

Memories of a historical Collection

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In this paper, we discuss the process of formation of a set of documents called Constituent Memory Collection, perceiving it as a strategic policy action to promote a democratic Brazil.

The Constituent Memory Collection is now deposited in the Republic Museum of Brazil and it gathers many documents produced during the reconstitutionalization process experienced in the country in the second half of 1980s, which resulted on the promulgation, on October 5, 1988, of the present Federal Constitution of Brazil.

At that time, the idea of democracy became more present in Brazil. The idea was ending up the dictatorship established in the country with the military coup of 1964 through the immediate convocation of a new National Constituent Assembly in Brazil. On this direction, many social proposals have assumed the defense of the broad participation of Brazilian citizens in redefining the political direction of the country.

About assigning value in organizing historical collections

The decision to constitute a document collection, investing and making sure that it will be accessible to future generations, assumes some understanding about what should be preserved as a "legacy" of the past to the present and the future. It also implies the intention to build a documentary heritage that is valued as a source of research and knowledge.

In recent decades, studies on the theme of memory and its relationship with history have been the subject of increasing investment among researchers from the areas of Humanities and Social Sciences. Within this broader theme, it gains strength the understanding that a documental collection can be understood as a work of memory

construction, among many others that can be built. Thus, attaching importance to a particular documentation is meaning it as something that should be known, remembered and studied, and, because of it, it is necessary to create ways to give it visibility and to ensure that it can be accessed through consulting and researching instruments.

It realizes that the formation of a historical collection can be a strategic memory action, which operates on what should be preserved and remembered, now and in the future (although the success of such strategies is never guaranteed), in the way to recognize that history and memory areas are constructions which take place in the dynamic field of social interactions, involving interest disputes.

Thus, those responsible for organizing the collections are recognized as subjects acting on them, interfering on their social function, as well as the authors of the documents and their researchers. Luciana Quillet Heymann (1997) discusses this issue when, for example, examines the complex processes of interference which may involve delimitation and organization of a file as documentary heritage. She believes that, at different times of the trajectory of a document, people decide whether it should be preserved or destroyed, and what should be highlighted within the collection, always from worries and attention that are not necessarily shared by all involved in each step formation and treatment of this collection. The understanding is that not only the collection formation but also the collection organization results from the adoption of a series of procedures for critical documents, which are procedures that create "doors and windows" for entries in the collection, which eventually suggest certain ways of approaching documentation. The definition of such procedures, which qualify the collection formation processes, and the treatment and preservation of collections, is determinative of the documentary action. Different criteria undertaken to organize a collection represent different ways of describing its content and of giving emphasis and degree of importance to the documents that it comprises.

Voluntarily or involuntarily, it is always proposed to the consultant to pay attention to this or that point of the collection, since the collection descriptions are ways of assigning meaning and value to it, which for example include references to certain characters, dates or events mentioned in the documents, or highlight the relevance of the documentation for the study of certain topics (while others are not mentioned).

Some aspects of the Constituent Memory Collection formation are exemplary in this regard, revealing that, in large measure, its final configuration reflects the choices of those responsible for their accumulation and organization, which is a work of memory.

How this set of documents has become a historical record? What are its goals? Where is it deposited? To pursue such issues can bring good 'clues' on the policy choices that supported the establishment of this collection, as well as their implications for the conformation of a historical memory.

The Constituent Memory Collection formation

The Constituent Memory Collection combines the Constituent Assembly documents produced between 1985 (the year of the official convocation of the Constituent National Assembly) and 1988 (the year of the promulgation of the current Constitution in Brazil).

These documents were produced and put together by two different instances of public administration in Brazil, both created during and because of the constitutional process, only to act on it: the Interim Commission for Constitutional Studies and the Pro-Memory Center of Constituent.

The Interim Commission for Constitutional Studies (CEC)

The creation of CEC occurred on July 18, 1985, by order of the Republic President José Sarney (1985-1990). Its goal was to prepare a "raw constitutional project" that would provide subsidy to the later work of the National Constituent Assembly when it was installed.

But the creation of this commission was also heavily criticized, mainly due to the fact that its members were appointed directly by the President. Some analysts said that this was a "vertical" measure and an intrusion of the President in the Constituent work.

In fact, people were afraid at the time that the production of this project would stay in the hands of an elite of specialists, therefore privileging the points of view of this elite. What was said was that the project that should guide the discussions in the Constituent Assembly had to come from a broad popular participation and not from an intellectual and political elite.

Among critics and defenders, the commission was created and, in practice – because or not of the criticism it received – it ended up adopting the principle of encouraging broad popular participation in its work. And in that direction, a series of public debates was organized, and many commission members went to television to invite the society to participate and to send them suggestions and comments about the Constituent.

On September 18, 1986, almost one year after the Commission was established, it concluded its raw project. But, in the opposite direction of what was expected, this project

was not a representative document of the political positions of the Federal Government in Brazil.

Moreover, the President decided not to send the document to the Constituent Assembly. According to some analysts, because the text advocated the adoption of parliamentarism in Brazil, and this proposition frustrated the president personally. But other authorities said that the project was not forwarded to the Assembly by the President because he decided to respect the idea that the discussions in the Assembly had to be made from suggestions of the whole population and not from the Commission.

In fact, even though the project was not sent to the Assembly by the President, it became well known and was a reference in the political debates at the time. It means that the Comission project reached the Assembly, not by the hands of the President, but it reached there anyway.

The Pro-Memory Constituent Center (CPMC)

The CPMC was linked to the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage in Brazil, which was created in 1937, with the mission to protect the cultural heritage of Brazil. Then, the Pro-Memory Center was created as part of actions to protect the Brazilian cultural heritage.

The CPMC was created in 1985, with the responsibilities of accumulating informational materials produced in the country on the debate of Constituent and creating ways for dialogues between the country's society and the National Assembly, encouraging public participation in the drafting of the new Constitution.

The Pro-Memory Center actually worked during the constituent process, for example, conducting interviews with political authorities and doing street interviews with the population on the issues discussed at the National Assembly. And it also organized a service of public access to the discussions that took place in the Constituent Assembly, creating a database of these discussions so that anybody interested could make inquiries or send messages to the constituents. It means that the Pro-Memory Center of the Constituent worked on organizing documents and also around the idea of stimulating the participation of society in the Constituent Assembly.

When the Constitution was promulgated, in 1988, the Pro-Memory Center had already gathered a large set of documents, which included documents produced in the work of the

Constituent Assembly and books, pictures, letters and posters of campaigns, cartoons, paintings by artists, videos and a lot more.

Moreover, in 1986 the Minister of Culture of Brazil, who was Celso Furtado, asked the president of Interim Commission for Constitutional Studies if all documents produced by this commission could be transferred to Pro-Memory Center. An agreement was made between these institutions and it established not only the transference to Pro-Memory Center, but also that after the promulgation of the new Constitution, the Pro-Memory Center should transfer all the documents to the Republic Museum.

It means that there was the intention to transfer all the documents accumulated by the Pro-Memory Center to the Republic Museum in this agreement.

It also means that the Pro-Memory Center was created provisionally during the constituent process, but it had a continuing purpose, which was to organize a collection of a museum institution. The Republic Museum should take care of these documents, preserving and creating the conditions for access and research so that they could be known and studied. And this documentation transfer was made to the Republic Museum in 1990, when the Pro-Memory Center was extinguished.

A memory of a democratic Brazil

In face of all that has been said, it is believable to say that the formation of this collection was an idea and a project that invested in the perpetuation of a particular memory and a particular political identity of Brazil. It was a project that involved the monumentalization of one narrative of the Brazilian democratic reconstitutionalization. The collection praises the democracy and denies an authoritarian Brazil.

It is an example that the formation of a collection can be an instrument of political struggle in the field of memory.

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