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To cite this article: Nahil Zerón & Edith Romero (2025) Our Existence, Our Memory, NACLA Report on the Americas, 57:2, 186-193, DOI: [10.1080/10714839.2025.2508003](https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2025.2508003)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2025.2508003>



Published online: 03 Jun 2025.



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Our Existence, Our Memory

From Tegucigalpa to Buenos Aires and New Orleans, the Archivo Honduras Cuir preserves and celebrates trans and cuir life through memory, resistance, and transnational solidarity.

S eated in front of the camera, Abigail introduces herself and begins her story. It's January 11, 2025, in Tegucigalpa, and she is in the living room of Dany Barrientos, co-founder of Archivo Honduras Cuir. "My name is Abigail Galindo," she

says, staring intently at the camera. "I'm from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and I was born on December 1, 1970. I am a survivor of the transfemicides of the 1980s and 1990s."



"The Obelisk Park Clan." A group of friends take a photo together at the start of a night's work in Comayagüela, Tegucigalpa, circa 1995. From left: La Campero (living in Europe), Bessy Ferrera (victim of transfemicide), Abigail Galindo (co-founder of Archivo Honduras Cuir), and Michell (victim of transfemicide). (COURTESY OF AGIBAIL GALINDO AND THE ARCHIVO HONDURAS CUIR)

From the time of Abigail's birth, Honduras in the late 20th century was marked by a series of overlapping socio-political upheavals and regimes of control. In the 1970s, military juntas took power. The 1980s brought a supposed return to democracy, framed by the new Constitution of the Republic ratified in 1982, while the 1990s were characterized by the arrival of neoliberalism. Abigail's words as a survivor speak to these decades—years marked by evolving forms of violence and repression.

This interview with Abigail seeks to preserve, within our dissident Honduran memory, the origin story of Archivo Honduras Cuir, an initiative committed to renaming and reclaiming sex-gender dissident existences beyond the invisibilizing logics of official Honduran history. It also captures the powerful convergence of two dissident bodies, whose encounter marked a process of return to our *ombligo disidente*—our dissident core. As co-founders of the archive, this dialogue between Dany and Abigail recounts the creation of this collective space of memory, one that seeks to visibilize the struggles, communities, and lives of the cuir population in one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trans women.

The archive is a kaleidoscope of thousands of feelings, documents, personal photo collections, newspaper clippings, and multimedia materials that trace the cuir history of Honduras from the 1970s to the present. We deliberately use the word “cuir” instead of the English “queer” to describe the archive and the Honduran community of sexual dissidents. The term is itself a political declaration of autonomy that affirms self-definition and resists white North American forces that seek to define our communities in their terms.

History is shaped by those who tell it—and they decide who is named and who is erased. The Honduran state does not acknowledge Sigfrida Shantall, for instance, the first Honduran person to undergo gender affirming surgery, nor her historic battle for legal recognition as a woman. It also fails to account for the criminalization of Abigail, who was arrested in the 1990s under “sanitary” laws targeting sex workers,

or the many trans lives punished simply for being trans, for being cuir, for refusing to conform to social norms. Over the course of her life as a trans woman and sex worker, Abigail has been detained by the police 25 times.



A news clipping from *La Tribuna*, where Abigail appears as a victim of a police raid in Tegucigalpa. The text reflects demeaning and incorrect descriptions of trans sex workers and evidences state control through the requirement of “sanitary documentation,” November 14, 1997. (ARCHIVO HONDURAS CUIR)

In addition to collecting inanimate objects that preserve hidden histories, the archive is also living memory—like that of Abigail, who experienced firsthand the discrimination, fear, and impunity surrounding the murders of her trans friends. To name oneself a survivor of the transfemicides of the 1980s and 1990s is to honor the memory of the *compañeras* who did not survive. During those years, police raids operated under a hygienist logic imposed by the Honduran state—one that paved the way for a 21st century in which travesti-trans bodies were not meant to exist.

Convergence in a Territory of Survival

“My name is Dany Ernesto Barrientos Ramirez. I am 40 years old, born on October 23, 1984, in Comayagüela. My parents are refugees and survivors

of El Salvador's civil war. That's why I am Honduran, but my whole family is Salvadoran. I've always carried that dual sense of identity—feeling both Honduran and Salvadoran, like I'm somewhere in between.”

Dany's early life unfolded amid a sea of doubt and social conservatism, shaped by the decades of repression that Abigail managed to survive. His family, displaced by El Salvador's civil war, lived through the violence of an authoritarian, oligarchic government that deepened poverty and inequality and orchestrated the deaths of thousands of Salvadorans—especially those who resisted the fascist regime. The civil war was marked by brutal massacres of rural communities carried out by military forces with material and political support from the United States. This led to the forced displacement of thousands of Salvadorans, including Dany's family, to other parts of Central America.

Coming out of heteronormativity in a family marked by forced migration and war meant also recognizing the need to migrate away from the systems of oppression that shape our lives.

“I'm a gay man, openly gay, and a former Mormon,” Dany continues. “That was intense.” Coming out of heteronormativity in a family marked by forced migration and war meant also recognizing the need to migrate away from the systems of oppression that shape our lives. As Dany's story shows, those moments when we choose ourselves and move away from heterosexuality are acts that save our lives.

Dany and Abigail's stories, though distinct, unfold in the same territory—one where survival becomes the core thread stitching together our collective memories. Their first-person narratives help us understand the fragmented realities lived by sex-gender dissident people in Honduras. Between the denial imposed by a state that refuses to recognize us and our own

acts of self-naming at the margins, acts of resistance emerge—like Abigail's first defiant gesture against cishnormativity. “I've been an activist since I was 16,” Abigail recalls. “My first act of activism was walking out in public for the first time wearing feminine clothes that matched my gender. It was a way to make myself visible, to help society understand that we, as transgender women, exist in this country.”

At Archivo Honduras Cuir, we decided that May 27, 2022, would become a day of celebration: the day Abigail and Dany first met. It was an event that took place in the heart of Tegucigalpa, marking the emergence of countless sex-gender dissident memories capable of challenging the country's official historical narrative.

Abigail first heard about Dany through her friend La Paquita, a gender-nonconforming trans lawyer, who told her someone was interested in speaking with her. “His name was Dany Barrientos, and he

had asked for my number,” Abigail recalls, “because he was looking to talk to trans women over the age of 50. Here in Honduras, a trans woman over 50 is already considered elderly, because of the high rates of violence and murders we face.”

Time moves differently for bodies that exist outside of cisheteronormativity. As Dany reflects, “the lives of people from the diversity community, especially trans people, are incredibly fleeting and fast.” We break away from the linear mandate of oppression that categorizes us from birth, limits our growth, and conditions the terms of our death. As a result of systemic violence, trans women in Honduras rarely reach the age of 35. Yet our existences, shaped by survival, overflow existing sociocultural frameworks.

“Memory is a flame that also burns fast,” Dany adds, “but it carries the power to ignite political action.”

Abigail vividly recalls their first conversation: “He told me over the phone to bring some photographs... so I packed a few, the prettiest ones, I thought.

I brought about 132 photos,” she says. “Later, Dany went to Argentina, and I gave him the photographs.”

At the time, Abigail was undergoing a serious health crisis that resulted in the loss of one of her legs. Her survival felt uncertain—but she trusted Dany completely. She didn’t know it yet, but those 132 photographs would become the beginning of the first sex-dissident archive in Honduras, making Abigail our dissident guide in Honduran trans memory. Eventually, she would go on to donate hundreds more photos to Dany and the archive.



Photo of Escarcha with a friend at a get-together, circa 1996. (ARCHIVO HONDURAS CUIR)

That first meeting between Abigail and Dany sparked a spiral of memory and resistance—one that we are still part of today.

Memory that Transcends Nations

“I think that was the first act of magic they sent—the first sparkle that fell from the sky,” says Dany, remembering his trip to Argentina in 2022.

“Because [Buenos Aires] is a city of millions of people with millions of bars, and I happened to sit in one where there was a calendar from the Archivo de la Memoria Trans.” That serendipitous moment became Dany’s introduction to the team behind the Archivo de la Memoria Trans (Trans Memory Archive), a collection of over 15,000 documents that narrate, preserve, and honor Argentina’s collective trans memory. The archive traces Argentina’s trans history back to the early 20th century and has inspired other collective memory projects, including the Archivo Honduras Cuir.

A few months after Abigail and Dany met in Tegucigalpa, Dany met Luis Juárez in Buenos Aires. Dany showed Luis, who is also Honduran, a collection of over 500 photos taken by Abigail since she was 16 years old. “Luis went crazy when he saw the photos,” Dany recalls. “He told me, ‘You have to make this an archive. Sure, do whatever artistic work you want—but the documents must be preserved just as they are.’” Luis introduced Dany to the Archivo de la Memoria Trans and he immersed himself in the collection. The name Archivo Honduras Cuir was born in a café in Buenos Aires, the result of conversations and ideas shared between Dany and Luis—an act of diasporic creation far from the borders of Honduras. As Dany would say, the ancestors once again invoked their magic and guided the journey that would become the archive, weaving ties across Honduras, Argentina, and beyond.

From its beginnings, the archive has challenged the borders and states that seek to violate and dehumanize. Sparked by that first encounter between Dany and Abigail, the archive has traveled thousands of miles across lands scarred by colonization, militarization, and forced migration. With anchor points in Tegucigalpa, Buenos Aires, and eventually New Orleans in the United States, the archive connects Central American diasporas, reaffirms trans Honduran identities, and challenges the state-imposed invisibility of our existence. It also celebrates the sense of community, love, and care that has formed around it. As Abigail

says: “These people are part of my story. To me, memory is exactly that: recovering our history.”

The story of the archive is, at its heart, a story of friendship and care—like the deep bond between Dany and Abigail, forged while navigating debilitating health complications and the trauma of amputation. These relationships break through borders and challenge isolation, creating transnational connections between sexually dissident people that affirm life and build communities where it is possible to not only survive, but flourish. More than just a space for cuir and trans people in Central America, our dream is that the archive becomes a catalyst—inspiring the creation of many more archives by and for communities rendered invisible by the state.

“I want the archive to become a Central American space for sexual dissidence,” says Dany. “I hope it becomes the seedbed for many other archives—for Afro-descendant people, for Tawahka people, for

campesino communities—always from a place of sex and gender dissidence. And I hope this project can continue to walk without us after we’re gone.”

Through these connections, Archivo Honduras Cuir emerges as both a community proposal and a practice of liberation, rejecting hegemonic, colonial, and patriarchal norms. It began on the margins of Tegucigalpa, with a trans activist and sex worker who used her camera to capture her friendships, her community, and her life. The act of preserving, scanning, safeguarding, and sharing those images has also been a collective process, one shaped by the hands of many volunteers.

“For me, memory is a political act,” Dany affirms. “It’s about dethroning cuir memory, dethroning the hegemonic and the patriarchal. It’s refusing to ask permission to exist, and saying: We are here. This happened. And this is how we lived.”



The exhibition of Abigail's photos in New Orleans, October 19, 2024. (BEBEL DEMOURA NILO)

The Archive in New Orleans

Dany's words resonate not only with the cuir community in Honduras, but also with immigrant communities across the United States. They speak to thousands of people—among them trans Honduran women and migrants from many other countries—detained in immigration centers where they face unrelenting abuse for seeking a better life. In October 2024, the archive once again crossed borders, expanding its reach through an exhibition in New Orleans. The project arrived there thanks to a 2023 connection made through social media with Edith Romero, co-author of this article, a Honduran cuir activist and researcher based in New Orleans. Through this relationship, the archive wove a transnational support network and helped raise awareness about Honduras's cuir history in different corners of the world.

New Orleans was once a major port city tied to Honduras through the banana trade.

In New Orleans, we found a large Honduran community living under the threat of anti-immigrant laws in a state governed by racist and fascist policies. The southern U.S. state of Louisiana is a place where state violence is denied and where families are torn apart by an aggressive system of surveillance and policing known as ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Just like in Tegucigalpa, cuir communities in Louisiana face violence, discrimination, and impunity—for being sexual dissidents, for being immigrants, or both.

New Orleans was once a major port city tied to Honduras through the banana trade. The United Fruit Company (UFCo) established offices there during the banana boom between the 1930s and 1970s, shipping bananas harvested through the exploited labor of Honduran workers and Afro-Caribbean migrants and their descendants. These ships departed from

Honduras's northern coast and docked at the port of New Orleans. But UFCo wasn't just an extractive industry—it also received vast land concessions and customs exemptions through corrupt deals with Honduran government officials, establishing practices of corruption and imperialism that persist to this day.

The blood-stained money of the United Fruit Company now resides at Tulane University, part of the institution's endowment thanks to the banana magnate Sam Zemurray, who left his fortune to the university. In a way, the exhibition of the archive in New Orleans could be seen as one miniscule gesture of reparations in the face of the massive debt the UFCo owes to the Honduran people. The funds that made the trip, transport, lodging, and materials for the exhibition possible were obtained through a community service program at Tulane, in which Edith participated.

Today, New Orleans is home to the largest Honduran community outside of Honduras—a labor force that has helped rebuild the city time and again in the aftermath of devastating hurricanes. Among this community are Edith and Arely Westley Kafati, both immigrants. Arely, a Honduran trans woman, activist, and immigrant rights advocate in the United States,



Dany Barrientos, co-founder of Archivo Honduras Cuir; Arely Westley, a Honduran trans activist; Edith Romero, a Honduran cuir activist and researcher; and Gabriela Abigail Redondo, a Honduran trans activist from the Unidad Color Rosa Collective. (ARCHIVO HONDURAS CUIR)

became part of the growing network of connections woven by the archive. Her participation in the exhibition helped link the struggles of trans women in Honduras with those of Honduran trans women who migrate north—women who confront one of the most heavily militarized borders in the world, inhumane detention centers, and discrimination because of their gender identity.

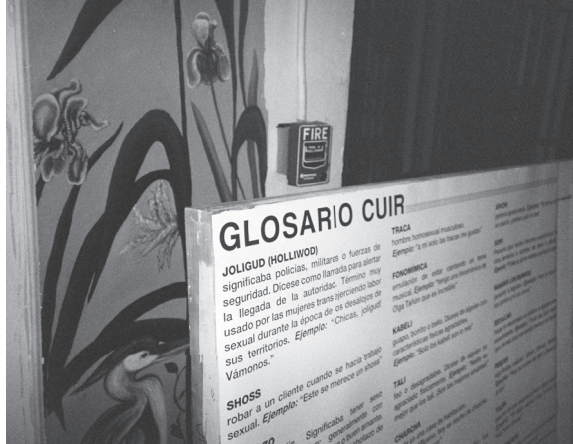
Arely was joined by Gabriela Abigail Redondo, a trans activist from the Unidad Color Rosa Collective in Honduras, as well as by Edith and Dany. Together, they stood in solidarity across borders, stitching together a memory work grounded in resistance, survival, and the shared demand for justice.

Memory in Movement

The exhibition in New Orleans brought the living memory of Abigail and her decades-long cuir friendships to the United States and into the consciousness of the Honduran diaspora. With over 40 photos, documents, and objects, the night of the exhibition offered a space for reflection on the histories that have been denied to us for decades: the struggle, sorrow, joy, and rage that shape cuir lives in Honduras. How many lives, struggles, and stories of courage and injustice has the Honduran state stolen from us?

The exhibition offered a bilingual tour—in Spanish and English—ensuring an accessible space for the Latin American diaspora. Among the images were snapshots of cuir parties and beauty pageants from the 1990s, spaces usually hidden away in Honduran cities, where the cuir community could feel safer expressing their identities and strengthen the LGBTQ+ movement that exists in Honduras today.

The archive brought to New Orleans a treasure for the Honduran and Latine diaspora: the treasure of presence, and the power to refute the invisibility imposed by Honduras's official history. It has amplified the voices and stories of trans women who helped build cuir resistance, like the fierce Alma Violeta, a stylist renowned in the 1970s for her talent, beauty, and unwavering insistence on her right to live with



The exhibition in New Orleans included a bilingual glossary of cuir terms, October 19, 2024. (BEBEL DEMOURA NILO)

dignity as a trans woman. In this way, the archive becomes a living source of knowledge production and countercultural resistance, fostering spaces for remembrance, preservation, recovery, celebration, and inspiration where new forms of collective memory can emerge.

"I never imagined that my photos would be seen like this, that people all over the world would come to know them," Abigail says about the hundreds of photos she took with her own hands. These are images that document her intimate life, her loves, her friends, her moments of bravery, and the sorrow that comes with remembering the many trans friends who didn't survive.

Living in one of the regions most affected by climate change, inequality, state violence, and imperialist intervention force sexual dissidents to move constantly.

Abigail reminds us that migration and displacement have always been tied to trans experiences and communities. Living in one of the regions most affected by climate change, inequality, state violence, and imperialist intervention force sexual dissidents to

move constantly. This reality is compounded by the militarization of borders and the dehumanization of immigrants in the United States. This migratory experience was documented in the exhibition by Sarcha Montes de Oca, a trans woman from rural Honduras who recorded her journey to the United States through photos, letters, and receipts. These testimonies shed light on the multiple layers of vulnerability, oppression, and resilience that trans migrants navigate.

“People in our community always live in places highly vulnerable to natural disasters. We get displaced, or we live in one place one month and the next month we’re somewhere else, and the photos get lost,” says Abigail. “Recovering testimonies—which are even more valuable in a broader sense—is part of the archive.” Abigail evokes not only the natural disasters that have ravaged Honduras but also the loss of memory objects and the economic precarity that follows.

New Orleans and Louisiana have also been treated as “sacrifice zones,” densely populated with oil refineries and plastic plants, industries that have led to some of the highest cancer rates in the country, especially among rural communities of color. Hurricanes and floods are also devastatingly common here, like Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Each time a hurricane strikes Honduras or Louisiana—intensified by accelerating climate change—cuir communities suffer deep losses: of life, homes, stability, and memory.

“The struggle never ends. It may shift focus, but it doesn’t end—and it never will,” Abigail reflects on the ongoing fight for rights and recognition. “We live in a country where the laws are unstable... One government might approve a gender identity law, and another might come along and take it away. So it will never truly end. How sad, isn’t it? To have to fight for what is rightfully ours, for the rights the government should be guaranteeing for all of us.”

A Historical Debt

The archive holds countless stories of trans lives and cuir resistance in Honduras across decades.

Yet one thread runs through every photograph, testimony, and object: a collective demand for justice. The Honduran state—alongside the imperial powers of the North—owes an immense debt to this community. The archive offers a place to begin to understand the scope and magnitude of that debt. It not only affirms that cuir and trans people have always existed in Honduras, but it also confronts the silencing, wounds, and historical erasures that must—and will—be addressed. The archive is a living, collective creation, one that grows with each new testimony, each act of care, each memory preserved by people like Abigail, Dany, and the countless volunteers who sustain the struggle to reclaim trans and cuir memory in Honduras.

Abigail, like thousands of trans women and cuir people, wields memory as a tool for resistance and justice: “I hope the testimonies we record and the photos we recover someday help launch a real process of historical reparation. And that people remember it all began with this crazy dream of ours, right? But may the government remember that it owes us a historical debt.” ■

Translated from Spanish by NACLA.

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Edith Romero is a Honduran poet, researcher, and activist who lives in New Orleans. Edith specializes in reproductive justice in Latin America and the United States, the struggle for immigrant rights, and the use of art as a catalyst for social change. Edith is part of *Unión Migrante* and *Eye On Surveillance*, two community organizations in New Orleans dedicated to immigrant rights and to building safe, non-carceral communities free from surveillance and criminalization.