

Concerning the artifices practiced in *documenting the documentation:* on writing, testifying and learning to file

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Abstract

This article aims to shed light on the formal and official paths through which researchers seek to obtain authorisation to conduct our research, particularly in state offices. Thus, I begin from the conviction that letters, certificates, academic transcripts, and research projects, together with their subsequent circulation within various sectors at the *Instituto Médico Legal* [Medical Examiner's Office], São Paulo, Brazil, are excellent sites of analysis precisely because they reveal the different management and government strategies put into operation both by researchers and by those who, as designated authorities, form the employees of these bodies. Artifices made of paper that, on the one hand, forge and convey an idea and an image that is projected and recurrently reaffirmed of what the state is. While on the other, they enable us to provide ethnographic nuances to the 'common condition of state subjects' in which all of us are immersed, by force or desire.

Key words: documents, state bodies, authorization, ethnography

Das artimanhas pelas quais se *documenta a documentação:* sobre escrever, dar fé e aprender a protocolar

Resumo

Este artigo pretende lançar luz aos caminhos formais e oficiais pelos quais nós, pesquisadores, procuramos conseguir autorização para a realização de nossas pesquisas, sobretudo, em repartições estatais. Assim, parto da convicção de que cartas, certificados, históricos escolares e projetos de pesquisa, bem como sua subsequente circulação junto a diversos setores no Instituto Médico Legal (IML), São Paulo, Brasil, são excelentes lócus de análise exatamente por revelarem as diferentes estratégias de gestão e governo colocadas em operação tanto por nós pesquisadores quanto por aqueles que, como autoridades designadas, ocupam os quadros destas instâncias. Artimanhas feitas papel que, de um lado, veiculam e forjam uma ideia e uma imagem a ser projetada e recorrentemente reafirmada do que é o Estado. E, de outro lado, nos permitem dar nuances etnográficas à “condição comum de sujeitos de Estado” a que todos nós, por força ou desejo, estamos imersos.

Palavras-chave: documentos, instâncias estatais, autorização, etnografia

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Introduction

And anyway, the secret is not as important as the paths that led me to it. Each person has to walk those paths himself. (Borges 1999: 334-335)²

This article aims to reflect on the formal and official strategies through which I sought to obtain authorisation to conduct my doctoral research at the *Instituto Médico Legal* (IML) [Medical Examiner's Office] in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil³. Less than an article on research methodology or focused on the misfortunes to which researchers are subject during their research on social sciences and anthropology, this reflection is oriented towards my own *documentation* techniques, highlighting the effect of certain choices in the process of doing significant paperwork. This paperwork is organised into two stacks of papers, including copies of my enrolment certificate, my academic record, a presentation of my research and a formal request for access to the files and work routine of the Campinas IML⁴. The IML is an autonomous branch of the São Paulo police, called the *Polícia Científica* [lit. Scientific Police], which, together with the *Instituto de Criminalística* [Forensic Institute], responds to its own Superintendency, directly subordinate to the *Secretaria de Segurança Pública* [Department of Public Safety] of the State of São Paulo⁵.

When paying attention to what I call *documenting the documentation*, I follow not only terms and symbols, but also techniques incorporated in this process and through which, using different means, researchers believe they know in advance how to request access, from whom, and through which narrative formulas this must be achieved. Moreover, how this should be done when the research assumes so-called state bodies, organs or agencies, such as the IML, as the object of reflection. A type of knowledge concerning how to request

1 Funding from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (FAPESP), research grants no. 2018/26728-4 and 2013/22349-5.

2 In the original, the poem reads: 'El secreto, por lo demás, no vale lo que valen los caminos que me condujeron a él. Esos caminos hay que andarlos'. This heading evokes the presentation of Maria Gabriela Lugones in the *Seminário Etnografando Elites, Redes e Dispositivos de Poder: experiências de pesquisa, reflexões metodológicas e questões ético-políticas* [Seminar on Ethnographing Elites, Networks and Devices of Power: research experiences, methodological reflections and ethical-political issues], held in November 2012, in Rio de Janeiro. Her voice narrating the text by Jorge Luis Borges remains very much alive and echoes in my thoughts, see Lugones (2014).

3 It is important to clarify that, in early 2014, when the research on my doctorate began, it was not mandatory that the same document be endorsed by any ethics commission, nor that my project was forwarded to the *Plataforma Brasil*. I understand that these requirements, mandatory for the current scenario, are complex and, even provide new contours to discussion that I seek to achieve in this article. This is because researchers are currently advised (or instructed) to go through ethics committees at their respective universities. Some are prohibited from providing details concerning their research before a document signed by an authority regularises their work proposal. Others, in turn, are prevented from defending their theses and dissertations publicly or from publishing their scientific discoveries, in the event that they do not have a document that legally supports research conducted in state, private and/or public institutions. For more on this theme see: Fleischer & Schuch (2010); Sarti & Duarte (2013); and Santos & Jeolás (2015).

4 The first of these documentary compendiums was delivered to the care of the director of the city's Medical Examiner's Office. These documents travelled through various sectors within the IML administration until they reached the *Comissão Científica* [Scientific Commission]. The second of them, I filed directly with the Scientific Commission based in the city of São Paulo. These different forwarding routes are analysed throughout the article.

5 Based on scientific-technical prerogatives, the IML's function is to perform a variety of examinations for expert purposes: examinations of living people, corpses, bones, and numerous laboratory analyses. These so-called scientific and technical analyses are essential to obtain conclusive material evidence in the most diverse cases, including rapes, homicides, suicides, accidents, and so on. In the same technical-scientific theme, the Forensic Institute is responsible for producing criminal evidence; however, this evidence is collected while investigating the crime scene and objects collected for this purpose, such as clothing, personal belongings, sheets, projectiles, weapons, and so on. These two pieces of forensic evidence are called technical-scientific evidence for criminal purposes.

access that is embodied both through our daily practices as citizens and our perceptions as researchers of investigations conducted in and about state bodies⁶. Namely, the inescapable intuition that – faced with a corporation previously delimited by means of an address, a building and its staff, with hierarchies and precise work rules – the research will be fated in advance to reiterate the official contours that produce institutions as institutions and the ‘counter’ as a simultaneous point of access and retention (Lugones 2012).

In order to recompose the threads that interlace actions, beliefs and machinations, in addition to this introduction, this article is divided into two sections and a conclusion that should be read as inseparable and articulated parts. A dialogue with the epigraph by Jorge Luís Borges (1999) is inevitable. As the poet suggests, it is a matter of recomposing ‘the paths taken’ in order to unravel the effects (projected and recurrently reaffirmed) that *documenting the documentation* and recording it correctly have among those who *request access*, as was my case, together with those who, like the IML, can *grant* or *deny access* to their routine work⁷.

Thus, in the first section, I seek to show the ways in which *documenting the documentation* is carried out and how this act of recording sustains, conveys, propagates and/or extends the ‘presence of the state in our societies’ (Lugones 2014). To this end, I use the expression *documentation* as a means of denoting a set of techniques through which a varied number of documents can be managed and organised (Buckland 1997). Related to this idea, I also think of documents and the act of *documenting the documentation* as a type of physical evidence, the background of which alludes to characteristics of bureaucracy in the modern state described by Max Weber (1946). I also expound an unusual similarity between the ways in which we communicate with state bodies in order to research them and the procedures performed by these same ‘bureaus’⁸ in their daily activities. It all begins and ends with merely, and above all, paper (Ferreira 2013).

In the second section, in possession of the *documentation* that you learn to *document*, I recompose my zeal and care in forwarding these papers to the correct places, in order to guarantee (at least in belief) their adequate circulation and, naturally, their *approval*. Here, I try to bring together different management and governing strategies put into operation by state departments: techniques of assisting and waiting, of doing without doing or of doing for some and not for others. Paper artifices that, concomitantly, ‘harass, torment, or facilitate the life of the individual in modern society’ (Peirano 2002).

Finally, I return to these practices of *documenting the documentation*, with the aim of refuting certain anthropological imaginations that relegate the practices of *requesting access* as a prelude to research, which indeed seem important and will only be carried out *a posteriori*. I argue that more than anecdotal elements or mere methodological debates, *documenting the documentation* and *forwarding it* correctly are crucial elements for those who are concerned with the ethnography of governance technologies (Foucault 2009) and gestation and management practices undertaken by state bodies (Souza Lima 2002).

6 As citizens, we share the belief that documents are central to both facilitating and formalising relationships; however, as researchers and participants in networks of researchers whose studies are conducted in different state bodies, we are informed beforehand of the impediments and requests for access that we will be involved in.

7 For reasons of choice, I will not pay much attention to the dimension of the implicit secret, also present in the short story by Jorge Luís Borges (1999) that I used as an epigraph. I understand the idea of ‘the world of official secrets’ (Abrams 2006: 114) not as something that is hidden, but rather as techniques that encourage us to see certain information, terms, relationships and functions of the institution. Thus, I understand that the strategies and impediments to access to rooms, files and staff dictate the terms of knowledge through which the mechanics of power proliferate and illuminate the many ‘checkpoints’ (Jeganathan 2004) imposed on the victims, the accused, researchers and citizens. For a more detailed analysis, see Nadai (2018).

8 I follow the formulation provided by Weber (1946) for the term ‘bureau’. The author affirms that an office constitutes the reunion of a ‘body of officials actively engaged in a ‘public’ office, along with respective apparatus of material implements and the files’ (Weber 1946: 197).

Words, insignias and acts of faith or how you *document the documentation*?

(...)

Carlos, há uma máquina
Que nunca escreve cartas;
Há uma garrafa de tinta
Que nunca bebeu álcool.

E os arquivos, Carlos,
As caixas de papéis:
Túmulos para todos
Os tamanhos de meu corpo
(...)
(Melo Neto 1996: 60)⁹

The heading is repeated numerous times. Under the decal of the Campinas State University (UNICAMP) insignia, the titles 'UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS / INSTITUTO DE FILOSOFIA E CIENCIAS HUMANAS / PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM CIENCIAS SOCIAIS' [Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH) / Post-graduate Programme in Social Sciences] reinforce the links between these bodies and the papers I produced and accumulated over a few weeks. Through the repeated suitability attested by the personal and institutional documents gathered in my blue folder, I begin to weave myself a *documentation* procedure. To this end, a pile of paper was written and intentionally ordered by me: first, a cover letter, followed by a request for access to the institutional files of the IML and other annexes proving my academic performance. Among these, my enrolment certificate and my academic transcript, both provided by the *Diretoria Acadêmica* [Academic Board]¹⁰.

Forms of documenting that, through the act of writing, distinguished not only my research interests and my academic curriculum, but sources of research funding – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) – and the name and surname of my supervisor – Dr. [Supervisor Name]. The successful and appropriate completion of another piece of research conducted by me on the archives and the daily work of the Campinas *Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher* (DDM) [Women's Police Station] – a police body, much like the IML – completed the institutional and academic guarantees gathered by me. In a cover letter, under the words 'the research aims to continue the studies initiated in my Master's research', I introduced the interests and objectives of my doctoral project to the authority of the IML. In my terms, the research is interested in understanding 'from an anthropological perspective [...] how material evidence is produced in cases of rape at the *Núcleo Técnico de Perícias Médico Legal* [Centre for Legal Medical Expertise], at the Campinas Medical Examiner's Office – SP' (Research presentation letter, March 2014).

Similar to processes conducted by academic selection boards and research funding agencies, the research project is assessed and qualified in this institution – the IML. Only this time with the aim of granting or denying a request:

permission to conduct research among expert reports, especially forensic reports involving cases of rape and sexual assault, between the years 2003 and 2006. We also request authorisation to observe the daily work

⁹ The following is a free translation of part of the poem '*Difícil ser Funcionário*' [Difficult to be an Employee] by Melo Neto (1996): Carlos, there is a machine / That never writes letters; / There is a bottle of ink / That has never drunk alcohol. / And the files, Carlos, / The boxes of papers: / Tombs for all / The sizes of my body.

¹⁰ As I indicate in the Introduction, in addition to the documents presented above, a second pile of papers was created during the months in which I sought to begin my doctoral research. These papers include certificates of confidentiality regarding the data collected and declarations that the IML would be expressly cited in publications, oral presentations, posters, and so on.

of the Campinas Medical Examiner's Office, following the work of experts and medical examiners in cases involving crimes of rape and the rape of vulnerable persons.¹¹ (Research request letter, April 2014)

In these interactions plotted using letterheads with the UNICAMP insignia, references to the CNPq and the FAPESP, and the identification documents of students and supervisors, I also used the code of ethics defined by the *Associação Brasileira de Antropologia* (ABA) [Brazilian Anthropology Association]¹². The following citation was included:

[I] certify that I will protect the privacy of all professionals participating in the research, as well as records that identify confidential documents and procedures of the institution. (Research request letter, April 2014)

Thus, the detailed *documentation*, written presupposing the ethical expedients that had to be fulfilled, was more than certificates and requests for access; it was also a reflection of something indelible and quite subtle: my own research trajectory with the Campinas DDM and the obstacles I encountered in completing the fieldwork conducted at this institution. At the time I had introduced myself to this police force with a simple letter of introduction, signed by my supervisor and myself. The document contained a generic description of the research that I wanted to conduct within the police force, located in the central region of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil. With no bureaucratic obstacles, the chief officer authorised the research. Sometime later, other forms of restrictions began to permeate my coexistence at the DDM. These situations would culminate in difficult emotional negotiations in the final months of the research: clarifications concerning the research conducted, what documents were seen and analysed, how observation was conducted, and what the purpose of the interviews conducted with the staff was, sometimes without the presence of a recorder (Nadai 2012).

Since authorisations were granted prior to interactions with the staff, these lacked documents that attested to and served as material and official evidence for the agreements, and the terms associated with them. Thus, instead of formal agreements, which had circulated through all the higher levels of the police force of the State of São Paulo and at least supported the intended research, I found myself entangled with other demands that coexistence with the DDM gave way to. Specifically, the desire for 'loyalty' demanded by the chief officer of that particular police station in response to my request to attend the office of one of the clerks on the days in which she held interviews with victims and perpetrators involved in cases of rape and sexual assault. The demand made of me, in the main corridor of the DDM and which resonated throughout every room in the building, represented one of the most embarrassing moments of my research at that time. According to her advice, I could participate as long as I was 'loyal' to the trust she placed in me and my work. Her informal authorisation, which had been granted in words only during the first few months of my Master's research, enabled me to be at the police station every week. However, it did not precisely express the parameters of my stay. Given this, at least in my *a posteriori* imaginings, research at the DDM lacked clearly established specifications that could be reported because they were attested, registered and signed by both parties¹³.

Faced with this experience, a diffuse idea of 'loyalty' began to serve me as a kind of point of reference, and, above all, as a logical response to the need to put everything on paper that I imagined to be important both for approval and for conducting the research, which I would later carry out inside the IML. Evoking the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (1996) in the epigraph that opens this section, the 'paper boxes' preserved in the 'archives' were 'tombs'. They should only be 'opened' if moral/ethical conduct is taken into consideration.

11 In the Brazilian Penal Code, the rape of vulnerable persons includes the rape of minors, persons with illnesses, physical and mental disabilities, and/or those under the influence of drugs or alcohol who are unable to consent consciously and assertively.

12 Even though the research was academically linked to the *Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais* [Post-graduate Programme in Social Sciences], in the field of gender studies, its ethnographic and anthropological references were always highlighted, even in my doctoral selection. This explains my choice to cite the code of ethics defined by the Brazilian Anthropology Association created during the 1986-1988 administration and later changed during the 2011-2012 administration.

13 For a more accurate analysis of the place occupied by the term loyalty in the context of the work of police corporations, see Renoldi, 2011. For an analysis of the meanings that *loyalty* came to assume in my research with the Women's Police Station, see Nadai (2012); (2018).

Without doubt, I should demonstrate ‘loyalty’ (and demanded as much of myself) before even participating in the daily work of these professionals, now based not in the police force itself, but in another of its branches: the *Polícia Técnica-Científica* [Forensic Investigators] of São Paulo, Brazil.

Thus, under the label of ethics, I imagined that access to the institution, its work routine, its staff and the documentation stored in its archives, was entangled in state bureaucratic meshes and expedients in which *documentation* procedures are of great importance and centrality. Based on my experience in the DDM, these are the ‘cultural standards’ and ‘intimacy’ that need to be protected to replicate the terms of the ABA code of ethics.

Therefore, based on the formulations of Max Weber (1946), as a particular type of ‘bureau’, I believed that the Campinas IML also placed great value on the documents and work performed by its staff. In this sense, in the act of *documenting the documentation*, I tried to replicate the care put into the work procedures undertaken in these police and bureaucratic bodies, which I assumed I understood. Inspired by the ‘principle of documentation’ (Weber 1978) and my two years of research at a police station, I presumed that I sought to handle official papers when requesting access to the documents produced at the Campinas IML. This means that, in addition to their varied contents – rapes, victims and their personal identifications –, I would also end up accessing the fixed, stable rules of administrative norms and principles that govern the performance of the role of expert/medical examiner.

I presumed that these staff members registered the techniques and official activities (Weber 1946) that they carried out as professionals at the Centre for Legal Medical Expertise of the Department of Public Safety of the State of São Paulo, on sheets of paper. To this end, instigated by the methodological reflections undertaken by Vianna (2014), and much like she did, I anticipated in my *documentation* that which I imagined would be necessary to research and take notes in these state bodies. In Vianna’s research, the real names of those involved in custody proceedings conducted in court, and studied by her, needed to be protected through a formal obligation¹⁴. However, while doing so, in addition to the names of the parties involved, Vianna (2014) chose to suppress the procedural numbers contained in these court documents, since ‘everyone’s bureaucratic identities were right there, in some numerical sequences’ (Vianna 2014: 49-50). It was a kind of siren song, in which, as Vianna (2014) highlights, we find ourselves placed in the same ‘theatricalised dimension’ that shapes legal processes as a whole and characterises what we believe to be ‘the legitimately administrative dimension’ of the *Justiça Infância e da Juventude* [Child and Youth Justice Service] or, in my case, the police and the IML.

Hence, my care in explaining in these papers that *requested access*, a kind of belief and understanding incorporated into what was at stake in these documents and expert procedures, which I was interested in observing/researching. Namely, the [not at all] public (and deeply encrypted) forms of managing material evidence with a view to determining criminal authorship [and, I would add, materiality] (Lowenkron 2015; Lugones 2012).

Guided by what Laura Nader (1972) called ‘studying up’, directed at state strata and institutions that guide, manage, organise and impact the daily life of any common citizen, I conjectured, in the presentation documents and requests forwarded to the IML, that my bond of trust should protect numbers, protocols, techniques and investigation procedures performed by the medical examiners assigned to the Campinas IML. I believed that by committing to protect the ‘legitimately administrative dimension’ of the IML, I consequently took responsibility for hiding the name, address, date of birth or any type of information that could become public or that could reveal the ‘identities’ of the ‘victims’ who were or would be registered there. In other words, inspired by reflections on the *Registro Geral de Identidade* (RG) [Brazilian ID] formulated by Mariza Peirano (2006), I assumed that I knew and understood the character of identification contained in forensic reports. This

¹⁴ For Vianna (2014), access to custody processes was only released following the researcher’s agreement to omit the real names of those involved in such disputes. The determination required by the *Justiça da Infância e da Juventude* [Child and Youth Justice Service] itself, however, made no requests regarding numbers, dates, signatures and other documents that constitute these papers as administrative assets (Vianna 2014). It is important to emphasise that, aside from prosecuting crimes by underage offenders, the Child and Youth Justice Service also has sole jurisdiction over judgments that concern the individual, diffuse or collective rights and interests of children and adolescents.

is because, as Peirano (2006: 36) states, a document ‘groups together a range of information, legally defined by a certain state body’, therefore, the immediate object of my research request, the reports, also contained important identification information given that they indexed name, surname, affiliation, age, ID, place of birth and address on the same physical platform. Indexing performed through a succinct paragraph that opens the forensic report and provides the personal ‘qualifications’ of the victim in the first few lines (Nadai 2022).

Furthermore, as Luís Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (2004) argues, through these bureaucratic *documentation* procedures, I sought to equate and impede two instances of anthropological work that are almost always unpredictable, which were already among the documentary records of the research request to be filed with the IML. On the one hand, a clear, conclusive definition of the research object and, on the other, absolute control over the questions and interests that would eventually be developed in a book and/or published thesis, following the interaction between researcher and the subjects of the research.

As ‘state subjects’, in the words of Maria Gabriela Lugones (2014), I indirectly reified and endorsed the restriction techniques, without major dilemmas, whose interest is to produce these corporations as inaccessible, unknown, or of restricted access, as highlighted by Nader (1972). According to Lugones (2014), and evoking Judith Butler (1997), in the very act of researching in state bodies, we must account for the omnipresent effect – constant, timeless, everywhere and simultaneous – of ‘state interpellation’ that not only ‘acts on us’, but rather without which we would not exist, both in documentary terms and beyond them.

Mixing belief and the ‘learning we acquire in our own flesh’ (Lugones 2014: 81), I tried to obtain a signature, an insignia and, consequently, a name with *authority* to *authorise* my research. Thus, *documenting the documentation* materialises a generous dose of ‘shared credulities’ around that which we imagine to be the expedients of certain state bodies, bureaucratic authority, and the ‘ingrained belief in their legitimacy – whether feigned or the result of necessity’ (Lugones 2014: 74).

Like Lugones (2014), I began my research at the Campinas IML sceptical that I could conduct it while only obtaining oral agreements, which are easily invalidated by transfers and removals. Much like the research conducted by Natália Padovani (2018), this type of scepticism is based on the procedures of state public safety bodies, particularly police forces and prisons. They are institutions that gestate and manage people, in the words of Souza Lima (2002), through determinations that are produced precisely in flows and in which roles occupy a central place. Therefore, believing in the legitimacy of ‘bureaucratic authorities’ and the need to reiterate them, I sent in my ‘academic credentials’. My documents and the techniques painstakingly incorporated into how to *document the documentation*, as argued by Mariza Peirano (2011: 63), sought to demonstrate how the fundamental character of documents, ‘issued by legally authorised bodies, serve as modern amulets that open doors and, in their absence, close them’. As the author suggests, when someone demands ‘your ID, please’, among all the papers forwarded – the university documents – it is ‘the authority of the issuing agency that matters, and not the individual who is identified’ (Peirano 2011: 51): UNICAMP, always in bold letters.

After an effortless entry into Campinas DDM, in mid-2009, and a hellish end of research, which juxtaposed the creation of unprecedented paperwork concerning the research and its consequences, requests for ‘loyalty’ and an unparalleled difficulty in equating what is ‘said there’ and what is ‘written here’, in the words of Marques and Villela (2005), I was supposedly ahead of myself. By *documenting the documentation*, with all the transparency (and ingenuity) possible and necessary, I sought to circumvent or at least dispense exclusively with the personal relationships that give flesh to the institution, and that could later leave me at the mercy of the most diverse legal and emotional problems. By *documenting* techniques, I was convinced of and conceded existence to the disembodied (and non-existent) dimension of state bodies (Abrams 2006; Mitchell 2006).

On ‘counters’, transits and stamps: where does the *documentation* go?

[I]n order for you to gain access [to these reports], *you expressly* need to ask for authorisation from the Director of the IML, who will ask the Superintendent, the Superintendent will ask the Secretary for Public Safety, the Secretary for Public Safety will ask... *all this will take about three years*. (Interview conducted in January 2015; emphasis in original)

Months after presenting a compendium of 11 sheets, duly signed and stamped, to the Campinas IML for the attention of ‘Mr. Director [Name]’, and filing 23 signed sheets directly in São Paulo, I received a single document via email and later through the hands of Milton, the medical examiner at the Campinas IML and the main interlocutor of my research. ‘Official Letter no. 017/2014’, signed and dated April 22, 2014, on a single sheet of bond paper, bearing the coat of arms of the State of São Paulo and its institutional affiliation: ‘Department for Public Safety/ Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police/ Medical Examiner’s Office/ Official letter: Scientific Commission – IML no. 017/2014’.

The field ‘Interested party’ read ‘Name – Supervisor – Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences’. Regarding the ‘Subject’, the ‘Official letter’ reiterated the research request addressed to the commission: ‘Requests assessment of the research project by doctoral student Name – Entitled ‘Among investigation documents: research on the production of material evidence in cases of rape’. In response to ‘Dear Dr. Name’, the document clarified that, in possession of the aforementioned project ‘for analysis’:

Since it is the responsibility of the Medical Examiner’s Office to protect the identities of the victims attended, the Scientific Commission did not approve the research project forwarded.

Sincerely,

Dr. [Name]

Member of the Scientific Commission of the IML/SP.

When I read ‘the Scientific Commission *did not approve* the research project forwarded’ in the letter sent via email by Isabel, the autopsy assistant, with whom I made my first contacts at the Superintendency in São Paulo, I was surprised. Research in state bodies can be made difficult, limited, but never so summarily and succinctly *denied*.

I remembered the secretary who received me at the Campinas IML, when I made my first visit to the institution, a building located at the back of the 1st Police District of Campinas and whose aged facade was the unattractive business card of the Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police. The railings around the building mark specific entrances and organise the path for inattentive pedestrians: on the left, the Medical Examiner’s Office; on the right, the Forensic Institute; in the middle, the sign for the Centre for Legal Medical Expertise unites both the scientific and technical obligations indicated therein.

Somewhat without references and in possession of a blue folder full of letterheads, I was looking for information on how I should proceed to schedule a meeting with the current director of the Campinas IML. The staff member not only discouraged me from making such an appointment, but she persuaded me not to wait for one and not to bother returning at another time. As she helpfully warned me, I would not be able to obtain anything through him in terms of authorisation for the research. After all, any research conducted at the IML needed to be approved by the IML Scientific Commission, based in the state capital, the city of São

Paulo. However, she very kindly accepted the papers I carried in tow. She stamped 'Received Today' on the left margin of the cover letter and wrote in pen 'forward to CP-IML for consultation'. Below, she stamped 'Campinas ___ / ___ / ___' and filled in the date the documents were delivered: '7 April, 2014'. Finally, she stamped the words 'Dr. [Name] Director of the Campinas NP-IML'. Later, out of my sight, the letterhead was signed in pen by 'Mr. Director', to whom I sent the documents I brought with me and an infinity of stamps whose materiality emphasised the journey these papers took through numerous sectors of the IML in Campinas and São Paulo.

However, noticing my discouragement with this 'bureaucracy', she was willing to help me. After informing me that many studies were being denied, she gave me the phone number of a staff member working in the city of São Paulo. This supposedly opened up a faster way to get around what Peirano (2002) calls 'this horrible time of papers'. Thus, in possession of this supposed information, I smiled immediately and left there very excited with the paper that contained a phone number written in pencil with the name of the staff member in São Paulo.

From that moment on, contrary to my fixation on documents and formal access paths, I myself began to forge the personal relationships that move *documentation* forward and, without doubt, form part of the ways in which we learn to document it. As the work of Kregg Hetherington (2011: 149) demonstrates, 'far from being impersonal, bureaucracy worked as an economy of favors' that always and inevitably involves 'moving paper'.

After calls and emails exchanged with Isabel, the autopsy assistant whose phone number I obtained in Campinas, on 16 April, 2014, I headed to São Paulo capital with an even larger quantity of letter-headed papers. During the exchange of information, Isabel patiently explained to me that the *documentation* I had already gathered and left in the care of the director of Campinas IML was incomplete. With the aim of providing guidance on the production of new paperwork, in an email, she numbered all the papers that should compose the dossier now destined for the IML Scientific Commission.

- 1) A letter of introduction from the university about the student, stating enrolment and the course; 2) a request from the university to the Scientific Commission asking them to assess the project. This can be submitted by the supervisor; 3) The research project, following the standards proposed by the Scientific Commission, namely: Introduction; Objective; Methodology and Bibliography; 4) If applicable, attach approval from the Research Ethics Committee; 5) Inform whether there is any financial incentive to conduct the project (FAPESP, CNPq, etc.); 6) Inform whether the person responsible for the project is an integral part of the staff of the Medical Examiner's Office; 7) Declare confidentiality regarding all information collected and/or accessed, subject to legal sanctions and, finally; 8) A declaration of commitment by the researcher(s) to include the name of the Medical Examiner's Office in future publications, oral presentation, posters and any other dissemination, scientific or non-scientific, arising from the project. (IML Scientific Commission, São Paulo Scientific Police)

In possession of the extensive list of statements that had to be produced, item 3 caught my attention. I should submit a research project, formally edited according to the assessment standards designated by the commission. Following the instructions provided by the IML regarding the necessary parts that should be included in the research project, I presented a brief essay concerning the interests, objectives and methodologies of my research to the Scientific Commission. In order to avoid the rejection of my request, I also chose to submit a more objective version of my project, trying to refrain from theorising or previous analyses based on reflections that I had already developed during my Master's degree¹⁵. Furthermore, I chose to follow the technical terms which IML reports and routines are based on, such as the idea of material evidence.

Furthermore, if people are compelled to carry, in the words of Peirano (2002: 34), 'legal papers that harass, torment, or [regarding our research] facilitate the life of the individual (...)', it is because this is an unavoidable

¹⁵ During my Master's degree, I developed the idea of *pieces of flesh*. A formulation that sought to emphasise both the effects of fragmentation present in the medical examiner's reports referring to rape cases and the different processes of carnality (Foucault 2003; Gregori 2016) linked to them. For an analysis of the idea of bodies seen *in pieces* and through *pieces of flesh*, see Nadai (2022); (2018); (2012); Nadai & Veiga (2019); and Nadai & Veiga (2020).

procedure in the multiple relationships established with state bodies. However, the mere certificate provided by numbers – RG [Brazilian ID], CPF [taxpayer ID], *Registro Acadêmica* [Faculty Registry] and so on – is insufficient as identification. Indeed, through countless examples, they attest to the referential and iconic effects of papers. Therefore, if the ‘state does not control this social force’, as argued by Peirano (2006: 38), research like that conducted by Navaro-Yashin (2007) on the effects of fictionality transmitted by documents and their local transactions in the Republic of Cyprus, they also remind us that any and all documentation produced always carries with it a generous dose of ‘make believe’. This, in turn, dismantles the idea of bodies as a domain of rationality, impersonality and bureaucratic oppression, as argued by Roberto da Matta (2018).

This also explains why projects are nothing more than ‘letters of intent’ and anonymous and abstract sequence numbers that need to be associated with clothing, body aesthetics and very specific prestige contacts that circumscribe research and researchers, as suggested by Leirner (1997) in his research on the Brazilian army. The way I produced myself as someone who was ‘all right’, in Foote-Whyte’s words (1993 [1943]: 300), required much more of me than the mere ability to know how to *document the documentation*, it also required the astuteness of mapping where, to whom I should deliver it correctly, and how to behave correctly when sending it directly to police and medical authorities, with respect to the IML. Thus, if for Leirner (1997), a jacket, a tie, a clean beard, a haircut and the prestigious indications of his supervisor complemented the letter of intent, with the stamp of the University of São Paulo, similar tactics intertwined my wanderings through the IML and the Superintendency. Formal attire, no cleavage or transparent apparel, together with transcripts and enrolment certificates, composed one of the possible images of credibility that I sought to certify as a researcher. Finally, my supervisor’s surname was the finishing touch to these claims.

It was through the intertwining of these multiple points that embodied the *documentation* that I arrived at the cold, imposing building located on Rua Moncorvo Filho, in Butantã, São Paulo, adjacent to the *Academia de Polícia de São Paulo* [São Paulo Police Academy] and close to the University of São Paulo. The building that housed the Superintendency of the Scientific-Technical Police contrasted with the small entrance of the Campinas IML, even though it was also divided, only this time into floors that were each a world in themselves. One floor for the Medical Examiner’s Office, another for the Forensic Institute and, finally, one for the organs responsible for managing the Superintendency itself. The large entrance had an information desk and a panel detailing each floor and sector. To the left, there were two doors with metal detectors and an independent entrance next to the revolving doors, with an armed guard. This restricted access door only permitted access for staff and the people authorised by the woman responsible for providing information, strategically located behind the ‘counter’. The ‘clientele’ were directed to attendance at a second window, to the right of the independent entrance. In a similar manner to a notary’s office, right in front of this ‘counter’ were some chairs that were occupied by people carrying documents or retrieving some type of official paper.

After asking for information at the entrance ‘counter’ (Lugones 2012), I headed towards the glass door with an independent entrance, where the uniformed guard was positioned, carrying a firearm. Once on the floor designated for the sectors of the Medical Examiner’s Office, I was surprised by the clear, aseptic environment. Nothing was similar to the police institutions I had already visited. The floor, the minimal decoration in the corridors and the lighting provided by cold white bulbs seemed to have transported me to a hospital or a laboratory. This sensation was replicated by the metal plaques that indicated what was behind each door and restricted access rooms that composed the long, wide, silent, meticulously clean corridor: genetic laboratories, chemical analysis laboratories, anatomopathological laboratories, and so on. In addition to naming the type of procedure performed in each of the rooms, the metal plaques also designated the names of the staff members allocated to the workspace. It was through these procedures that I not only recognised the room I was looking for, but also identified the name of the staff member with whom I had spoken on the phone. After not being

attended at the Scientific Commission office, I went to the Human Resources office, where I was finally informed that Isabel was not available and would only return the following day.

Noting my disappointment, the human resources staff member offered to accept the papers that I needed to file. However, there was one condition: that I inform Isabel over the phone regarding the delivery of this *documentation*. As had occurred in Campinas, the staff member in São Paulo also counted all the documents I gave her, with her fingertips. This time, however, she photocopied the statement signed by the secretary of the post-graduate programme that appeared on the first page of the pile of paper. Then she stamped the copy, and the original with the following words 'DTD-IML / APR.16.2014'. Finally, in pen, she wrote in cursive '[Name] received this and + 23 pages' and handed me the copy.

In possession of the receipt provided by the human resources employee, I returned to Campinas. It was now a matter of 'waiting'. A kind of waiting characteristic of and quite common when engaging in relationships with state bodies. It is not enough to 'sit' and abide the imminent waiting on the coming and going of papers to be completed satisfactorily. If, as Vianna and Farias (2011: 88) emphasise, 'registering a document' means delivering it personally to the correct institution, then making sure that it reaches its destination and only then, finally archiving it as proof of the procedures performed with the signature of the official responsible for receiving it, all these precautions may not be sufficient.

In the authors' research, the 'war' waged by the mothers from Rio de Janeiro against the state, which 'is sitting there', while the murder of their children continues without justice, involves filling the transit of papers with the insistence of an 'institutional pilgrimage'. Although life remains frozen since the brutal death of a loved one – son, nephew, brother, husband –, even documents filed with care do not 'move forward on their own'. The time of 'waiting for justice' is filled with the 'struggle' (parades, marches, going to trials of similar cases, etc.), with trips to the judiciary, making contact with prosecutors, new examinations of the victim's body (often already buried), going to the execution sites of said relative, and so on (Vianna & Farias 2011).

Without doubt, the contexts of access to research and the 'fight for justice' cannot be compared here. For political reasons, they are incommensurable. However, the procedures and ways of relating to state bodies – the police, the judiciary, and every state department imaginable – can be replicated. Using similar mechanisms with regard to requesting access to conduct research, in addition to *documenting the documentation*, in the words of Lugones (2014), it is important to 'keep things moving' through other means. Waiting for the transit of documents is, concomitantly, an incessant coming and going. This time based on personal relationships, as I had intuitively begun to do.

Thus, even before the formal response to my research, through the aforementioned 'Official Letter no. 017/2014', I had already contacted a professor at the UNICAMP *Faculdade de Ciências Médicas* [School of Medical Sciences], who was also a medical examiner at Campinas IML. Even though *documenting the documentation* seemed central to me, it was my university connections that gave me confidence that the 'waiting' period imposed on these bureaucratic procedures was avoidable. Furthermore, the moral assurance of a staff member, together with that of the director of the institution, and then from the director to the commission, could impart a personal dimension to the coldness of the insignia contained in the paper 'amulets' (Peirano 2011).

However, the wait for the assessment of the *documentation* forwarded to the commission was insignificant. In less than a month, my request was answered. The commission, however, was not addressing me, but rather my supervisor. They denied me *access* to the IML archives and facilities, despite having confirmed in a 'declaration' that I agreed and would not fail to comply with the 'confidentiality protocols regarding all information collected and/or which I accessed during research conducted at the Medical Examiner's Office, subject to legal sanctions'.

The email I received from Isabel was just one of the denials included in the documentation. In mid-July 2014, I met with Milton, one of the key interlocutors of my research at Campinas IML, and received a pile of

papers from him: the same papers that I filed in the care of ‘Mr. Dr. [Name], director of the Campinas IML’, in March 2014. The director of the institution, in possession of my *documentation*, had also sent these papers for consideration by the same IML Scientific Commission. As I have described so far, my desire to reduce the waiting time by directly filing a new pile of paper with the Scientific Commission did not prevent the paperwork I had left in Campinas from continuing to follow its institutional path. It took two months for these first papers to reach São Paulo and return from the capital to the interior.

Through a wide variety of ‘Dispatches’, the *documentation* received new signatures and numerous stamps. However, rejection was reiterated again. If in ‘Official letter no. 017/2014’ sent to me by Isabel, the ‘project of doctoral candidate Name’ was under ‘analysis’ and the response was addressed to ‘Dear Dr. Name Supervisor’, here, in the dispatches made in response to the same (and other) *documentation*, it appeared that ‘the request from the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences at UNICAMP had already been assessed and not approved by the Scientific Commission in Order no. 017/2014’.

My request had been transmuted into a request made by the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH) to the IML. Addressed to my supervisor, to the IFCH, to UNICAMP, the repeated rejection definitely hinted at very important layers of *authority*. Supervisor covers the doctoral student’s research that, in turn, refers to the supervisor’s teaching role at the IFCH, which is ultimately subordinated to the insignia of UNICAMP as an academic institution. As I sought to argue in other reflections (Nadai 2018), the rejection of the student’s research has ‘elective affinities’ (Weber 1930) with refusing the university – UNICAMP –, the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences and, in regard to an area of knowledge, the human sciences in general. By opting for the concept developed by Max Weber (1930), I seek to refute a case-by-case analysis between research and the university or between research and the human sciences. The research was not denied because it was from UNICAMP or because it was focused on the area of human sciences, even though these affiliations share an important convergence and attraction¹⁶.

Furthermore, the request for access made using the technique of *documenting the documentation* is now entangled with rejection precisely because it explains and reveals the ‘chain of acts, authority and authorisations’ (Ferreira 2013: 41) imposed on my research when inserted into the gears of management of the IML and the Department for Public Safety. As the epigraph suggests, becoming governor of the State of São Paulo would be an almost unavoidable fact, even if it takes a considerable amount of time and is unfeasible for a doctoral research.

Seen from this angle, the formal request I sent to the director of the IML and later directly to the Scientific Commission was correct, even if apparently ineffective. The stamps made on each section through which my papers passed within the administrative bodies of the IML reinforced these multiple mandatory ‘checkpoints’ (Jeganathan 2004). At the base is the director of Campinas IML, whose authority is directed towards the city’s employees and the work performed there. Above him is the Superintendent of the Scientific-Technical Police who, strictly speaking, is responsible for jointly managing the IML and the Forensic Institute. Above him is the Secretary for Public Security, responsible for the numerous security institutions in the state – police, prisons and *Centro de Atendimento Socioeducativo ao Adolescente* [Socio-Educational Support Centre for Adolescents] foundations –, who is chosen by the state governor. And, finally, elected by popular vote as the citizen’s ‘representative’, is the governor. These were the very addresses that I needed to do an ethnography of, as Hetherington (2011) astutely describes. Thus, my papers were documents that, when considered, revealed more than techniques for withholding information or setbacks in access that reveal malicious or improper conducts established by these police forces. *Documenting the documentation* was also a decisive part of the research requested and eventually executed.

¹⁶ Such correlations of convergence and attraction guided the writing of my thesis and are summarised in the polemic, controversial figure of Badan Palhares (Nadai 2018). For an analysis of the many meanings that Weber assigns to the term ‘elective affinity’, see Löwy (2004).

On documenting, registering and *moving to the other side of the counter*: some finishing touches and many loose ends

I began the first section of this article with lines from a poem by João Cabral de Melo Neto. As an epigraph to the section, his verses addressed to Carlos Drummond de Andrade talk about the difficult task of ‘being an employee’. In his words, the files seem like tombs made to the exact dimensions for all sizes of the poet’s body. Boxes that store papers printed by machines that do not write letters. The latter, imagined by the poet as the domain of the personal, of feelings, everything that seems so distant from the bureaucracy forged by the civil servant. Bureaucracy that mortifies him and buries every part of his body. In another context, Navaro-Yashin (2007) narrates the case of Fuat, a Turkish-Cypriot, and his feeling of fear/panic upon receiving a letter in the mail addressed to him by a British administrative body. In possession of the letter, still unopened, Fuat goes to a community centre that has Turkish translators so they can explain the contents printed on the paper to him. As the anthropologist highlights, by keeping his correspondence transacted with the British state filed in a safe in this community centre, Fuat somehow seeks to appease the ghostly effect of these documents on his life as an immigrant living in England. Thus, the file seems to be a flat, grey box that, due to the appearance of rationality and contention it engenders, contrasts with the ‘explosive affects’ experienced by Fuat when coming into contact with the letters sent to him by the British government. Whether in João Cabral de Melo Neto’s poem or in Navaro-Yashin’s (2007) ethnography, documents appear as objects that carry multiple affects and meanings. Without doubt, *documenting the documentation*, forwarding it to the correct places and then receiving it with a decision, whether positive or negative, raises the most diverse anxieties and uncertainties.

The impression of confusion, uncertainty and anguish that so many papers convey is not, therefore, an undue or unreflective effect of the argumentation that I have sought to produce throughout this article. I intentionally tried to awaken such sensations in the reader through the systematic enumeration of the sayings and imaginations imposed on the papers I forged. *Documenting the documentation* begins as an intuitive procedure that, only over time, becomes a practice carried out using formally stipulated guidelines and, precisely for this reason, profoundly legitimised. If, as João Cabral de Melo Neto suggests, it is ‘difficult to be an employee’, the differences between bureaucrats and us social scientists end up blurred and fairly well correlated due to the specious, pedagogical procedures of *documenting the documentation* (Riles 2006; Hull 2012; Ferreira 2014).

By bringing these figures together, on the one hand, I seek to highlight the centrality that documents acquire for both researchers and bureaucrats. Reports, letters, declarations, notices, forms, accountability are neglected records precisely due to the triviality and ordinariness they assume in the lives of researchers and their interlocutors – state agents, business elites, bureaucrats, and so on (Riles 2006; Hull 2012). On the other, inspired by the reflection of Ferreira (2014), I seek to underline how documents remain separate from the ‘self-representation’ of anthropology. In her words, ‘in the imaginary picture composed of the solitary ethnographer, the native village and the distant tropical beach, there is no space for formal authorisations to be signed and stamped by police chiefs (...)’ (Ferreira 2014: 142). Furthermore, the analytical implications of such similarities crystallise two important images through which, as Navaro-Yashin (2007) suggests, *documentation* can be considered. On the one hand, all papers are fictions, that is, they carry, perpetuate and support elements of fabrication both for those involved in their making and those who use them. On the other, documents support feelings and affects managed by the people who produce and transact them. As Navaro-Yashin (2007: 84) suggests, they carry ‘the image of proof, stability and durability’, but they also retain in their depths all the ‘Kafkaesque’ aspects of their creation: the anxieties, the absurdities and other explosive phantasmagorias (mistakes, shady and obscure intentions, dangerous political connections, and so on)¹⁷.

¹⁷ For other analyses on the intrinsic relationship between the rational and magical aspects propagated by state bodies and their inscription on paper, see Das (2004); Taussig (1997); Drybread (2022).

Seen through these itineraries, *documenting the documentation* has important effects. First, this procedure highlights the ways in which we communicate with state bodies. Official papers are preestablished forms of interaction, the formats, materialities and textual formulas of which must be mastered and replicated by any citizen who intends to establish a dialogue with state sectors and/or bodies¹⁸. Seen from this angle, the act of forging documents was a mandatory and required artifice for this investigation. As Anelise Riles (2006: 2) suggests, documents are important because they are ‘paradigmatic artifacts for modern knowledge practices’. They function as a kind of ‘epistemological model’ and a ‘paradigm of interpretation’ that prevails in different fields of knowledge – from the human sciences to state bureaucracies (Riles 2006: 6). Producing, transporting, handling and filing them is directly related to the experience of those who would have been my research interlocutors.

A second effect of the term *documenting the documentation* aims to highlight, ethnographically, the intentional mechanism of replicating the very work schedules undertaken by these police departments in this paperwork. Producing papers, registering them at the indicated ‘counters’ and filing them are management techniques routinely articulated in state sectors, agencies or bodies. If declarations, official letters, memoranda and requests are administrative models and solutions, *documenting the documentation* simultaneously mimics these precepts and their real and imagined purposes.

Moreover, such procedures, when taken as reflected movements worthy of analysis, enable us to dismantle reifications that I myself had replicated when choosing a formal, official path to enter the field: the certainty that the papers would grant more impersonal access and, therefore, separated from the personalities and verbal acts that always *help move bureaucracy forward*. As Ferreira (2009: 23) suggests, based on Weberian premises, even if ‘impersonality’ permeates the forms of administration practiced by state bodies, it cannot ‘be derived that bureaucratic procedures are purely formal and devoid of personality’. However, even when classified as personal, these same interactions and disputes between staff members, actions of ‘public faith’, files, techniques and authorisations, do not become or conform to ‘less bureaucratic’ administrative apparatus and procedures (Ferreira 2009: 24).

There is even a third effect that I sought to present throughout this article, which requires other developments. Inspired by the reflections undertaken by Lugones (2014: 81), that have been previously discussed, this effect speaks directly with what the author calls the ‘common condition of state subjects’. Whether this is because, as researchers or university teachers, we depend on and respond to state institutions – FAPESP, CNPq and UNICAMP – or because by *documenting the documentation* in the manner we imagine to be the most correct and efficient way of doing so, we propagate and/or extend the ‘presence of the state in our societies’ (Lugones 2014: 79). The belief that written documents are the exclusive means of opening the closed doors of the IML is supported by the ‘conscious habit or calculation (emotive and not always rational)’ that such authorities exist, are legitimate and can impersonally and definitively authorise these access flows (Idem).

When I began my *documentation processes*, I did not know the paths my papers would follow; however, I did believe they would be forwarded. As I sought to reconstruct in this article, I took a rather simplistic route through figurations, an address, a building, a name. Similar to the routes outlined in my master’s research, I imagined arriving at the building, obtaining more precise information about how I should conduct my request and, finally, having a meeting with the director of the IML. However, I never met with the director of the Campinas IML. The staff member who helped me, the director’s secretary, was my only face-to-face contact with the institution. Her indications would lead me to learn about the existence of a Scientific Commission

18 As Guterres (2016) argues in her research on the formation of vulnerable territories in the port area of Rio de Janeiro, a distinct and politically incomparable context, the ‘storing of documents’ enacts this very desire for permanence, in a world in which the rumour and terror of being about to get removed from your home is routinely and intentionally handled by these state bodies.

specifically created to assess research projects of a 'scientific' and not an 'ethical' nature¹⁹. Similar to the procedures imposed on countless research studies in state bodies, I was only seeking to 'formally request authorisation to conduct the research' (Ferreira 2015: 37). Authorisation was the ultimate goal, that is, I saw this bureaucratic process as necessary to conduct the research, but not as a **notable** part of my research. I needed to go through it and only then would I be authorised to work within the IML, which was the actual locus of my research.

The director and then the Commission were, thus, the '*pasillos*' [hallways] and '*barandillas*' [rails] of my doctoral project. As Lugones (2012) suggests in relation to the conduct undertaken by the Juvenile Courts in Córdoba, waiting is an imposed and necessary process for any of the 'administrated' who seek assistance in the court's '*pasillos*'. In this type of corridor, people physically wait, almost always standing due to the small number of seats, and without immediate access to drinking fountains or bathrooms. Between the corridor and the court room, the '*barandillas*' limit access. This type of mobile 'counter', particularly common in courts and public offices, fulfils a dual function. First, they provide access to the judges' offices. Secondly, they restrict access and serve as a 'counter', whose function is to provide information and simultaneously reaffirm to those administered: '*que me esperem*' [let them wait for me] (Lugones 2012: 82).

During this process, in the search to obtain *authorisation*, I was obliged to identify myself. I was a 'doctoral student' in possession of and intending to conduct 'research' whose entry into the IML would only be permitted following an assessment. Therefore, the commission was a particular type of 'checkpoint'. As Jeganathan (2004) argues, the function of 'checkpoints' is to impede vehicle and pedestrian traffic²⁰. This type of mandatory stop requires those who are in flow to answer questions posed by those who control borders and territories. According to the author, such questions revolve around issues of identity and are all sustained by the possession of valid, legible papers.

Although the distances between checkpoints are evident in zones of armed conflict, like in Sri Lanka, and the function of a Scientific Commission, I suggest that the similarities between these techniques of curbing and enabling passage are quite revealing. Both draw power from their controlling nature and, through their identification techniques, trigger correlations of differential forces between those who have the *authority to authorise* and those who are *authorised* to access the other side of the 'counter' (Lugones 2012). Therefore, the intent behind the papers that sought to *document the documentation* was to enter the organised and (not at all) dusty IML archive. Between peeks and readings, I would overcome the 'primordial lack of fetishised ethnography in the face-to-face meeting, of hours shared in the same space and time between researchers and those studied' (Vianna 2014: 46). Much like in the methodological manifestos of Abrams (2006) and Mitchell (2006), through an ethnography *in loco* and limited to idealised, reinforced institutional boundaries, I would be able to highlight the dissensions, 'illegalisms' and disputes that traverse and flesh out the IML's daily routine and working hours. This image, a mixture of 'projection' and 'mystification' and when agreed upon in our research, ends up reinforcing institutions – here, the IML – as beings that hover over all of us (Abrams 2006, Mitchell 2006).

As a final consideration, it is worth adding that by choosing not base this article on the forwarding of papers solely from a methodological perspective, I refuted certain imaginations that the intended practice of *requesting access* is separate from the research we aim to conduct. Indeed, I made an effort to carefully examine the techniques through which institutional functions and positions are publicised and agreements and access to agencies, bodies or institutions are plotted and remade on a daily basis. *Granting authorisation*, much like

19 At first, and even after going through it, I did not know which IML staff members were also members of the Commission, nor did I know what their obligations were or what the motivations were for its creation. The only information I had was that this Commission held meetings every second Tuesday of each month.

20 According to the author, checkpoints concomitantly function as physical devices that organise the flow of people and objects and as potential fixation points (targets) that anticipate latent violence. Checkpoints map targets and bomb attacks, while simultaneously determining and mapping such territories as subject to this violence due to the act of verification undertaken there.

producing bureaucratic documents that *request authorisation*, are nodal points for the research that later we will be authorised to conduct or through which spaces we will be permitted to circulate. By allowing myself to be enchanted by bibliographies and analyses that demystify the state as an abstraction, I myself was confronted with the state, that which does not exist as an entity, but, as Foucault (2009) argues, when its borders are drawn, too often produces ‘deadly’ effects. **You cannot enter, you cannot research, you cannot see, you cannot find ‘all the names’²¹** (Saramago 2003), because **you are not vested** with the keys that give you access to the other side of the ‘counter’ and allow certain research to finally be conducted in so-called state bodies.

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²¹ Here, I allude to the novel by Saramago (2003), in which Mr. José, an exemplary and efficient employee of the *Conservatória Geral do Registro Civil* [General Civil Registry Office], sneaks into the austere registry office at night, with the intention of completing, with a simple date of birth, his unusual, well-organised, personal collection of newspaper and magazine clippings of famous people: bishops, artists, sportsmen, politicians, criminals, etc., archived by him. For other connections between Saramago’s novel and my doctoral research, see Nadai (2018).

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