportunity to obtain something from the foreigner, who would surely pay for information, and to exercise his authority on the history of Mexico and the revolution, decides to adopt the identity of the missing hero. Rubio passes the foreigner's oral examination in order to validate his revolutionary identity but Bolton remains skeptical and requests material evidence, demanding, "*Well, papers, proof then!*" In a matter of seconds Rubio pulls out from his collection a series of documents pertaining to the missing hero whereby Bolton is immediately flabbergasted. The American gives Rubio a few hundred dollars in exchange for the documents and returns to Harvard having found in this private residence in remote Mexico a lot more than he had bargained for. After word gets out around town that the revolutionary hero Cesar Rubio has reemerged, the masses react with frenzy to the news and persuade the protagonist to run for governor against the incumbent corrupt general Navarro. The play takes a negative turn when Navarro, in order to force him out of the race, privately reveals to the protagonist that he is the assassin of the real Cesar Rubio, a crime he committed during the revolution. There is no backing down for Rubio, and after a series of threats from both sides Navarro orders his assassination the day of the election. Rubio is killed on the way to the polls, an

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<sup>1</sup> Rodolfo Usigli, *El Gesticulador*, Colección Teatro (Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 1985). 29.

act that allows Navarro officially to declare Cesar Rubio a state martyr, with all the memorialization formalities it entails, including a promise to always look after Rubio's family. The use of Rubio's death gains Navarro popular support and he is successfully re-elected.

*El Gesticulador* would not be put on stage until May 1947, when it became the first play to be banned by the Mexican government after a short two-week run. It was a commentary on the socio-political life of Mexico after the revolution that took aim at the ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and its use of the revolution to create a monolithic institution that would hold power for the rest of the century and part of the next.<sup>2</sup> The play propelled Rodolfo Usigli's career and placed him amongst the best playwrights of his time; known in Mexico today as "the father of Mexican theatre" and "the playwright of the Mexican Revolution," he continues to be a subject of study. Literary critics and theatre scholars are drawn not only to the content of his work, but also to its self-reflexive, meta-theatrical, elements. John W. Kronik refers to *El Gesticulador* as a metaplay, "a play within a play...since plays are inventions and the subject of the play is inventions...[the play] dramatizes man living out his play."<sup>3</sup> It also adheres to Lionel Abel's category of "theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized," and his dictum that in the metaplay life must be a dream and the world must be a stage.<sup>4</sup> For historians interested in that stage, *El Gesticulador* is a play about frustrations. Miguel's rant at the start of the play is a sentiment shared by those in many Mexican

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<sup>2</sup> It particularly criticizes the image and ideology of the popular, male, revolutionary general, since a good number of them sought political power after the most violent period of the armed struggle ended in 1920. For a good discussion on Usigli and his work, particularly *El Gesticulador*, see Peter R. Beardsell, *A Theatre for Cannibals: Rodolfo Usigli and the Mexican Stage* (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 1992). Jessica C Locke's "Gringo' Agency and Revolutionary Disillusionment in Rodolfo Usigli's *El Gesticulador*," in Kevin J Wetmore, *Portrayals of Americans on the World Stage: Critical Essays*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009).

<sup>3</sup> John W. Kronik, "Usigli's *El Gesticulador* and the Fiction of Truth" *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 347. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale. From Literature Resource Center.

<sup>4</sup> Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, 1st ed., A Dramabook (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963). 60

households who were trying to find a place in a nation constantly redefining itself, a stage where appearances and gestures were not only used to mask class struggle but also to seek advancement in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup> Cesar Rubio's profession makes him a moral authority and an exemplary citizen in Mexican society; yet at home he lives a life of frustration as the financial hardships of the house have loosened his grip as head of the family leaving only the ability to manipulate, or "gesticulate," the past through the use of documents. The crux of the play is the choice Rubio has between continuing to live his life as a historian, husband, and father of two within the confines of his house, or risk life itself to adopt *and* craft the life of an agent of Mexican history, a member of the "revolutionary family" and of Mexico's collective past. At the core of this thesis are the type of papers Rubio collected, papers that other Mexicans also have preserved and kept at home not so much to "impersonate," but to "gesticulate" the past (as the Spanish word *gesticulador* suggests) in order to give meaning to their lives, papers that in the following pages I describe as bundles of gestures but that historians refer to as archives.

## **ii: Archives**

For the most part, official and other institutionalized depositories have been the de facto sites of knowledge associated with the word 'archive', despite the fact that similar processes of material assemblage, preservation, and destruction also take place within the walls of private households. The papers, photographs, and letters of Delfina Garmendia and Arturo Monroy, whom you will meet shortly, are not only personal collections, but domestic archives, housed within the confines of a

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<sup>5</sup> Most writing on the play tends to focus more on its political content and its theatrical components, surprisingly there is not much on written on how it is also a commentary about the Mexican family. It was precisely the quote by Miguel that prompted the parallel between the play and this project—they are both wrapped around two fundamental themes in this project: history as a possession and appearances.

private residence looked after by their progeny. Generally, the treatment of this material has been left for amateur family historians and genealogists whose work typically revolves around the writing of a family's history, its origins, and not so much as evidence situated within the broader historical landscape that shapes them and that they help to shape. One explanation is that knowledge of their existence is limited because these archives are guarded within the walls of private households and because they require initial authorization and interaction with the guardian(s) through the various stages of the project. Secondly, some historians see the consultation of these archives as a process that is unpatrolled by a professional authority and hence as a perfect grow-op for constructivist scholarship that is difficult to verify, or worse, as a potential outlet for unethical practices.<sup>6</sup> These hesitations have allowed historians to bypass the process and motivations behind domestic archiving, but also to dismiss them by not taking into consideration that amateur historians and archivists, even if they do not name themselves as such, engage in methodical acts of archiving in order make sense of their lives.

Over the last two decades the archival turn has brought multiple theorizations about “the archive” and its interpretation by scholars across multiple disciplines.<sup>7</sup> These conversations were a response

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<sup>6</sup> Because dealing with domestic archives requires the guardian's involvement in the process, historians need to assess potential risks that their research might pose to that person, as there could be socio-cultural, political, or even emotional and psychological repercussions involved in the retrieval of their family's past. Oral historians in particular have written at large about the ethics and integrity in the interviewing process between researchers and their narrators. For a comprehensive look see Robert Perks, Alistair Thomson, and Taylor & Francis eBooks A-Z, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, Third edition, Routledge Readers in History (London ; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Recent discussion on archives and their production has opened the door to “new” evidence that deals with questions of memory and trauma in post-war countries, to marginalized groups to voice their history which might compete with a bigger history, to communities turning public memory into local history. The archival turn also attends to questions regarding the present and future of archiving in an era where the internet continues to replace material documentation with more abundant digital archives. Already in the last decade three anthologies have been published about the encounter and relationship between the academic and the archive. Ranging from community, oral, environmental, and government archives, the scholars in each chapter tell their own archival stories that trace the creation of their respective archive, describe where and how it is housed, its accessibility, and the behaviour of its archivists. See Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: facts, fictions, and the writing of history* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005; Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,

to Jacques Derrida's and Michel Foucault's discussion of the archives as a system that governs what can be said about the past more than as institutionalized repositories of documentation available to the public. Foucault, for his part, emphasized that the power structures of the archive emerged from the order in which the documents were kept, thus shaping how those documents are perceived and therefore knowledge itself. Derrida describes "archive fever" as the fascination with the knowledge of origins, warning that the structure of an archive is determined by a desire to create the past rather than preserving it. Derrida also attends to the role of the archivists, originally called "archons" in ancient Greece, and their ability to shape the archive but also determine who is worthy of accessing it. For Foucault and Derrida structures of power and archives are mutually inclusive.<sup>8</sup> Power, therefore, works together with history, and as the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, it is constitutive of the story and does not enter it once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. For Trouillot any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences; the point is to identify the unique process that create those silences more than the silences themselves.<sup>9</sup>

From then on, the archival turn became a multidisciplinary conceptual arena centred on the meaning of "archive" and the stakes involved in scholars' interaction with it.<sup>10</sup> In her 2001 book, *Dust*, British historian Carolyn Steedman engages with Derrida's *Archive Fever*, and focuses, amongst other things, on the romantic imagery of dust covered archives turning themselves to dust, where the historian

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2006); and Niamh Moore, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley, and Maria Tamboukou, *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and the writing of Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972) For Foucault, the archive represents not what has been said by a particular society, but what can be said: the archive defines discourses as well as the principle of their differentiation. Foucault places emphasis on what makes it possible or impossible for texts (in the sense of discursive formations) to take shape.

<sup>9</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015) 24-27.

<sup>10</sup> For a very comprehensive historiographical survey of the archival theory see Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (January 22, 2004): 9-25, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2004.0015>.

communes with the dead by inhaling the particles the past, a bodily connection with origins once experienced in the *Archives Nationales* in Paris by Jules Michelet, the famous historian of France of the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> While Michelet's inhalation of the archive resulted in a headache and a runny nose rather than an actual fever, Steedman defines real archive fever as the drive the historian has to extract its content despite the challenges they may face—whether that is abiding by the rules of the institution, friction with its archivists, technical difficulties, or other challenges like lack of sleep and spartan accommodation. Steedman's work sees the archive as bundles of materiality which may be mountainous but with not much there; it is ultimately the historian who gives the material in the archive meaning. Unlike human memory, which actively processes, suppresses, distorts, and selectively remembers, the archive just sits there, collecting dust, until it is read and narrativized.<sup>12</sup>

The “material turn” in anthropology, on the other hand, has shown that an object cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence without understanding its belonging in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning.<sup>13</sup> In this case, a different view of the archive from that of Steedman, belongs to the anthropologist Ann Stoler who, in the context of empire and post-colonialism in Southeast Asia, sees archiving as process rather than as a repository of facts. She exposes the archive as a condensed site of epistemological and political anxiety, in which there are conscious processes that the production of those archives undergo that may not be reflected in their actual content.<sup>14</sup> For Stoler the archive is a full-fledged historical actor because of the ways in which

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<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “Something she called a fever,” in Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> See Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life, Materializing Culture* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2000); Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter, Consumption and Space* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).



colonial archives served as technologies of imperial power, conquest, and hegemony. Writing about amateur historians/archivists in Greece in the early twentieth century, the anthropologist Penelope Papailias uses “archival poetics” as a concept that shifts the act of referencing the content of the archive to referencing its material composition in order to write a narrative. For Papailias, the emphasis is first placed on the document as material artifact and textual property, and then on documenting as a citational act.<sup>15</sup> In my treatment of domestic archives, I, like Steedman, acknowledge the appeal and modern romance of the archive as an object—the epistemological seduction—but embrace Stoler’s and Papailias’ anthropological approach to the archive, one that focuses on the forces that shaped its production and its transference.

It was, however, Antoinette Burton’s 2005 anthology *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, that originally inspired me to write the undergraduate paper in Bronfman’s class. Described as a series of “self-conscious ethnographies of one of the chief investigational foundations of history as a discipline,” the book brings to the fore the complex processes of selection, interpretation and creative invention set in motion by the personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the anxieties and pressures of the contemporary moment.<sup>16</sup> Writing on the Shanghainese alleyways that her family inhabited for most of the twentieth century, Jie Li, in her book, *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsest of Private Life*, gives a kaleidoscopic glimpse into the mentalities and lived experiences of the Shanghainese during that time by treating the house as a palimpsest, focusing on its enduring architectural forms shared over generations, and how the grander historical processes, like the Cultural Revolution, shaped it. The result is not only a beautiful tribute to her family, but an in-depth exploration of family life that breaks the divide between the private and

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<sup>15</sup> Penelope Papailias, *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Burton, p.6-8.

public life.<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, Steedman's earlier book, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), which predates her work on archives, focuses on the life of her mother and her struggle as a seamstress and single mother to bring to the fore the experience of the working class in Britain during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>18</sup> This essay is another archival story like the ones found in *Archive Stories*. The preface, as well as the sections entitled "Intermission" and "Curtain Call," shaped by the genre of theatre, narrate the ethnographic encounters that made me aware of history-making processes beyond the content of the archive. Like Li's book and Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, it is also a family history and a microhistory that reveals the nuances—the fibres—that weave together the larger tapestry that is their landscape. Finally, like *El Gesticulador*, this thesis deals with notions of family position and public appearance, and the notion that history can be shaped and reshaped by possessing the right documentation.

In the context of Latin America, Pablo Piccato refers to "public sphere" as an unfinished historical transformation rather than a stable structure. Shaped by capitalist markets and the emergence of spaces of social life, the public sphere was the conceptual space where citizens came together to discuss matters of common interest: "In doing so, they not only represented their private interests, but established a new bridge between three areas of life: the private realms of domesticity and work, the publicity required to exchange opinions in civil society, and the state."<sup>19</sup> By tracing the processes of domestic archival production, that is, by attending to the content and the form of the object, I show how historical consciousness challenged the boundaries between private and public life, in

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<sup>17</sup> Jie Li, *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life, Global Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> For a take on Jurgen Habermas', *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in dialogue with Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as well as a comprehensive bibliographical essay on the public sphere in Latin America see Pablo Piccato's, "Public Sphere in Latin America: A Map of the Historiography," *Social History* 35, no. 2 (May 1, 2010): 165–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071021003795055>.

which family, nation, and history were, and continue to be, mutually inclusive. In the case of Mexico, such processes show the Mexican Revolution as this moment of historical awareness, a moment of political unrest and instability where record keeping, that is, the formation of archives as instruments of power, is redefined. History—what is said about the past and who says it—becomes a form of capital for those who are born outside of privilege.

While arguably the Garmendia-Monroy archive screams out for a more in-depth analysis, given the length of this project, I steer away from engaging in deeper bibliographical discussions on gender, race, material history, and affect. Instead I use the genre of theatre, in this case “metatheatre,” and its self-reflective elements, as a way to frame the following ethnography and bring attention to the performativity and indivisibility between life and theatre, private and public, and history and archive. “Archives”, as Gabriella Giannachi writes, “are what we use to perform our relationships with everything as we continue to search for the yet un-lived in and around us, what enters the archive becomes part of the process of our becoming.”<sup>20</sup> This thesis is about having two minutes in the spotlight; it is a story about material gestures and gesticulating the past and, by extension, life: a series of performances, or gestures, preserved and bundled in personal archives that later became devices for new performances and new types of gestures.

I am grateful to my father and to Lety Monroy for letting me be the keeper of some of the objects that were given to them by their loved ones and for letting me share their own archival stories. To Delfina and Arturo, even though we are generations apart, I always felt a responsibility to not make assumptions about their motivations and desires based on a sense of familiar belonging: the goal was

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<sup>20</sup> Gabriella Giannachi, *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).

to let their archive and their present-day archivists be the actors that tell the story. The stage for Delfina Garmendia and Arturo Monroy is set. It is the same as Cesar Rubio's: Mexico in first half of the twentieth century, inside the home, not in the metropolis of the recently modernized nation, but rather in its peripheries.

## **Act 2: Delfina Garmendia**

### **i. Ashes**

The life of Delfina Garmendia (1877-1952) remains outside the history books of Mexico even though her family's archive situates her with people who feature prominently in them. Born in the southern state of Oaxaca, birthplace to Mexico's two most famous political figures of the nineteenth century, Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, Garmendia was the wife of a high-ranking bureaucrat named Arturo Monroy.<sup>21</sup> She had the privilege of traveling extensively throughout Mexico, as well as the opportunity of mingling with the country's elite, government officials, and even presidents like Díaz (1876-1910) and Venustiano Carranza (1917-20). She experienced a period of Mexican history rife with changing political, social, and cultural landscapes. Despite living in a largely patriarchal society, Garmendia operated beyond her husband's shadow and made a name for herself within a broader social circle.

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<sup>21</sup> Benito Juárez (1806-1872) was Mexico's first indigenous president (1858-1872). A shepherd from the mountains who grew up to become a lawyer, Juárez is known for his liberal reforms such as universal education and the separation of church and state, as well as for resisting and overthrowing the French-backed empire of Maximilian I of Habsburg. Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) was a general and politician who became president of Mexico for seven terms. Under his regime, Mexico underwent its most dramatic modernization period, however, the resistance to these transformations from the large rural population and the anti-reelectionists, sparked the armed movement known as the Mexican Revolution that began with his removal from power and exile.

The oldest document in Garmendia's frayed folder dates to 1903 at the height of the Porfirio Díaz regime, or Porfiriato (1876-1910). It is an invitation addressed to Garmendia's husband, Arturo, and her family to attend a ball in honour of President Díaz in the city of Guanajuato. This invitation is the only written document found in the collection prior to the revolution in 1910 and reveals that the Garmendia-Monroy family belonged to the very small percentage that was the Porfirian aristocracy, composed for the most part of wealthy land owners, industrial entrepreneurs and foreign investors.<sup>22</sup> The archive does not have another entry until June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914 when, no longer a member of the Porfirian aristocracy, Garmendia is officially appointed an "agent of the revolution" by Venustiano Carranza, then leader of the Constitutionalist Army, allowing her to travel around the country to deliver speeches supporting Carranza's cause. The archive does not provide information regarding the origin and proximity of the relationship between Garmendia and Carranza; it is only through a couple of brief "thank you" letters from Carranza to Arturo Monroy, now a major in the constitutionalist army, that we can link one to the other. Nonetheless by August 20<sup>th</sup> of 1914, Garmendia's political life is on the rise; now a member of the "Feminine Democratic Committee", she welcomed Carranza during his triumphant entrance to Mexico City with a speech in which she compared him to the "ancient heroes" of the fatherland.<sup>23</sup> The documents that follow this speech allow us to trace her political activity in subsequent years. In October 1915, she is granted written permission, on behalf of now interim president Carranza, to travel back and forth between Mexico City and Veracruz without inspection. A few days later she is appointed by the

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<sup>22</sup> For more on Porfirian Social Structure see William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*, 2nd ed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008); and William E. French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals, and Class Formation in Northern Mexico*, 1st ed (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Mark Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War*, 1st ed, Diálogos (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Carranza temporarily transferred the federal government from Mexico City to the port city of Veracruz in 1914, as a result of his recently fractured alliance with Francisco Villa in the north, and Emiliano Zapata in the south, whose armies had taken control of the capital.

Ministry of Public Instruction and the Arts as an "acting inspector of special services" for one year. On May 20<sup>th</sup> of 1916, she receives an honourable mention from Carranza for her "patriotic services to the people's cause", and the next month she is appointed as honorary inspector of the Superior Committee of Public Health, a position that grants her access to any commercial, industrial, or residential house complex that she sees fit to enter and even the support of the authorities necessary to complete the task of inspection.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, she continues to hold her original title of "acting inspector" for the Ministry of Public Education, a position that would be renewed on December 21<sup>st</sup> of the same year.

The year 1917 would be as defining a year in the life of Garmendia as it would be in the history of the Revolution. On February 2nd she is appointed representative of the regional government of Tehuantepec in Mexico City. Her political alliance to Carranza was paying off and her future only seemed more promising when in May of that year Carranza was finally officially declared president of Mexico after defeating Villa and Zapata's forces for control of the country.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, as her political life was on the rise, her personal life suffered when at noon, on July 7th, her husband, Arturo Monroy, passed away in Mexico City. Garmendia is immediately informed by the constitutionalist army barrack in Veracruz, to which her husband had belonged in the last years of

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<sup>24</sup> It is not clear what her job deliverables were as an acting inspector (*inspectora accidental de servicios especiales*). The Document outlines that Garmendia was to be paid \$8.00 pesos daily for a year from a fund allocated to "unforeseen expenses for public education."

<sup>25</sup> 1917 was a pivotal year in the revolution. On February 5th a new constitution would be enacted, replacing the previous constitution of 1857, and still in place today. Following Carranza's election victory, the United States would also recognize his government and withdraw its troops from Mexico—in Veracruz to monitor the port, and in the north to capture Francisco Villa. The weakening of Villista and Zapatista forces would also mark the start of a less violent period in the revolution. For a comprehensive study of the Mexican Revolution and its generals see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* (London: Verso/NLB, 1983); John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1969); Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998); Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

his life. A note dated July 16th sends its condolences to the widow and grants her access to the barrack to retrieve all the documentation and "unfinished business" left by her husband in that city. This would be the last document in Delfina's textual archive that dates to the period of Carranza and the Mexican Revolution. After Arturo's death her archive marks a period of political silence where there are no more appointments or correspondence between Garmendia, Carranza, or anybody in a position of power. According to her archive, it is not until twenty years after the armed conflict of the revolution ended that Garmendia makes a political comeback. On June 6th, 1940 Garmendia is appointed president of the "Women's Committee" of far-right-wing presidential candidate Juan Andreu Almazán, the last revolutionary general to run for president. In what would be known as one of the most controversial and violent elections in Mexican history, Almazán loses by an overwhelming margin signalling the end of the era of the revolutionary men on horseback in the political arena, and the solidification of a one party rule in Mexico that continues to this day.<sup>26</sup> For Garmendia, 63 years old at the time, the election of 1940 signalled the end of her political and public life. She passed away in 1952 at the age of 75.

Documenting her eventful life, Garmendia became what some might call a hoarder, collecting, over the years, large amounts of personal documents, correspondence, photographs, books, and artifacts of personal significance such as her children's infant hair and clothing. In the final days of her life,

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<sup>26</sup> There had been a wave of violence leading to the elections on July 7th, 1940. A number of pro-Almazán demonstrations had to be broken by the military, Time Magazine reported 100 dead and 48 injured in Mexico City alone the day of the elections. Considering the momentum and support he gained throughout his campaign, Almazán received only 5.7% of the total vote, sparking national unrest in the days that followed. "Mexico: An Age of Trickery," Time, July 15, 1940. Almazán left for Havana on July 17th in hopes to garner supporters for an armed movement backed by the U.S.. The latter ignored Almazán, as he has been a previous supporter of the left-wing Cardenista government. Many historians of Mexico consider the assassination of Carranza in 1920 and the end of the armed struggle as the end of the Mexican Revolution; others, like Alan Knight, date its end at the start of the 1940's when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) solidified its position as the ruling entity. PRI has since continued to rule Mexico, with the exception of 2000-2012, a two term presidential period with the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in charge.

now living with her daughter and grandchildren in a cramped apartment in the once prestigious Santa María la Ribera neighbourhood in Mexico City, Garmendia would sneak up to the building's roof in the middle of the night carrying large sacks full with these past possessions. She would dump the contents of each sack into a rusty old bathtub, set them on fire, and quietly watch the ashes cloud the cosmopolitan skyline of a city hardly recognizable from the days of the revolution. One of those nights her eight-year old granddaughter, Lety Monroy, who had been secretly following and observing her grandmother's actions, finally mustered the courage to confront her and ask for whatever was left inside those bags. It came as no surprise to the young girl when her grandmother, known for her abrasiveness, replied with a stern "no," followed by an explanation that these were private memories that belonged to her and her only.<sup>27</sup> Garmendia's reply suggests that her nocturnal burnings were deliberate acts of silencing, not only from her family but also from the historical record, of a significant part of her life and of the world she had lived in. For Garmendia the contents of those sacks may have been used as mnemonic devices to recall meaningful moments and other milestones of her private life, objects from her childhood, from past romances, and from her life as a mother and grandmother. Private, intimate self-reflection is why she held on to them for so long and why she believed none but her could, nor should, try to make sense of this "stuff" after her death. Nevertheless, Garmendia did keep traces of her life away from the fire and handed them to her daughter, Herminia, for safekeeping. Though much less extensive than what could have been all of Garmendia's "life archive", what was carefully compiled and transferred was most of the material pertaining to her social milieu at the start of the century—including her official appointments, political speeches, and the letters and telegrams signed by president Carranza. As such, in the last days of her life, Garmendia was confronted not only by the physical proportions of her possessions,

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Lety Monroy Chanona, June 2014. Tapachula, Chiapas. Mexico



but also by its rich content, a combination that forced her to embark on a classification process that turned her from hoarder to archivist, and allowing her to shape a history of her life.

The selective process of preserving and destroying material acquired within a lifetime, as well as the generational guarding and transfer involved in it, is what exposes the epistemological principles of Garmendia and her progeny. While many of the material fragments of her private life could only make sense to her, Garmendia believed that the material pertaining to her public life belonged to a collective past that would present less of an interpretative challenge for a future audience.

Garmendia knew that with the passing of time her own descendants might not recognize the subjects in private photographs or correspondence; they would, however, recognize the name Carranza because it belonged to the collective and discursive narrative of the past known as History. Her archive reveals that Garmendia's notion of history was premised upon a clear gendered division between public and private life, one that contended that historical agency did not come from the people but from "great men."<sup>28</sup> History was a respected discipline for the "lettered city" (and its *letrados*) that legitimized the present through the existence of tangible evidence found in institutionalized repositories known as archives.<sup>29</sup> Garmendia was not a passive spectator of history's unfolding; she was an active participant, her involvement in the Mexican Revolution, and the official documentation linking her directly to its protagonists, indicated that. She was an archival agent, weaving the social interactions of her own past into a new national narrative that was being rapidly

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<sup>28</sup> Here I refer to the gendered notion of the "man on horseback", so prevalent in the 19th century throughout Europe and Latin America, as liberators and as "founding fathers" of the nation. Peter Seixas explores the pedagogical impact, in history and social studies, of the work of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and history being written by "great men." As Seixas has argued on his work regarding historical consciousness, disciplinary history, modernity, progress and the nation were fundamentally joined in the nineteenth century. Peter Seixas, "Historical Agency as a Problem for Researchers in History Education," *Antítesis* 5, no. 10 (March 15, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5433/1984-3356.2012v5n10p537>.

<sup>29</sup> Angel Rama, *The Lettered City, Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

documented by new visual recording technologies such as photography and film, a narrative that she was helping generate and shape even if within the bounds of her own home.<sup>30</sup> While official institutions such as the national archives or museums collected documents similar to the ones owned by Garmendia, such as Carranza's correspondence and official appointments, Garmendia's public life before, during, and after the revolution instilled in her a sense of historical agency and duty to form an archive, even if in the future such an archive would remain within the house of her progeny. Garmendia's archive does provide us with a discursive glimpse of the cultural and political shifts that transpired in Mexico from the 1890's to the 1940's; nonetheless, what stands out in Garmendia's archive is how, for a private archive, it was imagined, constructed, and, decades later, preserved, as a means to negotiate matters outside the home or private life. As we will see shortly, many of the materials found here were transacted as gestures, performances of private life for public consumption, that in her later years served as proof confirming her life narrative, but that, in her last days, became old memories useless to anyone but her.

## ii. Gestures

When the Garmendia family was invited to attend a ball in honour of president Díaz in the city of Guanajuato in 1903, the Porfirian aristocracy was composed of wealthy landowners and

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<sup>30</sup> For more on photography and the Mexican Revolution see John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons*, 1st ed, The William and Bettye Nowlin Series in Art, History, and Culture of the Western Hemisphere (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012). Captured by the new technology that was filmmaking, the 1950 documentary "Memorias de un Mexicano" is a fitting example of another family archive that blends family, nation, and the transference of the archive together. The documentary is a series of loose shots from 1912 to 1935 taken around Mexico by Salvador Toscano, a photographer, capturing the Porfirian era, the armed movement of the revolution, and the project of modernization that followed it. The collection of videos was later turned into a narrative in 1950 by his daughter Carmen, who tells the story of a young man whose family is divided because of difference of opinions regarding the revolution, but a family that in the end comes back together, symbolizing the formation of Mexico as one big family after the revolution. The documentary, ultimately a private archive of the Toscano family, became a "national monument" in 1967.

foreign investors, followed by a large number of positivist intellectuals and technocrats, known as *científicos*, who occupied high offices and bureaucratic positions in government. Although this second group was not particularly wealthy, they had earned their prestige by being what Ángel Rama called *letrados*, educated individuals who mastered the written word and therefore negotiated and reinforced the system of documentation that brought order and expansion to the Latin American “lettered city.”<sup>31</sup> As the well-preserved invitation found in Garmendia’s papers suggests, these groups composed the “illustrious” members of society that mingled at lavish receptions such as galas, derbies, and masquerade balls.<sup>32</sup> The interactions at these events were pivotal; they opened the doors to new business ventures but also allowed social climbing through the arrangement of marriages and patronage to wealthier families that brought not only additional financial security but also elevated their social status. Since the majority of these *científicos* were not substantially wealthy, their professional education and etiquette granted them both sufficient social and cultural capital to be admitted to the big dance.<sup>33</sup> Appearances played a big role at these exclusive minglers, that is, the combination of certain aesthetics and conducts that were essential devices carefully framed and performed in order to assert identities and class status. Proper attire that included tasteful use of garments and accessories, as well as markers of cleanliness, etiquette, and good manners, were expected to all be harmoniously displayed during these interactions. What Miguel Rubio frustratedly

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<sup>31</sup> This allure with papers and documents continues to dominate the Mexican bureaucracy today, and a reason as to why most citizens continue to have many paper *copias* of identification documents such as birth certificates and military service cards at home. Rama and Chasteen (trans.), *The Lettered City*.

<sup>32</sup> The invitation is one long sentence translated by me as follows: “On behalf of the government of Guanajuato, we have the great honour to invite you to the Ball, given to the president of the republic as a gift from his wife, Mrs. Carmen Romero Rubio de Diaz, as well as by the most illustrious hosts of this city, which will take place at the Juarez Theatre on the 28th of the current month at 10:00 p.m.” Interesting here is the choice of words, in which the party is meant to be a “gift” rather than a commemoration for the president. Gifting suggests a thoughtful and symbolic type of giving, similarly, the word host, suggest that the citizens have been devotedly procuring to all of the president’s needs, traits expected in a host.

<sup>33</sup> Bordieau’s work on taste and cultural hegemony in French society is pertinent here, in which social and cultural aspects, such as education, determine social mobility in lieu of, or in addition to, financial assets. For more see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

refers to in the opening act of *El Gesticnaldor* as “*la apariencia*,” was ultimately the homogenization of these appearances to conceal wealth disparity.<sup>34</sup>

As it was often intended, appearances had the potential of leaving long-lasting impressions on people, yet many of them also left their mark on things. When there were no galas to attend these privileged groups maintained appearances year round through performative gestures commonly known in Spanish as *detalles* or *atenciones*. These were small courtesies directed at family, friends, patrons, elected officials, and priests, but also at local entrepreneurs and professionals like storeowners, bankers, and doctors whose acquaintance could one day prove to be beneficial. *Detalles*, therefore, were meant to foster relationships within one’s social network by going out of one’s way to display affection, care, respect, and admiration; many times these gestures tended to be more symbolic than genuine because while they were not mandatory they were for the most part very much expected. Some *detalles* were ephemeral, ranging from opening the door for someone, to informing a friend of a newly acquired property (with an open invitation), to asking a lady out to dance. Others were manifested in material forms and fitting examples included sending a person flowers, giving someone a handkerchief without expecting it back, sending a thank you card to a gracious host, or even extending a formal invitation to a ball. Since the intention was to leave a good and, hopefully, long-lasting impression by engaging in small but meaningful material exchanges, these *detalles* were gestures literally “impressed” onto material forms. The bundle of portraits found

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<sup>34</sup> Etiquette manuals were very popular in the first half of the twentieth century throughout Latin America, particularly the *Compendio del Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras*, written by the Venezuelan Manuel Antonio Carreño, first published in 1854 and last published in 2002. For more on these manuals during the Porfiriato see Valentina Septien Torres, “Manuales de Conducta, Urbanidad y Buenos Modales Durante el Porfiriato. Notas Sobre el Comportamiento Femenino,” in *Modernidad, Tradición y Alteridad: La Ciudad de México en el Cambio del Siglo*, ed. Claudia Agostoni y Elisa Speckman (Mexico: UNAM, 2001); Steven B. Bunker, “‘Consumers of Good Taste’: Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 2 (July 1997): 227–69.

wrapped in shopping bags in Garmendia's archive is a bundle of *detalles*, that is, material traces of her public interactions that capture the discursive role that public appearances played in Mexican society at the dawn on the twentieth century. The invitation to the ball, therefore, is kept as proof of a *detalle* that places Delfina Garmendia and her family in Porfirio Díaz's close circle.

Approaching the material in Garmendia's archive this way, not only by honing in on the events and people it documented, but rather by imagining how the objects inside were produced and distributed before becoming part of the archive, provides additional dimensionality to the practice of domestic archiving. The bundle of family photographs and individual portraits found in Garmendia's archive prompts us to ask the question of how this parcel converses with the other written documents that have allowed us to trace her life thus far. The physical properties of these photographs demand that they all be compiled and stored together based on sheer size and volume rather than content; as a result, numerous portraits from different time periods are found dispersed within the parcel without any seeming form of classification. As objects of a particular moment in time, these portraits of family and friends arguably do not belong to the same category of documentation found in the folder that contains Garmendia's speeches, appointments and recognitions, but to the private realm of family.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a discussion on the materiality of photography and photographs as objects see Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (New York : Florence: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004).



Fig. 1. Garmendia is sitting at the centre with her daughter, Herminia (my great-grandmother), on her lap. She is surrounded by her other children, her father and her husband's sisters. Her husband, Arturo Monroy, is standing behind her.

Writing about family photography at the turn of the twentieth century, Carlos Monsiváis argues that “good families” photographed themselves to consecrate their knowledge of aesthetic form and appearance, while the poor did so to attest to the existence of their main patrimony: family.<sup>36</sup> As images, the individual and family portraits in Garmendia’s archive serve as visual evidence of the aesthetic conventions of the time in which photography was a trending technology not only to construct but also to materialize appearance. Studio photography was particularly crucial in reinforcing these conventions. The composition of these types of family photographs by means of

<sup>36</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas Sobre la Fotografía”, in Carlos Monsiváis and Eugenia Huerta, *Cultura Mexicana en el Siglo XX*, 1. ed, Historia Mínima (México, D. F: Colegio de México, 2010).

lavish backgrounds, seating arrangements, and quality of the image, were both desired and expected features when people sought out having their picture taken.<sup>37</sup> As seen in the above photograph of Garmendia's family circa 1909, the clothing is telling of a turn of the century fashion similar to the wealthy classes of Europe, a fashion that is prominently displayed in the magazines that Garmendia collected. These portraits tell us that even if Garmendia did not possess the wealth of a privileged class, something we in fact have no documentation of, she was very aware of the popular perception of Mexico as a modern nation, an identity carefully crafted and surveilled by the institutions of the thirty-year regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) that linked the concept of modernity to material progress.<sup>38</sup> For middle and upper class families portraiture operated as a material marker of class identity because it allowed them to perform and visually assert a carefully curated public appearance. In this case the family portrait allowed Garmendia and her family to position themselves as members of the Porfirian aristocracy who were in tune with the fashion, material culture, and even visual and textual conventions of the time.

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on studio photography and popular conventions in family photography see Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, eds., *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography* (London: Virago, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> City photographic registries were employed around Mexico as larger systems of surveillance to stabilize, bring order, and categorize the otherwise fluid popular classes. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez shows how sex workers also used photographic images at this time to portray themselves as respectable citizens, with agency, by adopting elite notions of class ethnicity, gender, and sexuality order to gain access to spaces for themselves in the modernizing city. The case was the same for male transient workers such as, coachmen, deliverymen, and water carriers, which were perceived as threats to that modernity. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).



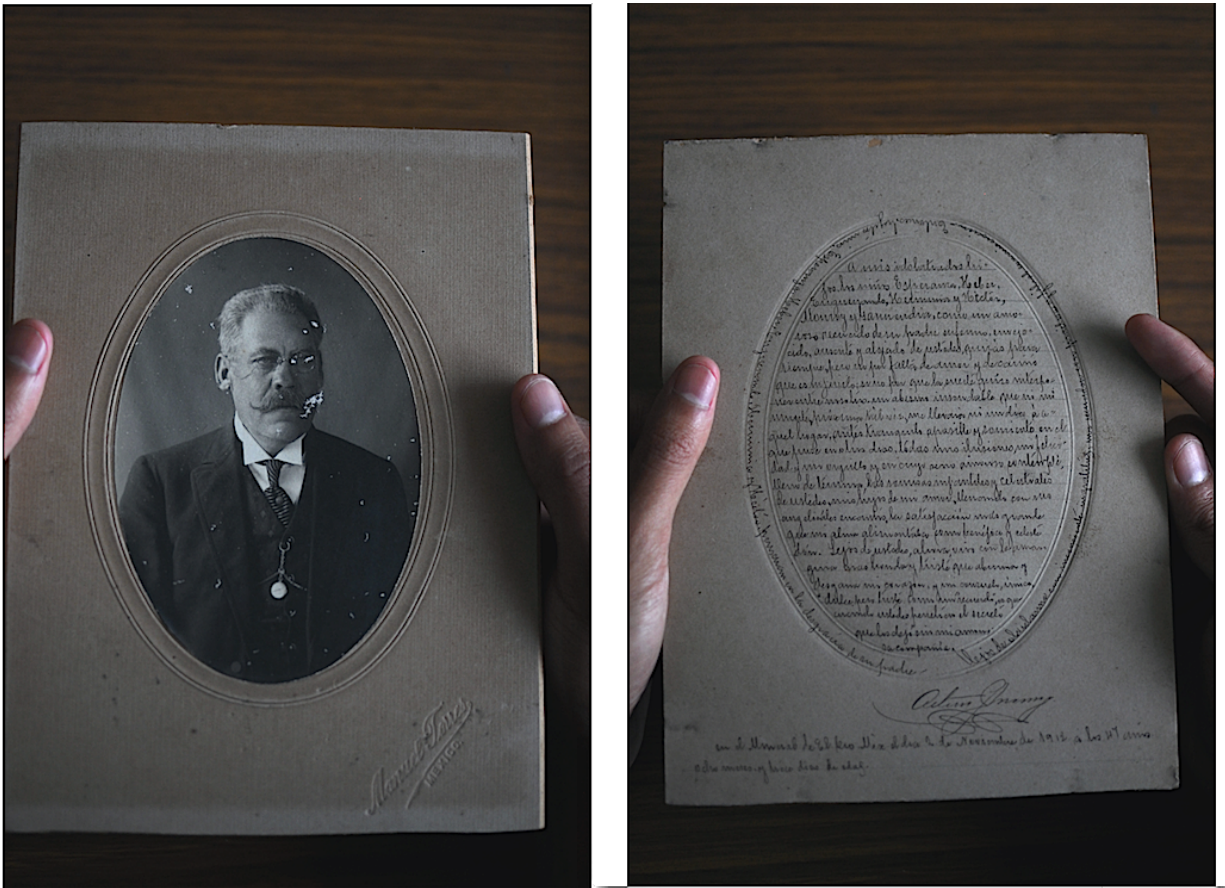


Fig. 2. Portrait of Arturo J. Monroy with a handwritten dedication to his children on the back of the frame written on November 2nd, 1912. Presumably the photograph was taken in Mexico City, as indicated by the stamp of the Manuel Torres Studio (bottom right).

Treating these portraits as artifacts provides an additional layer of context when thinking about their presence in the archive. As Elizabeth Edwards and Janet Hart write, “a photograph is a three-dimensional thing, not a two dimensional image.”<sup>39</sup> The photographs found in Garmendia’s archive, aside from being visual testaments, were also *detalles* exchanged among family members, friends, and loved ones. The portrait that Arturo Monroy took of himself in 1912 and dedicated to his five

<sup>39</sup> Edwards and Hart, 2004. 1



children on the back of the frame stands out above all of the others to draw significance to the materiality of photography. Expressing that his health is in decline and in fear of not seeing his children again, Monroy inks (and almost engraves) his endearing words on the back of the portrait, leaving a very elegant textual and visual imprint that takes advantage of the plate's design. These portraits were not only supposed to be visual reminders, or memories, but a personalized and affective gesture.<sup>40</sup> While Monroy's beautiful dedication stands out from the other portraits and photographs in Garmendia's archive, in terms of its content and visual design, the rest of the images were also originally mounted on similar cardboard plates to provide structural support. Mounting the photographs on a more rigid and durable surface not only prevented the picture from damaging or breaking, but also made them more adequate to be gifted in a presentable manner or ready to be displayed at home. The quality of the frames is also worth noting, as they differed in sizes, colours, shapes and textures; many of the frames in Garmendia's archive have sophisticated patterns engraved on them (like Monroy's), particularly those portraits taken during the Porfiriato. The frame was also the space in which the studio stamped its name, which mattered because the branding of these portraits — that were meant to be negotiated — was also a barometer of wealth, particularly in this time period when photography was both a developing technology and an emerging artistic form. Mexican photographers at the turn of the century were in fact making a name for themselves at the national and international level, participating in photography competitions at world fairs and winning the top prizes. As such, many of the family portraits in Garmendia's archive were taken in the studios of these celebrity photographers, such as Ignacio Gómez Gallardo and José María

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<sup>40</sup> Monroy would not pass away until 1917, however, death had always been in his mind. The dedication of this photograph was actually written on November 2nd, also known as Day of the Death. His fear of dying prematurely is also a recurring theme in his correspondence, found in Lety Monroy's archive.

Lupercio in Guadalajara or Antonio Torres in Mexico City.<sup>41</sup> A picture taken by a “celebrity” photographer could only raise your stock in the Porfirian social market.



Fig. 3. Family portrait taken inside a studio in 1925 with a lavish home as the background. On the left: Delfina Garmendia; sitting in middle: her eldest son, Heber Monroy, On the right: her daughter, Herminia Monroy and her fiancé, Cesar Aparicio.

The Mexican Revolution put an end to European-inspired Porfirian fashion, which became synonymous with material extravagance and excess, unattainable to the majority of the Mexican population. Moreover, the post-revolutionary regimes of Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco

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<sup>41</sup> Gomez Gallardo participated in the photography contest of the 1900 Paris International Exhibition, winning a gold medal. José María Lupercio was popular painter turned photographer famous for photographing Huichol indians. He would be later hired by the government to photograph most of the archaeological discoveries that were taking place at the time. For more on famous Mexican daguerrotypists see Emma Cecilia García Krinsky, Rosa Casanova, and Claudia Canales, eds., *Imaginarios y Fotografía En México: 1839-1970* (Barcelona: Lunweg, 2005).

Elías Calles (1924-1928) embarked on an aggressive cultural campaign to redefine Mexican national identity by adopting a homogenous imagery of the quintessential Mexican man and woman as revolutionary armed peasants.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the notion of a Mexican aristocracy, determined not only by material wealth but also by lineage, was extinguished. This meant that the *gente decente* (decent people), a status based on a person's education and a sense of morality, was the model to emulate. Yet, while there was a rejection of the material aesthetics associated with the Porfiriato, appearances continued to be at the centre of public interaction with new material trends and fashions quickly replacing old ones. As seen in the above photograph of Garmendia's family in 1925, the art-nouveau associated with Europe's *fin-de-siècle* was seamlessly replaced with the avant-guard, the cosmopolitan American art-deco. The bundle of photographs in Garmendia's archive is a marker that renders this transition of modernities visible as it does peoples' quest to attain them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The most notable example is the muralist movement (1921-mid 1930s) funded by the newly created ministry of education spearheaded by José Vasconcelos, himself a *científico*. Vasconcelos commissioned famous muralists such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco to adorn the walls of public buildings with murals depicting the history of Mexico from its pre-hispanic origins to the last days of the armed conflict in the Mexican Revolution.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on modernity in the first half of the 20th Century see Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900-1939*, The Mexican Experience (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016). Focusing in Mexico City, Sluis looks at the rise of the Deco movement as an intellectual transformation where architecture, culture and body are intertwined. Art Deco was seen as a space of transition or "reconstruction" of the nation, from the Porfiriato to the post-revolutionary era, in which indigenistas advocating for pre-Columbian motifs meshed with traditionalist defending neo-colonial art. The Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City and the market Avelardo Rodríguez in Mexico City stand out as the best architectural examples of this movement.



Fig. 4. Three copies of one photograph of Herminia Monroy's wedding in 1927.

Upon closer examination one can immediately distinguish that what appears to be the elegant foyer of a mansion is in reality a worn-out and out-of-proportion screen background of the studio where the photograph is being taken. The composition of the photograph suggests continuities in family photography from the turn of the century until well after the revolution. Not only did photographs continue to produce an appearance of wealth and stability that was not representative of the majority of the Mexican population, they also continued to make the “home” the stage on which to project that appearance. As *detalles*, giving those outside the kin some form of access into one's private

space, in this case a photograph, was a way of solidifying bonds and trust even if those glimpses of private life were carefully choreographed to meet public expectation. The *gente decente* of the post-revolutionary years, just like the aristocracy of the Porfiriato, depended on the constant demonstration of their courtesy by showering others with gestures or *atenciones*. The materializing of private family life in the form of *detalles* to shape public appearance and fulfil those *atenciones* was even more common when a family reached milestone moments. Births, baptisms, and more commonly, weddings, were events in which *detalles*, in the form of invitations, were mostly expected and produced. A series of photographs of the first wedding of Garmendia's daughter, Herminia, in 1927 is proof of that. Three framed copies of the same photograph appear in the archive, each with their own personalized dedication by Herminia and her new husband Cesar. These photographs were *detalles* that never made it to their intended destinations, but their presence in the archive reveals that the *atención*, the thought, had been there nonetheless.

On its own, the parcel containing all of Garmendia's family portraits only gives us scattered glimpses of her family life and not a "complete" picture of who Delfina Garmendia was. Attention to the material features of these photographs, however, provides a paratext that reveals an aspect of Garmendia's life that was meaningful to her based on continuities found in the form and use of those portraits found in the archive. While the private nature of Garmendia's collection suggests that these portraits were "saved" as visual memories of loved ones, Garmendia's collection of photographs, seen as carefully crafted *detalles* or tokens of appreciation, allow us to see that before, during, and after the revolution, Garmendia was aware of her position in her social landscape by continuing to attend to notions of aesthetic but also performative appearances. Moreover, the materiality of the photographs urges us to attend to a complex system of social networking that, far from being a private affair, was premised on the performative display of intimacy.



## Intermission

In the fall of 2013 Alejandra Bronfman encouraged me to attend grad school at UBC in order to turn this project into a masters thesis. I was immediately thrown into an ongoing conversation on archives and the dialogue amongst historians on the discipline of history, in other words, what the craft of the professional historian really is. Frustration and doubt kicked in, mainly because the project centred around my family archive; I felt that if I was going to write about the practice of domestic archiving wearing the hat of professional historian more than one family archive was needed, particularly if I wanted to provide a more encompassing glimpse of the Mexican society of the early 20th century. Moreover, I felt the need to undergo the right of passage for all graduate students of history: going to an “archive” to do research. In the summer of 2015, I decided to go in search of more family archives and traveled to Mexico City to visit the *Repositorio Histórico de Testimonios Familiares*, an institutionalized archive housing hundreds of family archives from families of multiple socio-economic backgrounds and places in the country dating back as far as the 16th century.<sup>44</sup>

Back in 1992, the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) embarked on a project to collect family histories by asking the general population across Mexico to donate their family archives, or at least a facsimile of them, for their new repository in the south borough of Tlalpan. Upon contact with other domestic archives I found a number of interesting parallels to my ancestor’s archive. For instance, many collections, like Garmendia’s, would only be comprised of official documents, diplomas, appointments, and other documentation with government seals on

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<sup>44</sup> The collection is housed at the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), Dirección de Estudios Históricos. Allende Núm. 172, Esq. Juárez, Tlalpan Centro, CP. 14000, México D.F. Tel. 40405100. The collection has been gradually digitized and some of it can be accessed online at [www.papelesdefamilia.mx](http://www.papelesdefamilia.mx)

them, but also objects of a different form, like diaries, letters, memoirs. What stood out about this last group, however, was that they would also centre their narrations around seminal events in the history of the Mexican nation, like the American and French invasions and, more frequently, the Mexican Revolution. Just like Garmendia, these families were inserting themselves into the narrative of the nation through their personal collections, and had gone further, perhaps, by infiltrating an institutionalized archive. Also noteworthy was the role and attitude of the donors—a large number of them chose to only donate photocopies of their archives, while others were okay letting go of the originals. The institute also gave the donors the opportunity to provide a written description of their archive's contents, as well as their family's background. Some of these appendixes were in fact more fascinating than the actual archives. A number of donors would write a fifty-page biography of their ancestors and the Mexico they lived in, while others opted for anonymity. A pattern was beginning to emerge: either the historical actor/narrator that created the archive considered his or her personal archive to be of grander historical importance or a descendant made this decision years down the road. The fact that Garmendia chose to preserve mostly material evidence that linked her to the metanarrative of the Mexican Revolution suggests that she recognized the historical significance of her present and wanted to inscribe her family and herself in it. Since the nation was redefining itself at this moment, this was a timely opportunity to also redefine oneself.

The parallels between some of these family archives and Garmendia's began to steer my project in one direction, when I received a phone call in early June from my cousin Karen Rodríguez, who had recently returned from a three week trip to the state of Chiapas, where she made a quick stop in the town of Tapachula to visit a distant relative. She mentioned that while she was there she discovered our relative had in her possession an enormous family archive, and that within this collection there was a large amount of material that belonged to Garmendia and her husband Arturo Monroy. She

ended the conversation with “you have to see the stuff she has with your own eyes.” At this moment, I already had a lot of momentum working with the other family archives and had distanced myself from making Garmendia’s archive the subject of my project. Nevertheless, I said why not, I had never been to Chiapas before.

We arrived in Tapachula on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2015 at around 7:30 in the evening, in the middle of a torrential storm that paralyzed the town. My relative, Lety Monroy, was gracious enough to let us stay in her house for three days, excited at the prospect that someone in the family had taken a kin interest in her family’s archive. Monroy, 84 years old at the time and suffering from a condition that forced her permanently to a wheelchair for more than a decade of her life, is the granddaughter of Delfina Garmendia and Arturo Monroy. After indulging in some savoury street *garnachas* and some fresh *café de olla*, Monroy directed us to her living room eager to start talking about the stuff she has been collecting through the years. I immediately noticed a stark contrast; unlike my father’s archive, stored in a dimly lit storage room, Monroy’s archive was located in plain sight in the centre of her living room. Stored inside a trunk that served as her coffee table, one just needed to open it out of curiosity to uncover the mountain of material she had collected throughout her long life, as well as everything she inherited from her mother and father. Here the family archive was not hidden or over-protected; rather, the archive, and by extension the past, became part of the living space of Garmendia’s day-to-day life, in which interaction with its papers and photographs is encouraged.





Fig. 5. Lety Monroy showing us her family archive in Tapachula, Chiapas. June 20th, 2014.

Before we even got a chance to unpack and settle into our rooms, Lety poured us some coffee and began telling us the story of how Delfina Garmendia, her grandmother, shortly before her passing, would go up to the roof of their building to burn objects from her personal archive. She vividly recalled Garmendia burning a large number of letters, pictures and even hair from her children's infancies. Lety mentioned that she made an effort to stop her grandmother from burning all the items, and even asked to keep them, but Garmendia refused telling her that these memories had no meaning to anyone but herself. Lety's story tells us that Garmendia did conserve material of a more intimate nature, despite what my father's archive suggests, however, she did not see this type of material as "documents," but as intimate objects that no one else could make sense of once she was

gone. For Garmendia the contents of those sacks may have been used as mnemonic devices to recall meaningful moments and other milestones of her private life, materials from her childhood, from when she fell in love to when she became a mother and a grandmother. Almost as if it were a ritual, this act of burning the past points to the centrality of writing and artifacts in the construction of life and the performative nature of such things. As William French aptly suggested, “if these artifacts constitute life, then in death they need to be destroyed as well.” It is through interviews with Lety Monroy in the days that followed, as well as through the documents in her custody (her birth and marriage certificate, personal photographs), that I began to get a more complete picture of Garmendia’s life that centred more on her private rather than public persona. Delving into the contents of Lety’s archive I noticed that I was no longer looking at Garmendia’s archive, but rather at her husband’s, Arturo Monroy.

### **Act 3: Arturo Monroy**

#### **i. Letters**

The life of Arturo Monroy also remains outside the history books of Mexico, even though Garmendia’s archive indicates that he participated in active combat during the Mexican Revolution.<sup>45</sup> Born in the state of Guanajuato on February 19th, 1865, he was an educated man who would become an administrator for the Mexican post service, becoming responsible for opening new post offices across the country. He married Delfina Garmendia on July 10th, 1895 in the parish of Tapachula, just a few blocks away from where Lety resides today; he was 30, she was 18. Letters indicate that their marriage was not a happy one, particularly because Arturo’s work forced him to

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<sup>45</sup> Garmendia’s letters suggest that her husband was stationed in a constitutionalist barrack in Veracruz at least from 1916-17.

constantly be away from the house while Delfina stayed at home with her five children: Esperanza, Enguerrando, Heber, Herminia (my great-grandmother), and Hector (Lety's father). It lasted until Arturo Monroy's death in 1917 when he was 52.

What stands out from Monroy's collection is that, in comparison to Delfina's archive, there is barely any official documentation—no presidential telegrams, no invitations to the ball, no official appointments—it is rather a collection of private correspondence, poetry and other musings written and dedicated to Garmendia and their five children, leaving hardly any trace of his life outside the house. Monroy's writing portrays him as a passionate and eloquent writer, but also as a kind, loving father and husband. His letters show how physically and emotionally distant he constantly felt from his family, particularly Delfina, whom he expressively considered the love of his life, but who seemed to be withdrawing and spiralling into a depression. He constantly asks his children in these letters to look after their mother and to be diligent in their school work so that they can be exemplary adults and able to "sweeten their mother's suffering."<sup>46</sup> Not a man detached from his emotions, he described himself as a man who may not exude "manly beauty," but as one who harbours sentiments of goodness, dignity, and compassion.<sup>47</sup>

Lety's archive contains multiple copies of Monroy's letters addressed to her father, Hector, which reveal the nurturing and imaginative character of her grandfather. In a letter dated August 16th, 1907, Arturo informed his children of having an encounter with a fairy on the Mexican-U.S. border while waiting to get a glimpse of comet Daniel. The fairy invited him to hop on the comet's tail, arriving at "El Paraiso de los Niños", a children's paradise full of plush babies where Arturo decided

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<sup>46</sup> "Dedicar con dicho empeño para que cuando seas grandesito puedas ayudar a tu mamá y endulzar sus penas." Letter from Arturo Monroy to Hector on April 11th, 1914, Toluca, Mexico.

<sup>47</sup> "belleza varonil", Letter from Arturo Monroy to Hector on September 27th, 1913.

to adopt a new sibling for his children. In this letter he also attached a postcard of this Eden, with the fairy of the story holding a baby that his children will soon get to meet. A couple of weeks later after writing this letter, on September 9th, 1907, Delfina gave birth to Hector. Even if his children were only infants, unable to read, Arturo Monroy made sure that, whenever he wrote a letter to them, it would be addressed directly to them. Surely his position in the Mexican post service facilitated delivering letters to each of his family members, but by doing this, these letters served not only as means of communication, they were, just like a portrait, material tokens of appreciation, *detalles*, expected to be archived and treasured.<sup>48</sup> For Delfina these letters even transcended to a metaphysical realm: in a letter to Hector entitled *Mi Despedida (My Goodbye)*, Garmendia goes as far as referring to the letter as a “talismán,” capable of keeping him away from evil, “a strong shield that’ll defend you and save you from the abyss.”<sup>49</sup> Through all of Hector’s childhood, Arturo’s letters became constant instructions, or reminders, of character building and integrity. In a letter dated, September 27th, 1913, when Hector was only six years old, Arturo tells his son not to be discouraged for inheriting his father’s underwhelming looks, because while he may not be an attractive man, it is “sentiments” and feelings which are immutable; having inherited his father’s feelings, Hector will always be a “loyal, honest, and sincere man.” Yet, within the intimate and familiar tone of these letters, and aside from instructions on how to be a good son and daughter in the family, lessons were also given on what it meant to be a good Mexican and a good citizen.

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<sup>48</sup> In his treatment of love letters in Mexico, William French described love letters as *prendas*, objects that are “worn” at all times, to readily produce material evidence of an “epistolary pact” between lovers. William E. French, *The Heart in the Glass Jar: Love Letters, Bodies, and the Law in Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> “Estas páginas serán de mí el talismán que alejen de ti todos los males, el escudo invulnerable que te defenderá y te salve del abismo...”

To the boy, Hector Monroy,  
With that enthusiasm that I enjoy so much, you provide me with a description of the splendour of the celebrations of the 16th of September, organized in commemoration of the INDEPENDENCE OF THE FATHERLAND.

What captures your attention is the military parade in which all of the younglings from the elementary school participate. It amazes you because being as young as you are, you realize that every boy is, and can be a soldier when the FATHERLAND calls for their service and their lives to defend it.

A man, since boyhood, needs to have engraved in his conscience that he has to die for his FATHERLAND, for his HONOUR and for the good name of his PARENTS.

If this year you did not dress as a little soldier, you will on another occasion, given that being a MEXICAN boy, who loves his honour, his FATHERLAND and his parents, you must prepare for whenever it is necessary to die for them.

I am already sending you a rifle so that you can start learning how to handle it and make use of it, whenever it is needed.

There are many boy heroes that the fatherland remembers with veneration...

Wouldn't you, my beloved Hector, wish to one day be like these young heroes?

Arturo's letter reveals that private life and family roles were articulated by outlining a gendered position between individual and the collective. In this case history with a capital H had infiltrated the family archive, supporting the claims that historians have made about the Mexican family that began to see itself as a microcosm of the nation with a clearly defined paternalistic structure.<sup>50</sup> The state was supposed to protect its citizens the same way that parents had to be protective of their children; men, however, were expected to die in defence of the nation and their family if necessary. A look at

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<sup>50</sup> For more discussions on family and nation as mutually inclusive in Mexico, see Eric Zolov, *Refried Ehis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and Ann Shelby Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). For more on how nationalism and the revolution shaped the educational system in post-revolutionary Mexico see Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).



the postcard attached to that letter to his children signalling Hector's birth provides the perfect imagery of this, in which “the fairy” centred in this garden full of babies is essentially an allegory of



Fig. 6. Postcard attached to Arturo's letter to his children. August 16th, 1907

the Mexican nation, a maternal figure wearing the colours of the nation, nurturing its children. Family history—in this case, what is said about a family's past—undergoes the same processes as the history of larger collectivities, such as communities, states, and nations. Maurice Halbwachs

argued that individuals, as members of groups, construct collective memories and that each group has different ones; among the most important of the social groups for the construction of memories are family, friends, and coworkers.<sup>51</sup> For Arturo, his archive was an intimate epistolary space where the collective past seeped in to the fibre that held the family together. As the years passed by, Hector became an archivist, continuing to receive and collect these gestures, *detalles*, written by the hands of Arturo and Delfina, storing them and eventually passing them to Lety for safekeeping.

The Garmendia-Monroy archive as a whole is a collection of intimate sources overlapped with collective identities, in this case those pertaining to family and nation. Delfina had her official documents from the revolution and Arturo had his stories of heroic youths, both of which were imagined and framed by public and collective elements. Yet, I would not have been able to realize this without seeing them as two separate archives and, perhaps, encountering them the way that I did. Delfina's archive of the Mexican Revolution was partly crafted using Arturo's personal documentation after his passing. Nevertheless, prior to my trip to Tapachula, I did not know when or where Garmendia got married, when her children were born, or had access to some of her more domestic and maternal side. Since Delfina's passing in 1957, however, the separation of her archive and the creation of others (in this case my dad's and Lety's) was a conscious act; those involved in their making saw material archives, that is objects like toys, hair, pictures or official documents, as essential tools for the production of their family and/or individual history, whatever history might mean to them and whatever story they wanted to tell.

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<sup>51</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, Colophon Books (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). 11.

In his seminal essay about Mexican national identity, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz references *El Gesticulador* to make a statement about the behaviour of Mexican society. “Through dissimulation we [as Mexicans] come closer to our model, and sometimes the gesticulator, as Usigli saw so profoundly, becomes one with his gestures and thus makes them authentic. The death of Professor Rubio changed him into what he wanted to be: General Rubio, a sincere revolutionary and a man capable of giving the stagnating Revolution a fresh impetus and purity.”<sup>52</sup> Through her documents and photographs Delfina Garmendia reinvents herself as a *letrada*, a matriarch, and agent of the revolution, while Arturo Monroy asserts his position as loving husband and father through the construction of an epistolary space that would eventually find a place in Garmendia’s granddaughter’s living-room. Set entirely inside the Rubio’s house, Usigli’s play became the outlet for Usigli to depict a vivid picture of the Mexican revolution and of the Mexican family, two concepts that as Delfina and Arturo’s papers, and others inside the archive in Mexico City have confirmed, were completely intertwined. Like Usigli’s play, this thesis contributes to that rendering of the Mexican stage and its society by focusing on the private collections of Delfina, Arturo, Lety, and my father, to spotlight their understanding of history and family and how these families and individuals imagined and wrote themselves into being.

On our last day in Tapachula I stumbled upon a photograph of Lety as a child sitting on her grandmother’s lap while gleefully gazing at her mother. I had seen an altered copy of this image two days before, in which Lety’s mother had been cropped out, leaving only a photograph of Delfina, Lety, and Hector. This image, however, showed Lety’s mother as the outsider in the group, standing behind a seated Delfina, who had turned her back on her while she and Hector locked their gaze on

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<sup>52</sup> Octavio Paz, “Máscaras mexicanas,” in *El Laberinto de la Soledad ; Postdata ; Vuelta a el Laberinto de la Soledad* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1967).



Lety. On the other hand, Lety gives her full attention to her mother, reaching out almost secretly to her mother's hand as to invite her into the picture. The contrast of the two images is telling of Garmendia's attempts to ostracize her daughter in law, who Lety admitted she was never fond of; Delfina tried doing so at the moment of the photograph by turning her back on her, but Lety's stare is itself so captivating that she had to be cropped out. This cropping was not done with scissors, but rather the erasure was commissioned during the developing process, as seen by the margins of the photograph. Lety became the focal point of the photograph the moment her mother was cropped out of the picture. Even though the image already showed her as an outsider, the erasure of Lety's mother from the family archive was Delfina's ultimate act of silencing in order to construct her family's history.



Fig. 7. Two histories of the same event: Delfina Garmendia with her family, date unknown. The curation of this image, which places the two images together and inserts Lety's mother back in the picture, has created a third history, as it were.

The juxtaposition of the two photographs illustrates the role of the archive perfectly, it selects moments that matter, and captures the focal points of those who create it, guard it and encounter it. While the papers my father inherited positioned our family as active participants of the Mexican Revolution, Lety Monroy rarely mentioned it. Lety was always more eager and passionate to talk about the family's private history, severed ties, rumours and other types of gossip that shaped her lived experience, family tensions that were clearly present in the archive. As the family historian, the letters she holds inside the large trunk, once intended solely for the eyes of its recipient, became accessible to the family, and now to a broader audience, once they became part of her archive. The point here, as Trouillot suggests, is not to ask what history is, so much as to understand how history works.<sup>53</sup> I think domestic archival stories such as this one do that; if not, then they are family gossip at its best. In a sense, and without seeing it at the start of this project, giving privileged access to readers to my family archive and its artifacts makes this thesis a token of my appreciation to them, a small gesture, *un pequeño detalle*.

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<sup>53</sup> Trouillot, 28.

## Curtain Call



Fig. 8. Facebook post from Lety Monroy featuring Delfina Garmendia May 9th, 2015.

Lety and I became “Facebook friends” soon after I left Chiapas, and I quickly noticed how she had already begun uploading and “sharing” to her social network some of the material in her collection, particularly pictures of her and her grandmother. Aside from becoming a protagonist to this thesis, Delfina has now reached new audiences thanks to the digitalization of her archive and to a progeny that for different reasons considered her life worth sharing. In the case of Lety, uploading a picture

of her grandmother was a "homage" to a member of her family that was fundamental in her upbringing, someone she called "a mother, a grandmother, and a teacher." Although this thesis sees the home as a physical site for archival engagement, new technologies have created new spaces and new potentialities, beyond the living room or the basement, for personal archives to flourish. The rapidity of communication technology and the emergence and discursive features of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, has transformed how people visualize, frame, and circulate themselves to a public.

The appetite for self-archiving and life writing with a public in mind appears to be a new phenomenon, in an era of "shares" and "likes" where reputations — for individuals, institutions, or enterprises— can be made or broken depending of what gets posted. Companies hiring social media coordinators, presidents using Twitter as their main communication platform, and people purchasing Instagram and Youtube followers, may seem incomprehensible to people from generations past. As this thesis has shown, however, the curation of private life, and its exchange to a public audience, has been an universal aspect of how people engage with the discursive elements that shape their landscape, and how the accumulation of that material allows us to shape what we call the past, with or without the world wide web. The Monroy-Garmendia archive, or its bundle of gestures, puts forth the argument that social media is actually a thing of the past more than a thing of the future.

Nonetheless, because the platforms govern how users are represented in systems, they also shape the contexts of creation and future access to those traces; archivist and historians should be concerned with how technology creates new potentialities for personal archives, as well as how social media platforms provide a representational blueprint and govern access to this information.

Today, where many collections are housed in the server and not within the walls of a private space, death poses questions about the fate of the content and the challenges for confronting, documenting and memorializing the passing of its user.<sup>54</sup> This is also an area of exploration for archivists and researchers tackling the challenges of confronting, documenting, and memorializing death in the age of social media. A guiding force of this ethnography is the transference of the archive, in this case, the generational transfer that brought it to life and shaped it. Walter Benjamin once wrote that, “to live is to leave traces.”<sup>55</sup> The materiality of these personal collections has allowed, or put pressure, for such transfer to take place, particularly after the passing of the collector. These technologies have opened the gate to a new area of enquiry for scholars interested in personal archives, an interdisciplinary endeavour that no doubt sees archive, media, and technology as mutually inclusive, what we may call an “archival turn 2.0.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Amelia Acker and Jed R. Brubaker raise questions about encountering death and memorialization in social media. *Death, Memorialization and Social Media: A Platform Perspective for Social Archives*. Archavia 77, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Paris the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in Walter Benjamin and Peter Demetz, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Professional archivists and researchers acknowledge that the field of personal archives has transformed., they study how people circulate personal information and “archive” it now, advising individual creators on comprehensive preservation practices ranging from media-specific issues to software preservation, hard-disk backup, and emulation. See Christopher A. Lee, ed., *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011).

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