pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

ARTICLES

Researching archives, inhabiting the archive: the case of the book *Disorderly Families* [1] [2] [3]

Pesquisar arquivos, habitar o arquivo: o caso da obra A desordem das famílias

Aquino, Julio Groppa [(i)]

Vieira, Elisa [(ii)]

Val, Gisela Maria do [(iii)]

(i) Universidade de São Paulo – USP, Faculdade de Educação – FE, Departamento de Filosofia da Educação e Ciências da Educação, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7912-9303, groppaq@usp.br

(ii) Universidade de São Paulo – USP, Faculdade de Educação – FE, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6501-4484, elisa.vieira@alumni.usp.br

(iii) Universidade de São Paulo – USP, Faculdade de Educação – FE, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8004-0130, giselaval@alumni.usp.br

Abstract

Based on the premise that dealing with archives is a fertile and viable alternative for educational research, this article focuses on the book Disorderly Families, written by Michel Foucault and Arlette Farge, about a set of eighteenth century French royal letters/orders (lettres de cachet). Firstly, we focused the trajectories of both thinkers and the commonalities that culminated in that initiative. Thereafter, the empirical treatment of the study is detailed, with emphasis on the procedural and argumentative aspects of the analysis therein. Finally, we advocate for researching as a transfiguring encounter between the researcher and the unsuspected forces of the archive mobilized by him/her.

Keywords: Educational research, Archive, Michel Foucault, Arlette Farge

[1] Responsible editor: Pedro Angelo Pagni <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7505-4896>

[2] References correction and bibliographic normalization services: Elisa Vieira <elisa.vieira@alumni.usp.br>

[3] English version: Anthony Cleaver (Tikinet) <traducao@tikinet.com.br>

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Resumo
Baseado na premissa de que a lida com arquivos consiste em uma alternativa fecunda e viável para a pesquisa educacional, este artigo debruça-se sobre A desordem das famílias, obra de Michel Foucault e Arlette Farge em torno de um conjunto de cartas/ordens régias (lettres de cachet) do século XVIII francês. Primeiramente, são focalizadas as trajetórias de ambos os pensadores e os pontos comuns que culminaram naquela iniciativa. Em seguida, o tratamento empírico do estudo é pormenorizado, com ênfase nos aspectos procedimentais e argumentativos da análise ali realizada. Por fim, advoga-se em favor da pesquisa como um encontro transfigurador entre o/a pesquisador/a e as forças insuspeitas do arquivo mobilizado por ele/a.
Palavras-chave: *Pesquisa educacional, Arquivo, Michel Foucault, Arlette Farge*

Introduction

Aiming to explore the potential of dealing with archives in educational research, this paper engages in a reflection on the book *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, by Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault. Published in 1982, it is the only book by the thinker not yet translated into Portuguese. It is worth noting at the outset that its rare circulation among Brazilian researchers is surprising since, strictly speaking, it is supposedly the highlight of the project on *infamous lives*, as we will see.

Unlike other broader analytical forays by Foucault in terms of number of sources and time frame, the document collection of *Disorderly Families* is addressed in an exclusive manner, restricted to the period of three decades (1728 to 1758). A further particularity is the decision of the two researchers to reproduce in annexes the original documents: the *lettres de cachet*,[4] accompanied by manuscripts that made up related dossiers.

The book draws interest not only for being the only work which Foucault wrote in collaboration with another author, but above all for being an occasion marked by argumentative consistency that is as acute as it is unique. In our view, *Disorderly Families* stands out as a kind of

[4] Due to the specificity of the expression, we chose to keep it mostly in the original language throughout the text. An approximate translation would be: royally issued arrest warrants. The expression was translated in *The Punitive Society* (Foucault, 2015, p. 117) as "royal order" and in *History of Madness* as "royal letters" (Foucault, 2005, p. 48).

CC BY

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

distinctive guideline for archival investigative procedures – in both a Foucauldian perspective and other theoretical approaches that draw on documentary materials.

In order to precisely situate the significance of such a theoretical-methodological experience, our attention turns first to the meeting of the two authors.

The Farge-Foucault encounter

At the time of her association with Foucault, Farge was an outsider in French historiography, a field in which she would gradually gain prominence.

> My background is history of law, not history. . . I came into history with no affiliation, by equivalence. When you enter a certain field in this manner, it becomes a disadvantage. I had to earn my place step by step, to accept a kind of marginalization. (Farge, 2001, n.p., free translation).

Farge graduated from law school and later moved towards the field of history, under the guidance of Robert Mandrou, a historian who was part of the second generation of the *École des Annales*. It was while she was working on her doctoral thesis, entitled *Délinquence et criminalité: le vol d'aliments à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* and defended in 1974, that she first read French judicial manuscripts, which would thereafter define her work (Farge, 2016b). This is a unique identification, as Farge's recognition is not linked to a school of thought, but rather to a specific archive – the Bastille court records, located in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, in Paris – which denotes her intimate relationship with archival research of a specific kind.

It is no coincidence that when the research topic was suggested to her by her advisor, as she reports, what most pleased her was the opportunity to handle 18th-century archives, most of which had never even been opened (Farge, 2016b). To add to the pleasure, the researcher would discover there "an exceptional source, with it [the archive] one can interrogate history in aa different way" (Farge, 1998, p. 17, free translation).

Later, Farge became closer to Jacques Revel – then editor of the *Archives* collection at Éditions Julliard – and began the research *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*, which led to her joining the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS) as a researcher, consolidating her position in historiographical research (Farge, 2016b).

CC BY

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Better known among Brazilian researchers, Foucault's trajectory in the field of historiography was prior to Farge's, so that archive handling was already a distinctive mark of his thought when they collaborated in *Disorderly Families*. Foucault was aware of Farge's inaugural study before meeting her, as the historian's 1974 doctoral thesis is mentioned in *Discipline and Punish*, in 1975.[5]

In the first contact between them,[6] Foucault asked Farge to consider the possibility of publishing some of the *lettres de cachet* from the period studied by the researcher, stressing the intention of presenting them without any type of explicit analytical argumentation. In her words: "For the beauty of the text. For the beauty of the gesture. The philosopher places himself in a non-reflective position, he does not hesitate to show that he voluntarily allowed himself to be dominated by the aesthetics of a raw reading – offered to everyone" (Farge, 1986, p. 165, free translation). However, Foucault's initial intention was discouraged by Farge on the grounds that, precisely for being such beautiful texts, the *lettres* required intervention by the researchers (Farge, 1998).

Thus began the Farge-Foucault partnership, always guided by the archive, which provided them with themes, required editing, suggested successive compositions. Around this common point, the two developed work that incorporated many of the meanings involved in the concept of archive: physical archive, discourse archive, assembly archive. It guided them through neglected events, traces of ordinary lives, ways of existence forgotten in the piles of 18th-century papers.

During the research that resulted in *Disorderly Families*, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal was constantly visited. There, petitions, expressions of mourning, police recommendations and interrogations were copied by hand (Farge, 2016a), affording direct contact with the narrated dramas. At times, each one produced their own text, while at others, reading and writing were done together. Then came the editing, as the purpose was to write with the greatest possible precision, unraveling the arguments to meet the intellectual and aesthetic requirements of both.

The fury contained in the documents marked the beginning of the work: many lives, many sorrows, many misfortunes. Each chosen letter was read carefully, in a great effort to

[5] In two footnotes to *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault mentions Farge's research to corroborate his assertions about vagrancy and delinquency in the 18th century (Foucault, 1987, p. 109).

[6] Farge presents two versions of this fact: in some interviews (Farge, 1986, 1998, 2016b), she says that the first contact with him was by letter; on another occasion (Farge, 2016a), she says it was by phone.

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

combine the multitude of details. Lulled by those "poetic lives," Foucault and Farge achieved a powerful partnership: "I don't remember any disagreement, I remember dialogues in which the philosopher's agile, mischievous and, at times, hilarious intelligence made me eloquent" (Farge, 1986, p. 167, free translation). It is worth mentioning that there was also another potential point in common between them, related to Foucault's difficult relationship with most French historians at the time. In this sense, in inviting Farge to embark on a joint undertaking with him, he may have also considered the fact that the historian had not, so far, been fully integrated into the group of "official historians," in Foucault's words (2011).

In the documentary film *Foucault contre lui-même*, of 2015, Farge recalls her partner:

> I often saw him in the archives, though historians criticized him for not having researched and interpreted archival material. His interest in archives was greater than any other historian's. He used to say that when he read certain texts like *I, Pierre Rivière* or the ones we worked on together at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, he felt a physical vibration. A physical vibration is more than an emotion; it's when your body begins to move and be moved. Intellectuals are often described as cerebral beings, but he was literally shaken at times. (Farge, 2015, n.p.).

Therefore, *Disorderly Families* is the result of the association between two outsiders of classical French historiography, through research related to other ways of understanding history, the archive, and the role of the researcher. Regarding the specificities, for Foucault, research with the *lettres* was part of his studies on the arts of government in Western societies. In turn, Farge focused on the forms of existence prevalent among poor segments of the French population in the 18th century. Namely, at the time of the book, the researcher was concentrated on investigating the street as a key character in life experiences, from both a social and political perspective, addressing "the history of the socially disqualified, the poor, the popular classes and the invention of their unique ways of life" (Salomon, 2016, p. 12). Despite being distinct, the thematic approaches of the two authors complemented each other through the analytical exuberance materialized in that archive.

As already mentioned, what also drove them was the search for another form of writing history, one which broke down the barriers between disciplines, which combined form and content, which embodied the astonishment derived from the events that occurred. To this end, each word had to be precisely placed (Farge, 2016b) to reveal the normative practices and

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

veridictive mechanisms surrounding the lives contained in that archive, rather than revealing supposedly veiled contents and generalizing conclusions capable of imparting artificial linearity to the events in focus.

In what was, according to Farge (2016b), the only French criticism of the book at the time of its publication, the historian Emmanuel Todd (1982) argued that the two researchers minimized the excesses of absolutist power and its capacity to interfere in every detail of the subjects' lives. In this regard, such criticism seems to have derived from the pair's understanding that the *lettres de cachet* offered "the possibilities of seeing the concrete functioning of a power mechanism; not, of course, as the manifestation of an anonymous, oppressive, and mysterious 'Power', but as a complex web of relationships between multiple partners" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 347, free translation).

Elaborating on the thesis of the micropolitics of power, Foucault (2014b, p. 149) recalls in an interview given in the same year as the publication of *Disorderly Families*:

> A comprehensive system of traps, of threats, was established with spies, police officers, an entire little world was established very early on, from the 17th and 18th centuries. The dossiers in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal are very garrulous; workers, priests, soldiers, as well as members of the gentry were arrested.

In Farge and Foucault's research, the dead have a name, face, and occupation; they loved each other, hated each other, betrayed, stole, struggled to survive. Composing a history that bypasses great characters, they were unaccounted for in the narrative of events, only brought to light when intercepted by the rudimentary forms of a given justice. The attention afforded to those infamous characters laid bare, with no airbrushing, the practices of a time according to their characteristic and untransferable complexity.

The event-book

Despite the scarce mentions of *Disorderly Families* among Foucauldian researchers, in Brazil there is a reference source by Marlon Salomon on the above-mentioned book and, more specifically, on what he calls Foucault's archival-editorial gesture. Characterized by the "editing and publishing of archival texts and documents" (Salomon, 2019, p. 231), this gesture would

have covered the period from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, including excerpts he translated from the anonymous memorial of an English libertine (titled *My Secret Life*) and the autobiographies of Pierre Rivière and Herculine Barbin, as well as *Disorderly Families*: "probably the least read, cited and known book by Foucault" (Salomon, 2019, p 231).

In the period, another high point of the Foucauldian project concerning the inhabitants of the *lettres de cachet* is the text *The Lives of Infamous Men*, published in 1977. More widely referenced in the Brazilian literature on Foucault, this work is considered "a masterpiece" by Gilles Deleuze (2008, p. 135), whose reflection on Foucault's use of the term "infamous" is worth revisiting. Although Deleuze is not here referring to the book *Disorderly Families*, the argument he puts forth helps estimate the impact that that archive had on Foucault.

> He [the subject] is born and disappears in the medium of what is said, of what is seen. Foucault derives from this a very curious conception of "infamous man," a conception pervaded with discreet joy. . . the infamous man is not defined by excessive evil, but etymologically as a common man, any man, suddenly brought into the light by an everyday event, a complaint from neighbors, the presence of the police, a lawsuit... He is the man confronting Power, summoned to talk and reveal himself. (Deleuze, 2008, p. 134).

In the biography of Foucault by Didier Eribon (1990), in turn, a brief paragraph is dedicated to the book. Another biographer of the thinker, David Macey (1993), is more generous: four and a half pages. A detailed contextualization of the work is later offered by Philippe Artières (2014, p. 139): Foucault "copies word for word, line after line, several dozen official dossiers on A4 sheets. He also tries to make statistics based on several manuscripts, but these will completely disappear, so to speak, within the work."

It is worth recalling that Foucault's interest in *lettres de cachet* was longstanding. It was recorded a decade before the 1982 publication: in the course *The Punitive Society* and in the conferences in Rio de Janeiro, both in 1973. In the latter, Foucault stated:

> The *lettre de cachet* was not a law or a decree, but an order from the king concerning an individual person, obliging him to do something. One could even force someone to marry by a *lettre de cachet*. In most cases, however, it was an instrument of punishment. (Foucault, 2014a, p. 197).

According to Foucault, *lettres de cachet* therefore consisted of an order from the king addressed to a person, not a general law. It was a variable instrument of government, based on

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

exceptions (albeit an implied rule) rather than on a common logic that justified each decision. Thus, their documentation enabled access to individual cases and, at the same time, to a general dynamic that applied to such cases, denoting the absolute power of the king. Through them it was possible to issue different kinds of orders: punishments, dispossessions, obligations, etc. This is what Foucault (2014a, p. 198) defines as parajudicial practice: "a kind of counterpower, a power that came from below and that enabled groups, communities, families or individuals to exercise power over someone." (Foucault, 2014a, p. 198).

Elsewhere, Foucault (2010b, p. 134) offers an enlightening description of the operating mechanism of *lettres de cachet*.

> We found piles of these letters, which were written by public writers, at street corners. Requests by the shoemaker, or by the fishmonger, who wanted to get rid of her husband, her son, her uncle, her stepfather, etc., and who dictated her complaints to the public writer. Astonishing documents, because the public writer explained to his client the need to use this or that mandatory wording. So they would begin: "My Lord, I have the honor of prostrating myself at your feet to…" Then came, with the request, what "justified" it, in the complainant's vocabulary, with their demands, hatreds, rants, screams.

In the context of the mid-18th century, *lettres de cachet*, it should be noted, also served to further government business decisions. For the most part, however, royal letters/orders were requested by individuals to resolve private standoffs. Thus, it is within the context of the concrete relationships between *letters de cachet* and the public and private spheres that Foucault and Farge justify their interest in the material that makes up the research archive: "it seemed to us that these documents could afford interesting insights into the daily life of the working classes of Paris during the absolute monarchy – or at least for a certain period of the *Ancién Regime*" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 10, free translation).

Documents of this kind, previously explored by other researchers, were approached by the pair from a different perspective: "reading these dossiers revealed to us not so much royal anger, but rather the passions of common people, at the center of which were family relationships – husbands and wives, parents and children" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 10, free translation).

More specifically, the investigation featured in the work focused on dossiers related to requests for imprisonment by parents against their children, as well as by husbands or wives

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

against their spouses, revealing not only a merging of public and private spheres at that time of the French *Ancien Régime* but also a dispersion of power relations among its subjects, who were responsible for petitions in favor of an incipient idea of a new social order, from now on based on a disciplinary tone.

From beginning to end, the book *Disorderly Families* gives us access to a minimalist investigation, extremely parsimonious in its explanatory efforts. In fact, one may deduce that Foucault and Farge succeeded in creating conditions for the archive to triumph according to its own forms of effectuation. In the book's pages, the way in which the research sources are handled is at odds with a naturalizing apprehension of historical factuality. In this approach, the archive gains density by providing glimpses of exchanges between individual and collective lives.

If, on the one hand, the result of *Disorderly Families* is indeed parsimonious from a hermeneutic point of view, on the other, the research process involved seems to be marked at times by excessive description, such was the keenness not to waste any of the archive's wealth. That is what Farge suggests when she states that, "during the discussions I had with Michel Foucault about *Disorderly Families*, he was overcome with a kind of passion, he wanted to quote everything" (Farge, 2004, p. 147, free translation).

The archive is not therein an on-site witness of the relationships and events described in it, but the factual surface on which the virtual contours of such relationships and events are outlined. This is because the very existence of the *letters de cachet* as a possibility of recording those contingencies grants the experience a different materiality. One may say that, through the eyes of Foucault and Farge, the *lettres* take on the condition of a materialization of a historical surface without any kind of transcendence. They merely operate concretely in the domain of historical problematization (Foucault, 2004).

The success achieved by the two thinkers in producing "a publication with no commentary" (Farge, 1986, p. 164) perhaps helps explain the work's poor repercussion even among researchers linked to the theoretical perspective of the two authors. Indeed, *Disorderly Families* has no immediate conceptual operators to instruct and instrumentalize other research, nor does it offer any evident clues that could be transposed to other investigative issues. Strictly speaking, it is not very useful as a theoretical source of immediate metabolization and/or application. It is merely a gestural horizon, so to say. Let us revisit it and learn in more detail the file analyzed by the pair.

CC BY

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

The gesture before the archive

Although it can be said that the *lettres de cachet* constitute the main empirical source of *Disorderly Families*, it is worth stressing that they were accompanied by related documents, composing dossiers of the cases in question. In the words of Nancy Luxon (2016, p. 2, free translation), editor of the English-language version: "Each dossier offers a glimpse into a life at a crossroads – a life framed by the letter of indictment, the indignant responses from the social entourage of the accused, the laconic notes of the lieutenant general penned tersely in the margins." Thus, Farge and Foucault's reading is based on the *lettres* but is also supported by the reverberations found in the dossiers.

Divided into three sections, besides an introduction, the book focuses on two specific subjects in the first two sections – disagreements between couples and complaints involving parents and children – followed by a more comprehensive section on the circumstances in which one would address the king at the time in question. Although the sections are presented without distinction of authorship, Farge (2016b) later admitted that she was responsible for the section on marital discord and Foucault for the subsequent section.

> He (M. Foucault) soon told me he preferred to analyze parent-child relationships than couple relationships; feminism is on a high and he prefers to leave me in charge of working on male-female relations. . . And then we decided to write the introduction and conclusion together, then separately the chapters: "parents-children" and "women-men" (Farge, 2016b, p. 276).

Accompanying each of the two sections is the part of the archive that supported them, so that most of the original work is made up of the actual documents that were examined, showing the intention of research aimed at giving voice to the archive in and of itself. In line with this is the usually descriptive tone of the authors' writing. Nonetheless, the text does not shirk from revealing the analytical trail it followed. There is nothing random in the themes addressed or in the choice of characters that stand out among applicants and defendants, or in specific events reported in the petitions.

Regarding the first section of the text, requests concerning marital discord account for a third of the total number of family *lettres de cachet*, which are fewer in number than those regarding disagreements between parents and children. In the former case, we see how

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

negatively expected behaviors for family life at the time are described. Whether the facts narrated were true or not matters little to Farge-Foucault, since, at the surface, the appeals referred to "norms outside of which conjugal life is no longer possible" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 23, free translation).

The focus of the requests regarding couples was what was called "debauchery":

> "Debauchery," this is the word most frequently used, the one that appears most often on the public writers's quill, a keyword, an imprecise word, but one that seems to sum up all the faults of the world without ever taking the time to give them specific meaning, true content. (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 32, free translation).

These were cases of immorality, adultery, sodomy, drunkenness, squandering of property, among other attitudes considered anomalous, i.e., behavior that was unacceptable to the local community but not provided in criminal law. Complaints addressed to the king about misconduct occupied a void in the legal system and called for intervention in individual behavior, ways of living, sexual normativity, and relationships with authority. Social practices were reported from the viewpoint of deviation, especially excess, marking the contrast in relation to morality and order, the break with the regularity of an exemplary daily life desired at the time.

> In short, bad conduct can be characterized when someone pursuits things other than work, home or the family's economic livehood. They run to the tavern, come home only occasionally, she goes off with soldiers, he commits swindles or leaves his job too often, she debauches herself alongside disreputable women. These are many forms of excess that have in common the fact that they were committed outside the traditional geography of labor and family spaces (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 30, free translation).

The requests thus described a typology of debauchery, of irregular behavior organized from reports by the injured party and the approval of spectators close to the couples, as "there is no scandal without the gaze of others, and petitions were, in almost all cases, signed by neighbors, tenants or priests" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 36, free translation). Another common complaint among couples was "dissipation," generally referring to resistance to work and loss of goods, culminating in the sale of one's own bed: "'He has even sold his bed'; 'He has even sold his children's bed'; 'She has even taken my bed'. An essential, and singular piece

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

of furniture: even when you had nothing, you still had your bed" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 29, free translation).

An element worthy of note in Farge-Foucault's view is the presence of witnesses in the petitions – in general, neighbors, relatives, and clergy – constituting indispensable links in the requests addressed to the king: "the couple lived observed, followed, and accompanied by neighbors, whether they were residents of the same building or street vendors, neighborhood superintendents or parish priests. . . The request for imprisonment then became an act that was also undertaken by others" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 35-36, free translation). Connecting the public and private spheres, the witnesses were assigned the role of mediating power relations, marking the request for an intervention that met the needs of a given normality and restored the honor of the applicants.

Regarding the second section of the text, based on data on the age group – mainly concentrated in the range of 20 to 25 years old – of children who were the target of *lettres de cachet* by the initiative of their parents, a brief analysis is made about the critical phase represented by the relationships between them when the authority of parents to impose punishments or corrective measures is challenged.

> This period in which the children reach the age of twenty-five therefore represented a trying time for the family unit, the moment when the coexistence of generations became the greatest struggle, and when the problems that it posed – as well as the means to resolve them – can no longer fit exactly within the framework established by the family (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 158, free translation).

If the family scope was no longer sufficient to resolve conflicts internally, neither was the judicial machine the desired resource to do so: "it is heavy and slow; it is always expensive and often infamous" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 158, free translation). Hence, *lettres de cachet* are a viable alternative for the circumstance, in which "the authority of the family finds its support in the principle of monarchy" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 158, free translation). This makes it clear, from the perspective of Farge-Foucault, that this involved a certain transfer of authority from the private sphere to the public domain.

According to the authors, there were different reasons for wanting children to be imprisoned: "permanent expulsion – getting rid of the children and never hearing from them again – or complete reabsorption – willing for them to return, but repentant and meek. The

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

second solution is the one most often desired" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 165, free translation). Requests to send children to the Islands[7] illustrate the first case.

> They express the desire for a total and definitive break: nothing was known of the Islands; it was very difficult to send from there, practically no-one ever returned and, another advantage for the family, there was no pension to pay. . . Being sent to the Islands resonated deeply in the people's imagination: invisible but real, the Islands were a "non-place" where the mark of wrong done silently disappeared (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 166, free translation).

To a certain extent, scandal – or the fear of it – was a major element in the requests and one of the main reasons for parents to complain about their children, as in the marital petitions. The *lettres de cachet* allowed the scandal to be kept secret, without the exposure that other judicial procedures entailed.

Dishonor also appears as a common aspect to the poor, the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats. If there was a need to avoid or respond to scandal, petitions were also largely made in the name of honor: "It is surprising the insistence with which reasons of 'honor' are invoked in those documents, which exposes, in such detail, the small disorders of family life" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 168, free translation).

In that context, evoking honor was not a mere resource, as if it were an obvious element of all the cases mentioned in the letters. Rather, it consisted of precise wording through which families – especially parents – sought to validate their self-awareness before the state. Farge and Foucault suggest a possible parallelism between the meanings of honor and public order for families and the city's administration, respectively: "imprisonment is obtained at the intersection of these two requirements; the honor of families was thus recognized as a necessity of public order" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 170, free translation).

A "science of policing" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 345, free translation) began to emerge through reflection and the development of practices aimed at designing disciplinary responses to an urban space that was considered chaotic. As a contact surface between the behavior of individuals and state control, the police followed the movements of the population.

[7] According to an explanation in the US edition of *Disorderly Families*, sending criminals to the Islands seemed to be a way of reducing the crowds in Parisian prisons and hospitals. The mention usually refers to the islands in the French West Indies (La Désirade, Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Tortuga) (Farge & Foucault, 2016).

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

An operational triad was thus formed – sovereignty (power over territory), discipline (power over bodies) and security (power over the population) – with the police providing the link between the three spheres:

> political sovereignty was established at the most basic level of social relations; from subject to subject, between members of the same family, in relationships of neighborhood, of interest, of labor, in relationships of hatred, love or rivalry, it was possible to exploit – in addition to the traditional weapons of authority and obedience – the resources of "absolute" power, at least if one had understood how to harness them and inflect them in the desired direction. An entire political chain intertwined with the web of everyday life. (Farge & Foucault, 1982, pp. 346-347, free translation).

The police operated according to an interconnection of the public and the private, although family life did not exactly become public; it remained an intimate sphere, if it did not disturb public order. It was in situations of deviation from standards, honor, and good behavior that the family became subject to public interest and intervention. In such cases, the *lettres de cachet* "testify to this 'interlocking' of the family institution to the large administrative apparatus" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 347, free translation).

In his review of the book published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the Canadian academic Michael Ignatieff (1983, p. 409) considers:

> It was not enough for a husband to claim that his wife had run off with another man. In order to procure her confinement, he had to convince the King that she had become a whore and a public nuisance. The King's business was not with infidelities but with anything that could be construed as a threat to his civil order. Hence only "public" sexuality had a claim upon his attention.

Thus, if the police operated as a kind of hinge between the complaints of private life and state control, real power proved to be the pivot of the practice established by the *lettres de cachet*. This was underscored by Farge and Foucault in a descriptive movement that revealed a kind of two-way power relations at the time: on the one hand, requests for interference coming from actual subjects, calling for intervention in their family problems, since traditional legal means were time-consuming, expensive and very indiscreet, bringing infamy to the family; on the other, forceful actions, emanating from royal power, intervening in the details of family and individual life.

CC BY

> the tranquility of families was an important component in the maintenance of public order; and it was worthwhile for the king to use his supreme authority to guarantee it. Through it, the private and the public were joined together: it was the repressive act that ensured this union. (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 348, free translation).

Once again, the encounter between public and private was also offered as a response to requests for royal intervention, so that family secrets could be protected. The infamy would be protected by the royal seal, since "he [the king] is entrusted with a secret that only he could keep. An extraordinary path of confession: the secret goes to the king to ensure its concealment, just as the accused hides in his prison" (Foucault, 2012a, p. 244).

A connection was thus established between common day life and the royal figure, as only the latter was able to completely resolve disputes, applying punishment without incurring the burden of infamy brought about by common justice. In this case, during the time in which they were used, the *lettres de cachet* operated as a factual surface for many of the vectors that made up current ways of life: morality; honor; marital and family behavior; relations between public and private; the emergence of a specific behavior police; royal authority, etc. Consulted to compose the archive that supported *Disorderly Families*, they revealed the forces that inhabited them and that lasted until the moment they fell into decline.

> A day would come when maintaining the honor of families would seem insignificant and the destinies of people's domestic life too common, too vulgar, to be taken into serious consideration. At the same time, the site where the king's power was translated into arbitrariness day after day would seem necessary hateful rather than necessary (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 356, free translation).

It was thus, according to the authors, that the royal letters/orders fell into disuse among the subjects, who increasingly began to judge them as despotic (Foucault, 2012a). The disappearance of the practice, however, did not completely end the ways of thinking and living that materialized in it: "Prison, which will become the great punishment of the 19th century, has its origins precisely in this parajudicial practice of the *lettre de cachet*" (Foucault, 2014a, p. 199). For the thinker, the *lettres de cachet* gave way to other strategies of imprisonment, other modulations of punishment, a different governmental rationality.

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Inhabiting the archive: between the dust and the cloud

In the text *The Dust and The Cloud*, Foucault (2012b) responded to Jacques Léonard's criticism of *Discipline and Punish*, whose main arguments were based on the difference between the roles of the philosopher and the historian, as well as on the opposition made by the "dust of facts" to the "cloud of great vague ideas." In it, Foucault was accused of not paying attention to the former with the rigor that historiographical research effectively required. In his reply, the thinker detailed his own system of investigation, based precisely on reconciling the historian and the philosopher. Furthermore, he argued that there is a "procedural difference between the analysis of a problem and the study of a period" (Foucault, 2012b, p. 317), arguing that it was not always desirable to focus on comprehensively addressing the material from a given period. According to him, other rules were imposed on researchers focused on analyzing a problem (and not an actual period), such as the choice of material based on the problem raised. In short, an operation of balance and reconciliation between the "dust" and the "cloud," contrary to the argument that had served as a basis for Léonard's criticism.

One might say that *Disorderly Families* achieves such a reconciliation precisely, as Farge well describes when commenting – in a 1982 interview given alongside Foucault – on the pair's desire to "interconnect a world of archives and a world of ideas" (Foucault, 2012a, p. 242). In the first passage of the book they already refer to the assumption that supported such interconnection: "The idea that history is dedicated to the 'accuracy of archives' and philosophy to the architecture of ideas seems nonsense to us. That is not how we work" (Farge & Foucault, 1982, p. 9, free translation).

The clue provided there is key to understanding that, if, on the one hand, we are faced with a work whose pages are mostly taken up by revisiting the actual archive – which would imply that the archive speaks for itself, denoting a supposed accuracy of what is therein materialized – on the other, there is the intense and meticulous archiving work that gives it shape. In other words, under no circumstances does the archive emerge as a passive repository. Instead, in Farge's view (1986, p. 166, free translation), "the archive becomes the interlocutor, and everything is established around it."

In fact, this would be one of the features of the singularity of the Farge-Foucault meeting: the sagacity of a gesture that succeeds in giving voice to the archive due precisely to the way it reverberates the research problem investigated. That is why we propose that there is

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

an encounter between Farge, Foucault and the archive, with the last-mentioned playing a role alongside that of the two researchers; after all, it was the link between them, causing them awe and disturbance.

From this meeting resulted a unique work of research, pervaded by the incessant noises that emerged from the lives exposed in those previously isolated documents. It is dialogue polished by the voices of the dead, aiming to produce a historical-philosophical work of a different nature. We are here faced with a gesture intended not to elucidate the truths of the present by unveiling facts that occurred in the past, or to prescribe futures that might rewrite the past based on supposed regularities, but faithful to the ability to extract from past events what was unique to them.

From time to time, Foucault was asked to explain his way of working. For example, in a dialogue published in 1980, the thinker stated:

> I use the most traditional methods: demonstration or, at any rate, proof in historical matters, references to texts and authorities, and statements related to ideas and facts, a proposition of intelligibility schemes, of types of explanations. There's nothing original there. From that point of view, what I say in my books can be verified or invalidated by any other history book. (Foucault, 2010c, p. 293).

Later, in 1983, he again stated:

> What seems essential to me is respect for the reader. A work should tell and show how it is done. In this sense it should not only not be misleading, but also be positively useful. Every book draws around itself a virtual field of work that is, to a certain extent, responsible for what it makes possible or impossible. . . I dream of books that would be very clear about their own way of doing things, so that others could use them, but without trying to mix sources. Freedom of use and transparency are linked together (Foucault, 2010a, p. 367).

Foucault's concern with explaining his thought processes reveals not only a kind of unquestionable care with the sources he chose but also a noticeable responsibility towards the other end of the process: the readers. He aimed to show his way of doing things in the most unobtrusive manner possible, thus protecting the ethical foundation of intellectual work. In this sense, *Disorderly Families* is no exception; rather, it embodies it vehemently.

CC BY

pro·posições
e-ISSN 1980-6248
http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

As we aimed to argue in this paper, the investigative gesture of the 1982 book brings into play some procedures that materialize the potential, seen here, of dealing with archives in educational research. Namely: the creation of document series with specific time frames; the formulation of an investigative problem that guides the treatment of sources, enabling their assembly and reassembly; a minimalist immersion in the sources, committed not to their interpretation according to previously given conceptual criteria, but to the creation of spaces of resonance for the voices that inhabit the archive, therefore being open to encountering the new that might emerge from that. It is, therefore, about listening to the archive and giving voice to the threads that emanate from it.

By interconnecting such a horizon with educational research, we supposed that it would provide not the "revelation of certain universal themes lying harmlessly in the documents" (Aquino, 2019, p. 217), but the "power of estrangement and reinvention of one's own time" (Aquino & Val, 2018, p. 52), since the basic commitment of educational research, in our view, relates mainly to the "critical examination of the rationality inherent in everything we already do in the name of educating others" (Saraiva & Aquino, 2020, p. 300).

It is precisely for accurately materializing the unique archival approach of Farge and Foucault that *Disorderly Families* stands out as a guide for investigative work in educational research. It is concluded, therefore, that the act of research thus becomes a transfiguring encounter between the researcher and the unsuspected forces of the archive mobilized by him/her. It would all come down to being alert to the dust, to the cloud and the insistent murmur between them.

References

Aquino, J. G. (2019). O arquivo e a pesquisa educacional: aproximações. In A. Butturi Junior et al. (Orgs.). *Foucault e as práticas de liberdade II: topologias políticas e heterotopologias* (pp. 207-226). Campinas, SP: Pontes Editores.

Aquino, J. G., & Val, G. M. (2018). Uma ideia de arquivo: contributos para a pesquisa educacional. *Pedagogia y Saberes*, *49*, 41-53.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Artières, P. (2014). A exatidão do arquivo. In P. Artières, J-F. Bert, F. Gros, & J. Ravel. *Michel Foucault* (pp. 137-141). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense.

Deleuze, G. (2008). *Conversações*. São Paulo, SP: Editora 34.

Eribon, D. (1990). *Michel Foucault, 1926-1984*. São Paulo, SP: Companhia das Letras.

Farge, A. (1986). *Travailler avec Michel Foucault*. *Le Débat*, *41*, 164-167.

Farge, A. (1998). Historiadora: con qué objeto y con qué objetos – una entrevista con Arlette Farge. [Entrevista concedida a Elisa Cárdenas; Veronique Hebrard]. *Espiral, Estudios sobre Estado y Sociedad*, *5*(3), 15-33.

Farge, A. (2001). Le siècle mineur: entretien avec Arlette Farge [Entrevista concedida a Stany Grelet e Philippe Mangeot]. *Vacarme*, *15*, n.p.

Farge, A. (2004). Entretien avec Arlette Farge: Propos recueillis par Sylvain Parent. *Tracés: Revue de Sciences Humain*, *5*, 143-148.

Farge, A. (2015). On the perception of intolerable. In F. Caillat, et al. *Foucault against himself*. Vancouver, CA: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Farge, A. (2016a). After words to the English edition. In A. Farge, & M. Foucault. *Disorderly families: infamous letters from the Bastille archives* (pp. 267-273). Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press.

Farge, A. (2016b). Arlette Farge, a trajetória de uma historiadora. [Entrevista concedida a Laurent Vidal]. *Interfaces da Educação*, *7*(21), 271-295.

Farge, A., & Foucault, M. (1982). *Le désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des archives de la Bastille au XVIII siècle*. Paris, FR: Gallimard.

Farge, A., & Foucault, M. (2016). *Disorderly families: infamous letters from the Bastille archives*. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press.

Foucault, M. (1987). *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão*. 20. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes.

Foucault, M. (2004). Polêmica, política e problematizações. In M. Foucault. *Ética, sexualidade, política* (pp. 225-233, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. V). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2005). *História da Loucura na Idade Clássica*. 8. ed. São Paulo, SP: Perspectiva.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Foucault, M. (2010a). A propósito daqueles que fazem a história. In M. Foucault. *Repensar a política* (pp. 365-368, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. VI). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2010b). Confinamento, Psiquiatria, Prisão. In M. Foucault. *Repensar a política.* (pp. 126-154, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. VI). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2010c). Conversa com Michel Foucault. In M. Foucault. *Repensar a política* (pp. 289-347, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. VI). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2011). O estilo da história. In M. Foucault. *Arte, epistemologia, filosofia e história da medicina* (pp. 252-258, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. VII). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2012a) A idade de ouro das *lettres de cachet*. In M. Foucault. *Segurança, penalidade e prisão* (pp, 242-244, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. VIII). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2012b). A poeira e a nuvem. In M. Foucault. *Estratégia, poder-saber* (pp. 316-327, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. IV). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2012c). A vida dos homens infames. In M. Foucault. *Estratégia, poder-saber* (pp. 199-217, Coleção Ditos e escritos, v. IV). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2014a). A verdade e as formas jurídicas. In M. Foucault. *Filosofia, diagnóstico do presente e verdade* (pp. 130-244, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. X). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2014b). Entrevista com M. Foucault. In M. Foucault. *Genealogia da ética, subjetividade e sexualidade* (pp. 141-151, Coleção Ditos e Escritos, v. IX). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Forense Universitária.

Foucault, M. (2015) *A sociedade punitiva: curso no Collège de France* (1972-1973). São Paulo, SP: Editora WMF Martins Fontes.

Ignatieff, M. (1983, April 22nd). At the feet of the Father. *The Times Literary Supplement*, p. 490.

Luxon, N. (2016). Editor's Introduction. In A. Farge, & M. Foucault. *Disorderly families: infamous letters from the Bastille archives* (pp. 1-16). Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0070EN

Macey, D. (1993). *The lives of Michel Foucault*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Salomon, M. (2019). "Isso não é um livro de história": Michel Foucault e a publicação de documentos de arquivos. *Topoi*, *20*(40), 229-252.

Saraiva, K., & Aquino, J. G. (2020). Os paradoxos da forma escolar na contemporaneidade. *Reflexão e Ação*, *28*, 293-303.

Todd, E. (1982, November 5th). Ce que révèlent le lettres de cachet. *Le Monde*, p. 17.

Submission data:

Submitted for evaluation on August 24, 2022, approved for publication on January 24, 2023.

Corresponding author:

Aquino, Julio Groppa: *Faculdade de Educação da USP, Avenida da Universidade, 308, São Paulo, SP, Brasil. 05508-900.*

Author contributions:

Aquino, Julio Groppa: *Conceptualization (Equal), Data curation (Equal), Formal analysis (Equal), Investigation (Equal), Methodology (Equal), Supervision (Equal), Writing - original draft (Equal), Writing - review and editing (Equal).*

Vieira, Elisa: *Conceptualization (Equal), Data curation (Equal), Formal analysis (Equal), Investigation (Equal), Methodology (Equal), Writing - original draft (Equal), Writing - review and editing (Equal).*

Val, Gisela Maria do: *Conceptualization (Equal), Data curation (Equal), Formal analysis (Equal), Investigation (Equal), Methodology (Equal), Writing - original draft (Equal), Writing - review and editing (Equal).*