

FOCUS

Shirley Carvalhêdo Franco (2014)

**Sobrevivendo ao mito da destruição total:
os arquivos da guerrilha do Araguaia**

Curitiba: Appris, 247 p.

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The dictatorship in Brazil lasted 21 years. Today, Brazilian people are trying to reconcile to their recent painful past, also by carrying out truth commission work. Franco's book is part of Brazilian studies on the civil-military dictatorship and its social consequences. It is about records and how they can be used to control, understand, and support operational actions in times of social conflict. Although records and documents are neither History nor memory, researchers use them as sources. But even so, official documents are not the only source available to understand a historical moment – they work like triggers to memory.

The scientific debate in which *Sobrevivendo ao mito da destruição total: os arquivos da guerrilha do Araguaia* is embedded can be represented by authors like Fruin, Feith and Muller (1898), Duchein (1977), Cook (1993) and Akçam (2012). The scientific debate in archival theory helps to understand archival principles, the

development of the ramification concept, and the role of documents in a society.

The book reviewed results from the author's PhD in Information Science at Universidade Federal de Brasília (UNB), in Brazil. Franco is also a teacher at the Information Science Department in the same university. The government and public institutions used to argue that the records about the Araguaia Guerrillas were already destroyed. This is what she calls the total destruction myth. Franco questions if it is possible to delete all of the records related to a certain traumatic event. In fact, she argues that the total destruction of records is impossible because of the complexity of governmental institutions.

The book is composed of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. It also provides recommendations for further studies in the same area, as well as a glossary. The introduction presents the research, explains the research

problem, and provides a bibliographical discussion about the references used to understand the problem. The introduction helps to understand Franco's research motivation: the difference between what the government claimed regarding the documents and its destruction, and what other researchers have found.

The first chapter presents the discussion about traditional archival principles in archival literature, such as fond and provenance, and their impact on the ramification concept. These classical principles are helpful to understand the principle of provenance nowadays and the relationships between ramification, records, memory, fond, and provenance. The chapter also presents definitions about records, which makes the concept of ramification possible. Fond is defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) as "the entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator"¹. Provenance is defined by the SAA as a fundamental principle of archives that refers to individuals, families, institutions or organizations that created or received the items in an archival collection. This principle predicts that records of different origins be kept separate to preserve their context.

The ramification ("ramificação", 65) notion refers to the misplacement of records belonging to a certain archive to another archive as the result of a transinstitutional and intrainstitutional network of records' production, reception, and sharing. This notion is useful to contextualize the assumption of total record destruction after a given historical event. Besides, Franco tries to understand the creation of documents and records as result of the Araguaia Guerrillas in the light of traditional archival principles. Adding an entirely new concept like this is not an attempt to forget or discard the traditional archival principles such as provenance or fond.

The second chapter explains the events around the Araguaia Guerrillas in a sociological context. The research tries to understand the stories behind the Araguaia Guerrilla records. Araguaia Guerrilla was a political movement that took place close to the Araguaia River during the Brazilian dictatorship. There is no information available about the Araguaia Guerilla movement's exact date of beginning or end. It is commonly claimed that all records have been lost. It is estimated that the guerrillas were active between the years of 1966 and 1975. The chapter presents the Brazilian legislation on confidential documents and access to information. Finally, the second chapter

1 Multilingual Archival Terminology: <http://www.ica.org/14282/multilingual-archival-terminology/multilingual-archival-terminology.html> (last access: 25/03/2016).

describes the political actions about the dictatorship memory, such as the program *Memórias Reveladas* (Uncovered Memories).

The third chapter presents a methodological proposal to map the collection related to the Araguaia Guerrillas. It also presents the institutions involved, their histories, and the documents' state of conservation. The methodological proposal consists in identifying studies about the guerrilla and looking for the documentary sources used in them. Afterwards, Franco shares the information for organization, comparing to the book cited as source. Then, the author starts to visit these institutions to identify the repression documents found in their collections. Franco also interviews these institutions' employees to help identify the documents and unfold the history of the collection.

Franco argues that dictatorships are recognized by the creation and abundance of records during their rule, followed by the prolific destruction of these as the dictatorship's hold on power comes to an end. It is the nature of bureaucratic institutions to produce and keep records. Thus, it is almost impossible to obliterate all of them because the repression archives are not only constituted by the documentation of repression institutions, but also by other bureaucratic structures used to support repressive activities. Records are unique in the context they are produced and there are reasons why institutions create and keep them.

Acknowledging that repression records not only consist of the documents produced by certain institutions can help to understand the social context around the production of these documents. Society is full of documentary practices and practices with documents – and both are inseparable from bureaucratic practice in dictatorships. Therefore, the repressive government's complex organization results in large-scale production of records. This increased document production foments record ramification.

The conclusion explains that the ramification notion cannot be mistaken by record dispersion – when records that belong to the same origin are scattered in different places and archival sources – and also that ramification does not mean multiple provenience – records created by different sources. Additionally, when ramification occurs, it does not mean that multiple provenance or parallel provenance also occurred. In the end, the author presents some research recommendations that try to encourage new researchers to explore the concepts she presented.

The research is informative in at least three ways. Firstly, it is a way to understand archive principles nowadays, as well as it provides a new concept to documentation studies: the ramification concept. Secondly, Franco's primary research into the Araguaia Guerilla movement will likely prove enlightening to other researchers pursuing the same

topic – she effectively paves the way for them by offering a mapping of institutions and collections regarding the Araguaia Guerrillas, as well as the civilian and/or military documentary practices of these institutions. Thirdly, it reveals the existence of this type of collection and therefore becomes an important way to preserve these records.

Besides, the book is meant to become an important study in archives research, improving archival theory. It also brings to light the perception that archives are part of the society and that they can reflect society's organization. *Sobrevivendo ao mito da destruição total: os arquivos da guerrilha do Araguaia* can help sociologists, historian or those who work in archives and seek to understand dictatorship in Brazil and Latin America. And it can help archivists to deal with this repression documentation. Franco's book is not a research about the dictatorship in Brazil or specifically about the Araguaia Guerrillas, but about how records are used in dictatorial regimes and how they can be used by society to later understand, accept and preserve their past.