

ARCHIVE FRICTIONS:

QUEERING AFRICAN PASTS THROUGH ARCHIVAL INTERVENTIONS

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Once thought of as a repository of historical documents, in recent decades the archive has been opened up as an object of enquiry, and as a terrain of intellectual, artistic and political intervention.¹ In the humanities, the social sciences, and in the contemporary arts, scholars and artists, social theorists and curators, have been interested in rethinking the archive as a metaphor speaking to problems of collective memory and historical narration, of knowledge production and indexing, authority and violence, justice and redressal.² Feminist and queer scholarship and activism have been rather productive in devising strategies of intervention on existing archival collections, while also critically inviting a re-imagination of the concept of the archive itself, through creative or performative practices of collecting, storytelling and reading the past.³ To be sure, these are not academic exercises alone, but are also political

¹ Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972). Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Adina Arvaty, "Spectres of Freud: The Figure of the Archive in Derrida and Foucault", *Mosaic*, 44(4), 2011, pp. 141-159. Ann Laura Stoler. *Along the archival grain: thinking through colonial ontologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Anjali Arondekar. *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009).

² Michelle Caswell. *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). David Wallace, Wendy Duff, Renée Saucier, Andrew Finn (eds.). *Archives, Recordkeeping and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

³ Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell (2015). *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*. New York: State University of New York Press. Alana Kumbier. *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, LLC, 2014). Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy and Zeb Tortorici, "Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings", *Radical History Review*, 120, 2014, 1-11. Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten (ed.). *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, LLC, 2012). Kate Eichhorn. *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). Maryanne Dever (ed.). *Archives and New Modes of Feminist Research* (New York: Routledge, 2020). Noortje Willems and Sylvia Holla (eds.). *Gender and Archiving: Past, Present, Future* (Amsterdam: Hilversum, 2017). Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry Katz, Mary Perry (eds.). *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010). Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramizes. *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Leila J. Rupp and Susan K. Freeman (ed.). *Understanding and Teaching US Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). Elizabeth Freeman. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer*

incisions speaking to contemporary struggles for rights, memory, belonging and recognition. In such cases, the political potential of the archive lies in its mobilisation of an imagined and memorialized past that lends support to political projects in the present and avows utopian visions of the future.⁴

In the Global South, various feminist and queer re-articulations of the archive as concept and as a practice have emerged of late.⁵ In Africa, in particular, scholars have been calling for the re-configuration and decolonization of the archive.⁶ While gender, sexuality, and intimacy have not been initially a major concern in these debates, in the last few years important interventions have mobilized the idea of the archive to raise new questions about

Histories (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010). Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003). Marisa Fuentes. *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Jill Richards. *The Fury Archives: Female Citizenship, Human Rights, and the International avant-gardes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). Antoinette Burton. *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Rahul Rao. *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴ Simon Popple, Andrew Prescott and Daniel H. Mutibwa (eds.). *Communities, Archives, and New Collaborative Practices* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020). Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge. "Archivist as activist: lessons from three queer community archives in California", *Archival Science*, 13, 2013, pp. 293-316. Mathias Danbolt. "We're Here! We're Queer?: Activist Archives and Archival Activism". *Lambda Nordica*, 3-4, 2010, pp. 90-118. Rebecca Taves Sheffield, "The Bedside Table Archives: Archive Intervention and Lesbian Intimate Domestic Culture". *Radical History Review*, 120, 2014, pp. 108-120. Martin Manalansan. "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives". *Radical History Review*, 120, 2014, pp. 94-107. Cassie Findlay. "Archival Activism", *Archives and Manuscripts*, 44(3), 2016, pp. 155-159. Alexandrina Buchanan and Michelle Bastian, "Activating the archive: rethinking the role of traditional archives for local activist projects", *Archival Science*, 15, 2015, pp. 429-451. Marianne Hirsch. "Feminist Archives of Possibility". *differences*, 9(1), 2018, pp. 173-188.

⁵ Arondekar, *For the Record*. Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*. Robb Hernández, *Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicana Avant-Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 2020). Zeb Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). María Alena Martínez. "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics", *Radical History Review*, 120, 2014, pp. 159-182.

⁶ Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michelle Pickover, Grame Reid & Razia Saleh. *Refiguring the Archive* (Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002). Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes. *Uncertain Curature: In and Out of the Archive*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014). Carolyn Hamilton (ed.). *Tribing and Untribing the Archive* (Durban: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2016). Garth Stevens, Norman Duncan, and Derek Hook (Ed). *Race, Memory and the Apartheid Archive: Towards a Transformative Psychosocial Praxis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Siseko Kumalo. "Resurrecting the Black Archive through the decolonisation of philosophy in Africa". *Third World Thematics*, 5 (1-2), 2020, pp. 19-36. Siseko Kumalo. "Khawuzela: an instantiation of the Black Archive". *Imbizo*, 11(2). Achille Membe. n.d. "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive". Available at: <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>

gendered and sexualized intimacies, affects, memory, historical formations, identity making, and contemporary cultural practice.⁷

The popularisation of the archival concept – which includes ‘archival turns’ in various disciplines and fields of practice, from anthropology to the contemporary arts⁸ – has, surely, received its own forms of critique. To some, it has resulted in a “tendency towards the over-casual use of the word ‘archive’ as a shorthand to refer to, well, just about anything”.⁹ These critiques have suggested not only that the archive has become a “universal metaphor for all conceivable forms of storage and memory”¹⁰, but also, and perhaps more crucially, that “the archive metaphor is reaching its expiration date.”¹¹ It may be relevant here, for comparative analysis, to refer to the criticism to an equally generalised and popular term in recent years: ‘decolonisation’. In this case, critical scholars have also claimed that “decolonisation is not a metaphor”, and have made a point for a more well-defined and historically grounded usage and understanding of the term.¹² The question then becomes: how can we resort to or claim the archive beyond its usage as a mere metaphor, but without reifying a too conservative or authoritative view of its powers? How can we think the archive as a specific political practice and epistemic project, without reproducing hierarchies between the conventional (physical, printed) format of the repository of knowledge, on the one hand, and community archiving projects, on the other, many of which homeless, dispersed, and digitally based?

⁷ April Sizemore-Barber. “Archival movements: South Africa’s Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action”, *Safundi*, 18(2), 2017, 117-130. April Sizemore-Barber. *Prismatic Performances: Queer South Africa and the Fragmentation of the Rainbow Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020). Katlego Disemelo. “Performing the Queer Archive: Strategies of Self-styling on Instagram”, in Jay Pather and Catherine Boule (ed.). *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019). Kehuro Macharia. “Archive and method in Queer African Studies”, *Agenda*, 29, 2015, pp. 140-146. Thérèse Migraine-George and Ashley Currier, “Queering Queer African Archives: Methods and Movements”, *WSQ*, 44(3/4), 2006, pp. 190-207. Cheryl McEwan. “Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory, and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29(3), 2003, pp. 739-757. Andrew Van der Vlies. “Art as archive: Queer Activism and contemporary South African visual cultures”. *Kunapipi*, 34(1), 2012, pp. 94-116. Kylie Thomas. “Zanele Muholi’s Intimate Archive: Photography and Post-Apartheid Lesbian Lives”. *Safundi*, 11(4), 2010, pp. 421-436.

⁸ Ruth Rosengarten, *Between Memory and Document: The Archival Turn in Contemporary Art*. Lisbon: Museu Coleção Berardo, 2012. Eric Ketelaar, “Archiva Turns and Returns: Studies of the Archive”, in Anne J. Gilliland et. al. (eds.). *Research in the Archival Multiverse*. Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2017, 228-268.

⁹ B. M. Watson, “Stop Calling Things Archives: an Archivist’s Plea”, *Perspectives on History*, 22 Jan 2021. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/january-2021/please-stop-calling-things-archives-an-archivists-plea>

¹⁰ Wolfgang Ernst, “The Archive as Metaphor”, *Open*, 7, 2004, 46-52.

¹¹ Naoshika Mori, “Where are we going beyond the archive metaphor?”, *Culture & Psychology*, 17(1), 2011, 11-19.

¹² Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Culture*, 1(1), 2012, 1-40. Olúfémi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously*. London: Hurst & Company, 2022.

In this paper, I want to initiate a reflection around these issues by looking at the case of queer archives in Africa. I use the term queer here as an umbrella term to refer to people who identify with any of the identities represented in the LGBTIQ+ acronym (that is: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer). I do so at a historical moment in which the archiving of queer pasts, mostly led by research institutes and community organisations, has gained momentum around the world.¹³ Yet, in spite of these developments, the majority of the LGBTIQ+ archives in operation today are located in the Global North, and particularly in North America.¹⁴ This uneven distribution of archives along the North-South contributes to, and serves to reproduce, the marginalization and invisibilisation of postcolonial contexts in mainstream narratives of the global LGBTIQ+ movement. Thus, the 'global' history of queer liberation remains parochial, Eurocentric, white, and elitist, while the Global South tends to be imagined and represented as a "backward" and queerphobic space.¹⁵ This is particularly true of Africa. Of course, the reality of queer politics in Africa is rather complex¹⁶. It includes persecution and the death penalty in some contexts (like Nigeria), but also the consolidation and increasing visibility of LGBTIQ+ movements in others (like in Angola or Mozambique). In order to capture this complexity as well as the historically shifting nature of queer politics and subjectivities in the continent, archives are more important than ever. Queer histories and memory, in addition, play a critical role in contexts where LGBTIQ people are said to not exist, to not belong, to be a foreign import with no roots in local culture and society.¹⁷

At the same time, this work is being done at a historical juncture in which feminist and queer studies have been particularly invested in problematizing the boundaries of "the human" as an universal category. This body of work has showed that gender and sexual normativities have been constitutive of "hierarchies of humanness," by which certain bodies were de-humanized, and deemed as nonhuman, sub-human, in-human.¹⁸ Surely, modern historiography and conventional (state) archives have played a critical role in facilitating and

¹³ Simon Popple, Andrew Prescott and Daniel H. Mutibwa (eds.). *Communities, Archives, and New Collaborative Practices* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020). Alexandrina Buchanan and Michelle Bastian, "Activating the archive: rethinking the role of traditional archives for local activist projects", *Archival Science*, 15, 2015, pp. 429-451.

¹⁴ Gerard Koskovich (2013). "Libraries and Archives". In John C. Hawley (ed.). *LGBTQ In America Today: An Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. p. 687.

¹⁵ Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Zethu Matebeni (ed). *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities* (Cape Town: Modjaji Books, 2014).

¹⁷ Rao. *Out of Time*.

¹⁸ Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, "Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?", *GLQ*, 21(2-3), pp. 183-207.

reifying these processes of de-humanization. As the black queer scholar Robert Reid-Pharr has argued, archival practices and institutions were fundamental to the ways in which “the essentially provincial concept of (white, Western, propertied) Man has been established as universal precisely through the wilful erasure of the profound violence that attended – and attends – the articulation of humanism.”¹⁹ To avert the violence of the archive, Reid-Pharr proposes a post-humanist archival practice that is able to attend to the “messiness” of lives and subjectivities, and that is able to imagine “ways of naming human being, that are not bounded by the very forms of philosophy and sociology from which black and female subjectivity are always already excluded.”²⁰ A queer archival practice, thus, necessarily interrogates, disturbs, and implodes the boundaries of what gets to be historicized and legible as human in the colonial and postcolonial archive – and, likewise, of what is denied humanity. Where is the queer African subject in the archive? Is the archive amenable to a project of decolonisation and post-human critique?

In Southern Africa, queer histories remain – by and large – invisible and un-archived, with the exception of South Africa. This seems particularly problematic if one considers that a prolific historiographic production already exists on issues of gender and sexuality in the region. The political and academic interest on the gender question in the midst of regional liberation and its aftermath did not translate into a consistent effort to register and archive related histories of queerness in these countries. At the same time, it is critical to de-centre “pink South Africa” as the epicentre of queer scholarship and activism in the continent.²¹ To keep focusing on South Africa’s exceptionalism in terms of queer visibility and LGBTIQ rights in opposition to an “homophobic Africa” only serves to fuel longstanding stereotypes, which are also grounded in racialized understandings of the continent as a place of “otherness” – a narrative still prevalent in the Western media, as well as political and academic discourse.²² In this paper, I intend to intervene in this ongoing debate by reflecting on two documentary archival projects that I had the opportunity of leading in Mozambique and Angola. I follow the suggestion of Ethiopian scholar Serawit Debele. Faced with an official archive in which queer Ethiopians are violated, dehumanised and criminalised, Debele resorts to speculation,

¹⁹ Robert Reid-Pharr, *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique* (New York: New York University Press: 2016), p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²¹ Stella Nyanzi, “Queering Queer Africa”, in Matebeni, *Reclaiming Afrikan*, 61-66.

²² Rao. *Out of Time*.

fabulation, and imagination as critical methods that not only challenge the regimes of truth of (post)colonial power but also, at the same time, lend themselves to a politics of liberation grounded on histories of the present and utopian imaginations of the future.²³

Lambda and the Quest for Queer Visibility (2006-Present)

LAMBDA, the first LGBTIQ+ organisation in Mozambique, was established in 2006 by a group of queer people, mostly identifying as gay men. Its creation follows from the liberalisation of the country economy and politics in the 1990s, as well as from Maputo's own queer history in the early 2000s, a period marked by processes of identity formation, community-making, and increasing visibility and institutionalisation of same-sex sexuality²⁴. Following the end of the civil war in 1992, a window of opportunity was opened for emergent forms of collective politics and mobilisation. Moreover, the HIV/AIDS health crisis brought gender and sexuality to the foreground of this newly reconstituted public space, as these issues reverberated in policy and political debate, and in media and academic discourses.²⁵ At the same time, new networks of sociability started to emerge, with gay parties operating as "great catalysers" of a queer subculture that cut across boundaries of social status, race, class, and location.²⁶

Since then, the last two decades have seen the great diversification and expansion of the queer scene in Mozambique. LAMBDA has become more representative, both in terms of its geographic reach and of its constituency (gay men, once the protagonists of this story, now share the spotlight with lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer persons).²⁷ At the same time, the somewhat narrow emphasis on HIV/AIDS and sexual health, which has tended to shape and constrain LGBTIQ+ movements everywhere, has been subdued by a new and substantial investment in queer visibility and public-facing campaigning. The collection of oral histories

²³ Serawit Debele, "Trans(forming) Archives: Speculative Biographies of Ethiopians in between and beyond genders", *African Studies* (in press).

²⁴ Francisco Miguel. 'Maríyarapáxjis: Silêncio, exoginia e tolerância nos processos de institucionalização das homossexualidades masculinas no sul de Moçambique', PhD thesis, University of Brasília, 2019.

²⁵ Maria Judite Chipenembe. 'Sexual Rights Activism in Mozambique: a qualitative case study of civil society organisations and experiences of lesbians, bisexual and transgender women'. PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit Brussels and Universiteit Ghent, 2018. Francisco Miguel, 'International Cooperation, Homosexuality and AIDS in Mozambique'. *Contexto Internacional* 42, 2020, 647-664.

²⁶ Danilo da Silva, oral history interview, Maputo (04/02/2020).

²⁷ Interview with Danilo da Silva, Maputo, 2019. It is interesting to note that after a decade under the leadership by a gay man, Danilo da Silva, Lambda opted, in 2020, for a dual leadership structure, with the executive directorship shared between a gay man and a lesbian woman, Roberto Nelson Paulo and Fauzia Naline Mangore, respectively.

and testimonies has been part of this drive for diversification, too. LAMBDA's Department of Communication and Documentation, for instance, was in charge of interviewing members of the LGBTIQ+ community, not only in Maputo but in other cities as well. These testimonies were later published either on LAMBDA's website and Facebook page, or in their newsletter *As Cores do Amor* (The Colours of Love). As explained to me by the head of the Department, Francelino Zeúte,

LGBT people's lives are somehow invisible. Because they are invisible, there is a need to build a narrative about these lives that are often marginalized. [...] The documentation of life histories has, above all, the potential of drawing attention to those who have a right, to show there is a need for [...] the collective work of society, [...] so these people do not suffer with discrimination in the future. [...] It's an enormous task, but we realize that it begins here, in documenting these life histories, because to inform society is a way to build a [less difficult] future.²⁸

Since 2019 I have been working in a collaboration with LAMBDA and the GALA Queer Archive, based in Johannesburg, in building a queer archival collection for Mozambique. The project involved systematising the materials already collected or produced by LAMBDA, but also creating new audio-visual materials in close dialogue with the community itself. One of the outcomes of this initiative was a collaboration with the Berlin-based photographer Aghi, who we commissioned to produce a visual archive of LGBTIQ+ activism in Maputo, especially by following members of LAMBDA's cultural group, a vibrant collective of performing artists working with dance, singing, drag, theatre, modelling, and voguing. The collection of photos produced within the project were later published in the book "Outros Corpos Nossos/Other Bodies of Ours", printed in South Africa by GALA's Mathoko's Books.²⁹

The book is in itself an archive and an artifact in cultural activism, as it (re)presents a series of photographs of queer scenes in Maputo. In addition to the photos, it also contains excerpts from oral history interviews I collected with participants, as a strategy to recognize their own voices and experiences, as told by themselves, in the first person. By aligning the

²⁸ Interview with Francelino Zeúte, Head of Lambda's Communication and Documentation Department, GALA Archives.

²⁹ Half of the books printed were sent for distribution in Mozambique. The other half were distributed in South Africa. The book is also available for free download: <https://gala.co.za/outros-corpos-nossos-other-bodies-of-ours/>

photographs with these testimonials, the book intends to articulate the visual languages of documental and portrait photography with the textual registers of oral histories and storytelling as strategies of promoting LGBT visibility and empowerment through archive-making. Text and photographs, portraits and testimony, comprise a living and lived archive of queer lives in Maputo. In line with other initiatives in queer activism around the world, the book was designed to function as an 'archive intervention.'³⁰ Thus, it intends to blur the already tenuous lines between public and private history, while also interrogating the very means by which memories and archives are produced, silenced, or reactivated in the midst of political struggles for LGBT rights, visibility and recognition.



Outros Corpos Nossos. Book cover.

³⁰ R. T. Sheffield, "The Bedside Table Archives: Archive Intervention and Lesbian Intimate Domestic Culture". *Radical History Review*. 120, 2014, 108-120.



Esta pose! A pose é tipo “olha-me” (Risos). Mas, não me olhe com pressa, me olhe devagar porque eu sou a tal, eu sou a top. Esta pose diz: sou mulher poderosa. E é por trás desse poder que se esconde uma menina muito frágil e leve de se machucar. Acho que é por isso e eu uso desse poder para esconder o que está dentro de mim, mas eu preciso libertar essa pessoa que está dentro de mim. Eu tenho medo de mostrar esse lado frágil e nunca mostrei mas, quanto mais a pessoa convive comigo acaba descobrindo que eu não sou essa pessoa poderosa (Risos).

This pose! This pose is like “look at me” (Laughs). But don’t look at me in haste, look slowly because I am the one, I am the top. This pose says: I’m a powerful woman. And it’s behind this power that a very fragile girl is hidden, a girl who easily gets hurt. I think that’s why I use this power to hide what’s inside me, but I need to free this person who is inside me. I have to show this fragile side of me, and I never have. But the more someone spends time with me, they end up finding out that I’m not that powerful person (Laughs).

Outros Corpos Nossos. Example of interview excerpt.

The Arquivo de Identidade Angolano and the Struggle for Queer Memory (2017-Present)

In 2017, a group of queer feminists came together to form a new collective dedicated to the groups often invisibilised within the LGBTIQ+ acronym, particularly bisexual, trans, intersex, lesbian, and queer womxn. In building a collective project that powerfully articulated gender and sexuality in a postcolonial society, this group also felt the need to think about history, to think historically. That meant an impetus to seriously consider issues of change over time, of continuities and discontinuities between pasts and present. In other words, how the past is not something well bounded in history, packed away in another time, but rather a force that lingers and continues to exist in the present, as the baggage one carries and the legacies one grapples with. In this perspective, their intervention on the landscape of LGBTIQ+ activism in Luanda was both timely and specific. That same year, they formally organized as the *Arquivo de Identidade Angolano* (Angolan Identity Archive), most commonly known as AIA. As one of the founding activists, Pamina Sebastião, recalls:

At that time, I identified myself as a bisexual person, and I didn’t feel like there was a space, that there were concrete agendas for bisexual people, and I also felt there wasn’t much space for LIQ (Lesbian, Intersex, and Queer) people. Even with the T (Transgender), more or less... So, that was how the archive emerged, more or less... We started to go back to the historical register with an extremely political idea, in the sense of asking: what is our political positionality in relation to LGBTIQ struggles in

Angola? That was something that I missed throughout my involvement in LGBTIQ+ activism here. I lacked such spaces for questioning.³¹

AIA's early initiatives were focused on both exploring existing African queer archives and producing their own modes of self-documentation. The first part of this had to do with curating a library of queer liberation and feminist critique, which included reference books by Angela Davis and Djamila Ribeiro, but also materials that AIA's activists or volunteers themselves translated to Portuguese for the first time, such as the *Queer African Manifesto* and other entries published in the *Queer African Reader*.³² The second part of their activist work was devoted to devising methods of self-archiving on a both individual and collective level. This resulted in a series of testimonial clips called *Hora de Dar a Cara* ("It's Time to Show Our Faces"), where members of the LGBTIQ+ community share their life stories.³³ The work of translation and documentary-making demonstrates AIA's commitment to producing specific content on gender and sexuality for the Angolan public. Such initiatives have, surely, the purpose of educating audiences and changing mindsets towards a more equal society. But they also voice the more political position that engaging queer memory offers radical possibilities for advancing claims of belonging and recognition in contemporary Angola. As Sebastião explains:

The archive emerged in a register of trying to explain three temporalities. The part relating to the books, to the translations that we did, had to do with deconstructing the myth that homosexuality is not African. It had to do with the historical recovery of the past in order to change a narrative about the present, a LGBT-phobic narrative, a narrative based on a certain notion of African identity that excludes us. And at the same time the archive was also about preserving the present, the issues facing LGBTIQ people today. We produced content in different formats, but always navigating the past and the present. I'm not sure if we were really navigating into the future, or the possibility of the future, but maybe the archive's very existence was precisely that, navigating into the future. The archive is the future. When I say future I am talking about the next generation, of another type of activism, which hopefully can reconcile all

³¹ Interview with Pamina Sebastião, 24/11/2020, via zoom.

³² Abbas and Sokari, *Queer African Reader*.

³³ The videos are now available on AIA's youtube channel. Much of the multi-media material produced by AIA relied on the volunteer work and technical expertise of allies and friends, most of whom drawn from the social networks of queer activists themselves.

the experiences we archived and recorded, and can continue to produce a narrative that preserves us. The archive was a place of navigating the past and the present, with an ideal for the future. But it was more than that: it was about us being able to say that we exist.³⁴



Cover to the Portuguese translation of the “African LGBTI Manifesto”, published by AIA as a pamphlet.

At the moment, advocacy and content creation remain two of the most critical areas for AIA’s activism. We hope that this very project will be amenable to activist appropriation, hopefully resulting in materials or initiatives that enhance queer visibility and help building a more robust queer memory in Luanda. In this case, the turn to history and the archive is not so much an exercise in finding evidence of a queer past that works to legitimize claims in the present, but more a self-reflexive gesture of locating oneself in a wider liberation project, a

³⁴ Interview with Pamina Sebastião, 24/11/2020, via zoom.

project that does not necessarily lends us authority based on what once was, but that points towards an utopic queer future. When asked about what are AIA's plans for the future, Líria replied as follows:

I see AIA in the future as an organization of reference: we will keep doing advocacy, working with state institutions, doing lobby inside (*the state*), as a way of changing the minds of the old men who are there (*in power*). In terms of content, we will continue producing content of materials relating to our lives, our everyday. And another thing is that we recognize that as Africans we need to create our own basis. As African women, we need to create our own history, our own dynamics. We are not homogenous, we are heterogenous. And even then, we are much stronger than what the world offers us, this Western, globalized, world. And this recognition, this reflection, ends up helping us think about what type of AIA we want in the future. Where we once were, where we are, where we want to go.³⁵

Since 2021, I have been collaborating with AIA and GALA in the making of an archival collection for Luanda. The project involved conducting oral history interviews with members of the LGBTIQ+ community as well as activists affiliated with several queer collectives. It also had an arts-based component, pursuing artistic collaboration as a tool to promote subaltern modes of knowledge production, which tend to be marginalised in a conventional academic setting. We have partnered with the Angolan feminist photographer Mwana Pwo, who was commissioned to produce portraits with some of the participants of the oral history project. This collaboration has resulted in the photo series *Identidade: Queer*, where Pwo asked her interlocutors how they would like to be seen without taboos or interdictions. If they had the power to decide what their ID photos would look like, how would they be? The participants were asked to engage objects that spoke to them, that voiced their identities, from hats and necklaces, belts and blouses, to flowers and rings. Some look into the camera, some commit the transgression of looking away or having their eyes closed, dreaming away. Some chose their best clothes, some removed them. All of them defy state practices of identification as standardisation and surveillance, and seek instead alternative visual dispositions and queer reimaginings. The series is, once more, an lived archived of contemporary queer struggle.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.



There's nothing wrong with being who you are. Nothing. There's a saying I learned when I was a child: "all is good, when nothing is good." It is all good. I am speaking to LGBT people in Africa, because we face horrible things, in our families. They bring people to speak about the past, to say that in the family there has never been a LGBT person, that our grandparents have never done anything like this... But that's a lie. Our grandparents did it, too. What's the most important, the first step, is for you to accept yourself, to respect yourself. I am like this, and that's it – Augusto.

Conclusion

The archival projects described here were grounded on a transnational collaboration with colleagues and partners from various locations in the Global South, but principally from Mozambique, South Africa, and Angola. At a time when national boundaries still hinder the possibilities of collaboration across linguistic spaces in Southern Africa, these projects stand out due to its fully bilingual nature. They also suggest that archives are not simply containers of information about a well delimited "past." Rather, the making of archival collections, as

much as the writing of silenced histories, are deeply political acts that speak to our present aspirations for historical recognition and societal and legal change. Perhaps more crucially, these projects also gesture to imaginations of a different future, and the possibility of queer, utopias. Here, the archive works as an invitation for thorough contextualization and radical re-imagination of the historical experiences – and the intimate historicity – of gendered and sexualized lives amidst societal and political change. In line with other initiatives in queer activism around the world, they have been designed to work as “archival interventions.”³⁶ In this sense, they reject the claims to epistemic authority of the official archive and blur the already tenuous lines between public and private history, while also interrogating the very means by which memories and archives are produced, silenced and reactivated in the midst of political struggles for LGBT rights, visibility and recognition.

³⁶ Sheffield, R. T. 2014. “The Bedside Table Archives: Archive Intervention and Lesbian Intimate Domestic Culture”. *Radical History Review*. 120, pp. 108-120.