



The invention of self in elderly autobiographical writing

Larissa Maria de Resende Neiva^{1*}, Mônica Yumi Jinzenji² and Ana Maria de Oliveira Galvão²

¹Prefeitura Municipal de Belo Horizonte, Av. Afonso Pena, 1212, 30130-003, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. ²Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. *Autor para correspondência. E-mail: larysmaty@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT. The article aims to analyze how elderly authors invent themselves through autobiographical writing in the contemporaneity. It also problematizes the potentiality of this process for the field of Education. Eight autobiographies were analyzed as main sources. They were written by men and women that were born in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil in the first half of the 20th century. In addition, IBGE census data were also used. The analysis allows us to affirm that gender belonging strongly delineates the references chosen by each one of the authors for the process of self-invention and also for the elaboration of the meanings of aging. For the women writers, family and religion constituted as the axis of the narratives. On the other hands, for the authors, the work and the socioeconomic condition were chosen to conduct the writing. Women refer to aging positively, but men tend to emphasize the losses and limitations related to this stage of life.¹

Keywords: autobiography; gender relations; third age.

A invenção de si na escrita autobiográfica de pessoas idosas

RESUMO. O artigo tem como objetivo analisar como autoras e autores idosos inventam a si mesmos por meio da escrita autobiográfica na contemporaneidade, problematizando a potencialidade desse processo para o campo da Educação. Como principais fontes, foram analisadas oito autobiografias, escritas por homens e mulheres, nascidos em Minas Gerais na primeira metade do século XX, além de dados censitários do IBGE. A análise realizada nos permite afirmar que o pertencimento de gênero delinea fortemente os referenciais eleitos por cada um(a) dos(as) autores(as) para o processo de invenção de si e, igualmente, para a elaboração dos significados do envelhecer. Se para as autoras, a família e a dimensão religiosa se constituíram como eixo das narrativas, para os autores, o trabalho e a condição socioeconômica foram eleitos para conduzir a escrita. As mulheres se referem ao envelhecer de forma positiva, enquanto os homens tendem a enfatizar as perdas e as limitações relacionadas a essa etapa da vida.

Palavras-chave: autobiografia; relações de gênero; terceira idade.

La invención de sí en la escritura autobiográfica de personas mayores

RESUMEN. El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo autoras y autores ancianos se inventan a sí mismos por medio de la escritura autobiográfica en la contemporaneidad, problematizando la potencialidad de ese proceso para el campo de la Educación. Como principales fuentes, se analizaron ocho autobiografías, escritas por hombres y mujeres, nacidos en Minas Gerais en la primera mitad del siglo XX, además de datos censales del IBGE. El análisis realizado nos permite afirmar que la pertenencia de género delinea fuertemente los referentes elegidos por cada uno de los autores para el proceso de invención de sí y también para la elaboración de los significados del envejecimiento. Si para las autoras, la familia y la dimensión religiosa se constituyeron como eje de las narrativas, para los autores, el trabajo y la condición socioeconómica fueron elegidos para conducir la escritura. Las mujeres se refieren al envejecer de forma positiva, mientras que los hombres tienden a enfatizar las pérdidas y las limitaciones relacionadas con esa etapa de la vida.

Palabras-clave: autobiografía; relaciones de género; tercera edad.

Received on May 24, 2018
Accepted on September 10, 2018.

¹ English version: Viviane Ramos- vivianeramos@gmail.com

Introduction

In the last decades, there has been an accumulation of researches in the educational field aiming to problematize the notions of childhood (Kuhlmann Jr, 1998; Sarmiento & Gouvêa, 2008) and youth (Peralva, 1997; Oliveira, 1999, 2004; Tomio & Facci, 2009; Pinto, 2015), which was understood as social and historic production. Little has been studied about adulthood and the old age², even though, as can be seen in the tendencies of Brazilian population pyramid, Brazil is going through an accelerated period of demographic aging, with the proportional increase of adults and elders, with the last as the fastest growing group (Borges, Campos, & Castro e Silva, 2015).

Faced by this demographic configuration of Brazilian society, several questions impose themselves in the area of Education, demanding studies that focus on elders as research subjects/objects, to better understand how they see and reinvent themselves as subjects and to subsidize pedagogical practices to and with them³. The analysis of autobiographies written by them, in contemporary times, can be, in this context, fruitful to problematize several of these elements.

Bruner and Weisser (1995) understand autobiographic writing as a resource that answers a possible need of the individual to 'talk about him/herself'. To the authors, writing about your own life allows, among other aspects, a 'self-location' that would be the result of "[...] a navigation that fixates the position in a more virtual than real sense" (Bruner e Weisser, 1995, p. 145). In other words, to these authors, through autobiography, those the authors place themselves in the symbolic world of culture. Thus, autobiographical writing allows the author to give sense to his/her life experiences through the cultural tools s/he has when creating the narrative. In this process, writing about yourself can be understood as an educational process, as it makes possible a self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world in the attempt to approximate and distance the 'I' that the author creates when thinking about his/her own experiences. It is a way of thinking this type of writing as a learning instrument, considering such activity as a reflection tool on the experiences and practices of the writers. That is, the production and the reporting of one's own experiences through writing allows an enlargement of self-knowledge, of who narrates it (Hernández, 2010; Kroeff, 2012; Passegi, Vicentini, & Souza, 2013).

The analysis of autobiographies written by elderly authors allows us to evaluate more intensely the effects of the present on memories in the process of self-invention, as it is through the present that the past is (re)constructed. It is worth mentioning that the term 'self-invention' does not intend to diminish the validity of this type of narrative, or, as expressed by Bruner and Weisser (1995), to judge it as a 'biased self-report'. The use of the expression seems to be the most adequate to refer to the movement of organization and reflection on the facts and experiences lived by the author(s) during writing. After all, it is understandable that, when narrating their lives, the authors try to establish a certain order and coherence to the facts narrated, to give meaning, through the narrative, to their existence (Bourdieu, 1986).

Aiming to contribute to the understanding of self-invention in the writings of elderly subjects, in contemporary times, this text analyses eight autobiographies: five written by men and three by women, all born in the state of Minas Gerais, in the first half of the 20th century, as will be detailed. Besides the biographies, as complementary sources, we used Census data from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* [IBGE- Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] from 1920 (IBGE, 1928) and 1950 (IBGE, 1959).

We opted for autobiographies published from the 2000s because it is a moment in which there is a clear consolidation of a new concept of aging in Brazil, which has significantly intensified from the 1960s and 70s, within a movement of reconfiguration of this life phase that, generally, was taken as a time of losses. Among those changes, we have the change, in Brazilian Portuguese, of the terms 'old' (*velho*) and 'old age' (*velhice*) to 'third age' (*Terceira idade*) that, as pointed out by Marques (2004, p. 66) "[...] adds news visibilities and positiveness".

Within this new concept on aging, from the 1990s there was a boom in biographic and autobiographic publication, a phenomenon still followed with little interest by part of researchers, especially those from the literature field (Gomes, 2004). More recently, in history of education, there has been an increasing interest

² The studies on this age group are concentrated in the area of health, anthropology, and sociology. We highlight the classic work of Beauvoir (1976). In the education field, old age has not been, traditionally, a focus of study, with the exception of some researches, as Oliveira (2004) e Grossi (2014).

³ Brazil has 11.8 million people who cannot read nor write, corresponding to 7.2% of the population of over 15 years old (IBGE, 2017). Among those with 60 years or more, this number is of 20.4%. Clearly, there is an expanding public that could possibly take part in different types of educational practices.

in the analysis of self-writing as a cultural practice, and the use of these sources to reflect on the school and learning practices and experiences that are not commonly registered in other documents (Lopes, 2004; Melo, 2008; Manke, 2012; Galvão, Neiva, & Jinzenji, 2018).

In this article, we analyze a printed document corpus, whose production had different motivations and addresses, not always clear or declared. Following Lejeune's (2014) assumptions, considering the different manifestations of the autobiographical genre and the impossibility to delimit the works in one or another specific definition, in this work, we used texts written mostly in prose (even though other genres are used to compose the works) in which the authors talk about themselves, narrate episodes in their lives – either lived by themselves or recovered by reports of people in their lives.

We discuss how elderly authors, common people, invent themselves through autobiographical writing, identifying, in the first moment, the profile of these subjects in the schooling process and Brazilian publishing context. After, we problematize how their gender belonging strongly outlines the references chosen by them in their process of self-invention. Finally, we discuss how the meanings of aging are also related to the construction of gender identities.

The autobiographers: their school trajectories and the Brazilian publishing context

The subjects analyzed in the research wrote their autobiographies when they were 65 years old or more and their works were published in the 2000s. They were born in the countryside of the state (Minas Gerais) and moved to the capital (Belo Horizonte) in some point of their trajectories; in most cases, they migrated in search of better living conditions, through the continuation of studies and/or looking for better jobs⁴. These data can be seen on Table 1.

Brazilian editorial market, that in the beginning of the 20th century was concentrated in few streets in the center of the city of Rio de Janeiro, considerably increased its product diversity, reaching, in the beginning of the 21st century, more than 500 commercially active publishing houses (El Far, 2006). Therefore, there are, mainly in the capitals, a number of medium and small-sized publishing companies focused on the publication of a variety of works and texts, expanding the editorial catalog beyond the famous works, of renowned authors, who already had a space in this market. As can be seen on table 1, this is the case of the publishing houses which published the analyzed works that, with the reduction of the costs to print and the enlargement and diversification of the reading public, opened their doors to common subjects who wished to write their memoirs and autobiographies. They are: *Líthera Maciel*, *Sografe*, *Redação*, *Mazza Edições*, *Gil Braz*, and *Imprensa oficial de Minas Gerais*, all still active in Belo Horizonte⁵. Together with this opening of Brazilian editorial market, other elements helped to build the profile of these autobiographers: their school trajectory and the familiarity with the written words.

Among the eight authors, as can be observed on table 1, three had primary education (four years of schooling), two had high school (*Normal school*- which train students to become teachers), and three had graduated in higher education. According to the Census of IBGE (1928), in 1920 in Brazil, only one quarter of the population knew how to read and write. This index decreases when we analyze the state of Minas Gerais, in which this group represented a little more than 20% of the population. The discrepancy between these indexes is even higher when comparing the capital, in which the population which could read and write represented around 60%, with other cities in the State: 11% of the population in Itamarandiba (Vicente Guabiroba's birthplace) and 21% in Bom Despacho (Maria da Conceição Teles's birthplace) could read and write.

Even though in 1950 it was already possible to see a significant increase in the number of people over the age of 5 years old able to read and write in the capitals and other cities, this number was still discrepant when comparing urban and rural areas. In the latter, illiteracy represented more than 50% of the population (IBGE, 1959).

⁴ This collection of eight autobiographies resulted from searches done in second-hand bookshops and in public and private archives. We selected those who filled the requirement previously established, as date of publication, authors' age when writing the work, place and time of birth. Besides this, we excluded those which, despite having characteristics of the autobiographic genre, did not have enough elements for the proposed analysis, as was the case of works focused almost exclusively to the description of cities and those written in verses.

⁵ With the exception of *Imprensa oficial do Estado de Minas Gerais*, which was established over 120 years ago, and *Mazza Edições*, established more than 30 years ago (focusing on Brazilian and African Brazilian cultures works), the others are small publishing houses. It is worth saying that even though *Mazza Edições* is not part of the small publishing houses, its specificity allows that common authors, with no space in the big publishing houses, to be given a voice.

Table 1. Autobiography of authors from Minas Gerais born in the first half of the 20th century and published in the 21st century

Title	Author	Publishing house/ Place of publication	Year of publication	Number of pages	Author's birthyear	Author's birthplace	Schooling	Date of migration to Belo Horizonte
<i>Outono Dourado em prosa e verso (Golden Autumn in Prose and verse)</i>	Maria Horta Cabral Fernandes	Líthera Maciel Belo Horizonte	2000	159 pages	1909	Santa Maria de Itabira/MG	Primary (1917)	1929
<i>Minha vida, meu tesouro! (My life, my treasure!)</i>	Maria da Conceição de Oliveira Teles	Redação! Belo Horizonte	2003	184 pages	1923	Bom Despacho/MG	Graduated normal school (1940)	1970
<i>Sem medo de se encontrar (Not afraid to find yourself)</i>	Therezinha Gonçalves	Mazza Edições Belo Horizonte	2003	135 pages	1930	Pirapora/MG	Primary – 1937 to 1941	(aprox..1947)
<i>Minha vida & crônicas (My life &Chronicles)</i>	Abram Ribeiro	Sografe Belo Horizonte	2002	165 pages	1920	Amparo do Serra/MG	Primary, no date	1939
<i>Rascunho de uma vida (Drafts of a life)</i>	Allyrio Nunes Coelho	Mazza Edições Belo horizonte	2001	128 pages	1921	Guanhães/Mg	Graduated normal school (1938)	s.d.
<i>Impressões de uma vida (Impressions of a life)</i>	Vicente Guabiroba	Gil Braz Belo Horizonte	2006	196 pages	1922	Itamarandiba/MG	Goes to Seminary; Bachelor in Law	s.d.
<i>Trajatória de lutas (A trajectory of fights)</i>	Olney Jardim	Sografe Belo Horizonte	2006	141 pages	1925	Araçuaí - Vale do Jequitinhonha/MG	Graduated Odontology (1951)	1947
<i>Vá com Deus, mãe! (Go with the Lord, mom!)</i>	Vicente de Souza	Imprensa Oficial de Minas Gerais Belo Horizonte	2003	207 pages	1935	Água Comprida, zona rural de Boa Esperança/MG	Bachelor in Law at UFMG (1964)	1959

Source: Research archive (2011-2015).

Another important fact that should be observed is that two of the three female authors in the researched group are from regions in which, in both rural and urban areas, the difference between men and women who could read and write, in the 1950s, although existing, were not so discrepant. In the urban population of Pirapora, for example, Therezinha Gonçalves's birthplace, 39.82% of men and 34.96% of women knew how to read and write; in Santa Maria de Itabira, Maria Horta's birthplace, 34% of men and 28% of women knew how to read and write⁶. In the researched places, this difference was sensibly higher only in Boa Esperança (72 to 44%) (IBGE, 1959).

Summing up, we can say that these are subjects with atypical trajectories in the development of their relations with reading and writing, if considered as a whole and in comparison with the rest of the population in these places and periods. They are part of a population minority that, having access to primary education, some in the rural areas of the cities in which they have spent this life period (for instance, Vicente de Souza, born in Água Comprida, rural area of Boa Esperança and Abram Ribeiro, born in Garapa, close to Amparo do Serra),

⁶ We did not find in the Census any data about Bom Despacho, Maria da Conceição de Oliveira Teles's birthplace.

climbed to better life conditions through migration; the trajectory of some was marked by school longevity and of other, by autodidacticism (cases of Maria Horta Fernandes, Therezinha Gonçalves, and Abram Ribeiro)⁷, as can be seen on table 1.

Besides this, these are subjects to whom writing about themselves is part of wider writing practices developed throughout their lives, for professional reasons or by personal affinities and interests, even though none of them were professional writers. The autobiographies indicate that the authors developed professional activities that demanded a daily contact with writing and reading, for example Maria da Conceição Teles, who was a primary teacher, Allyrio Coelho, a school principal and a political advisor in the Legislative Chamber, Olney Jardim, who graduated in Odontology, Vicente Guabiroba and Vicente de Souza, who both graduated in Law and the later became a court judge in Belo Horizonte. Besides this familiarity with writing, five of the authors inserted, in the autobiography, some texts wrote by themselves in other contexts, suggesting a familiarity with writing beyond their professional work.

To give an example, Teles (2003) wrote and published his autobiography – *Minha vida, meu tesouro!* – when he was 80 years old; she studied in Normal School and worked as a teacher for a short time in the 1930s. She had 15 children, with Emídio Teles de Carvalho and, aiming to give better study conditions to her children, moved to Belo Horizonte in 1970. In the capital, the author started to work as a seamstress and embroiderer. She wrote the book *Histórias da vovó: contos populares passados de pais para filhos* (Stories from grandma: popular stories passed from parents to children), published in 2001 (Teles, 2001) by the publishing company *Leitura*. She wrote her autobiography two years after this previous publication, by the publishing house *Redação*. She included in the autobiography two of her poems: *Obrigada, Senhor* (Thank you, Lord) and *Nada tenho* (I have nothing) (Teles, 2003).

Allyrio Nunes Coelho was born in 1921, in Guanhães. In 1938, she graduated in Normal School. He married Tonha, with whom he had 4 children. He worked in many activities during his life: *caandeiro* (who guides the ox cart), cowboy, bread seller, engineer helper, municipal agent of statistics, a sailor clerk, teacher, secretary at the city hall of Buritizeiro, principal and one of the founders of *Ginásio Pirapora*, and chief advisor at the Legislative Chamber. He wrote and published his autobiography when he was 80 years old, in 2001, by *Mazza Edições*. In the end of this autobiography (Coelho, 2001), he adds two of his chronicles: *Lenços molhados* (Wet handkerchiefs) and *O diálogo do amor e da morte* (The dialogue between love and death) that, having no connection with the autobiographical text, were probably written independently.

As a last example, we have Maria Cabral Horta Fernandes. She finished her primary education, and at 14 years old started to work in a fabric factory in Itabira. Married with Ilson Fernandes de Araújo, she had 11 children. Around 1928, with her arrival in the capital of Minas Gerais, she started to work in a sewing studio and, later, opened, together with her husband, a store to repair clothes and a laundry. With her husband's death, in 1978, when she was 68 years old, she started to frequent SESC⁸, where she says she discovered herself an actress, working on the theater and on many television advertisements. When she was 90 years old Maria Cabral Horta wrote her autobiography entitled *Outono Dourado em prosa e verso*, published by Líthera Maciel, in 2000. Besides mentioning writing some theater plays, she included in the autobiography 26 of her poems with various themes, some of them: *Minha infância* (My childhood), *Ipê florido* (Flowered Ipê), *Buscando a felicidade* (Searching happiness), *Cidade no interior* (Countryside city), *Agradecimento a meu pai* (Thanking my father).

We can see that even when other texts were incorporated to the autobiography, these writings were not always produced to compose the work, but written in previous moments of the authors' trajectories. And even though these texts act as a complement of the autobiographic narratives, not all of them have an explicit relation with the content of the works. Finally, besides the familiarity and ability to write, the acknowledgement of family members and close friends are elements that have possibly influenced the process of producing a self-invention through an autobiography in their old age.

7 Even though studies indicate the important role of families in the participation of subjects in written cultures (Thies, Manke, & Peres, 2009), in the cases analyzed here this influence is not always evident. According to Galvão (2018), there are contexts in which the family is not a privileged instance for this participation and, still, these individuals can develop, during their trajectory, a strong familiarity with reading and writing.

⁸ Translator's note: SESC- *Serviço Social do Comércio* - is a private Brazilian institution kept by the commerce, service, and tourism companies, which, among other services, offers cultural activities and courses.

Gender in the belongings identity chosen for self-invention

According to Galvão et al. (2018), in the autobiographical writing, each author tends to choose an identity belonging to which s/he is strongly engaged in the moment of writing, to give sense and coherence to her/his life. Such choice is not announced or deliberate and involves specific circumstances in the present that become an axis to read the past. Thus, we can consider that, in other different moments of life, different re-reading can be done of one's one past. In the analysis of the eight chosen works in this research, five belongings were highlighted: religious, family, socioeconomic, professional, and regional.

Religious belonging

Out of the eight autobiographies analyzed, in only one, written by a woman, the religious belonging is chosen as the axis of the narrative.

In *Sem medo de se encontrar* (2003), Gonçalves, who writes at 73 years old, re-reads her life, from the knowledge she acquired through the philosophy Seicho-No-Ie⁹ and the various religious readings and experiences lived in her trajectory, as spiritualism and Catholicism. Therefore, her narrative is marked by a religious syncretism that, in the text, is translated by several quotations of those doctrines, but also in the interpretation of her past experiences with a religious bias and the overcoming of emotional difficulties through religion, as in the excerpt bellow:

I knew I was not a pretty child, because I never heard those words. On the contrary: once, I was with my mother in an amusement park and I got a bit red elephant in a draw. A lady, that was also participating in the sweepstake, looked at me and said: 'What an ugly won!'. At the time, been ugly has taken away the joy of the present I got, and the saddest is: every time I looked at the red elephant, I remembered the 'ugly girl'. Today there is no red elephant nor an ugly girl...There is an adult being, who has learned to search beauty in the greatness of life, in which we are joined to God (Gonçalves, 2003, p. 30).

The author's motivation to write an autobiography is also related to her religious belonging. By considering that she is in a privileged place of knowledge and self-knowledge, a result of innumerable religious readings and experiences, Therezinha aims to deliver her teachings to people, so that they can know themselves better and have a more harmonious life. The influence of this religious syncretism is also in the background of the profile she tries to draw of herself: "I have the temperament of the sixth lightning, seen as the energy of devotion. This energy leads me to a more interiorized life, towards a spiritual life. I have always had a strong inclination for the Creative Life [...]". (Gonçalves, 2003, p. 72).

Family belonging

Two female authors chose family as the axes of their narratives. Teles (2003), in *Minha vida, meu tesouro!* writes as a demand from her children who wanted to pay an homage for her 80 years of age. Explicitly addressed to her family, the author tries to report her trajectory in an objective and concise way, describing facts and events lived by herself and her family, exalting the quality of her children, grandchildren, and relatives.

In her work, it is possible to see the tone which gives herself the role as the foundation and the base of the family. To build this belonging, the author starts the writing presenting her family tree and, during the text, she inserts 46 photos related to her family and poems written by her or by her husband about family situations lived in her trajectory, as bellow:

Thank you Lord,
 To be a wife and a friend is to be happy without measure
 Is to give and receive a sincere love...
 Is to harvest from love the fruits of life:
 Our beloved children, whom I love so much!

Thank you, Lord, for such beautiful children
 Who trust us, with such tenderness
 Beautiful eyes, smiling at us
 Angels from heaven, such pure souls!

⁹ Founded in 1930 and present worldwide, it is a Japanese philosophy, characterized by the search of spiritual self-development and harmony between nature and the human being. Information taken from <http://www.sni.org.br/oque.asp>

Thank you, Lord, for all we have:
 Courage, health, faith and love.
 Together with You, I know we will win,
 And for all this I bless you Lord! (Teles, 2003, p. 54).

Thus, when reading the work, it is possible to notice the author's intention to correspond to the expectations announced by the children, assuming the role of the woman, wife, mother, and grandmother (supposedly) resigned and happy, even when faced by difficult situations, as the responsibility of raising 15 children basically alone, as her husband was away due to work.

Similarly, Fernandes, writing at the age of 90, tells her story choosing family as an axis. In *Outono dourado em prosa e verso* (Fernandes, 2000), she tries to connect her memories and family stories with important historical facts, as the Aurea Law, the Free Womb Law¹⁰, the first and second world wars, among others. When Maria Cabral describes the house her grandparents lived, she refers to a "[...] two-story house, in colonial style, from the first half of the 19th century, built with cob walls, with very high walls all white, blue-painted doors, carved in hardwood" (Fernandes, 2000, p. 16). In another moment, referring to Filó, a character from the time of her grandparents, she writes: "Princess Isabel had already proclaimed the Aurea Law and Filó was now a free woman. With the other former slaves, she would participate in the party at the Farm, organized by them, with the help and support of Seu Chiquinho to celebrate this event" (Fernandes, 2000, p. 39). When talking about the hardships faced by her family, Maria Horta says:

To make things worse, with the end of the War in 1918, the great world crisis of 1929 was on its way. Thank God, my mom, despite all, had already overcome past sufferings and was always happy and singing. She had our grandfather's temper, she was happy even during the hardships, what gave us strength to continue (Fernandes, 2000, p. 87).

Socioeconomic belonging

An author chose the socioeconomic belonging as the axis of his narrative. Writing at the age of 68, Souza, in *Vá com Deus, mãe!* (2003), has his narrative marked by the resilience faced by the extreme poverty of his childhood. Due to the precarious conditions he lived with his family after the death of his mother, when he was 8, he started to live with a substitute family. It is through a tone of poverty overcome that the author re-signifies these events and rereads his life throughout the work, becoming, even, of the motivations for the autobiographical writing: "I also had in mind the sincere wish to instill in the readers that go through hardships the idea that they should always hope for better days" (Souza, 2003, p. 7).

Therefore, it is through the idea that he had a difficult childhood, marked by scarcity and sufferings, that Vicente de Souza tries to highlight his merit in reaching the condition of court judge and, in this sense, he considers himself to be a 'winner'. The author also bestows upon the humiliations lived due to his poverty, the cause of his shy, introverted, and insecure personality, what would have negatively influenced his professional work as a prosecutor and, later, as a judge:

I felt very insecure in the profession I was working. The life in the rural area, in extreme poverty, the loss of my mother at the age of eight and the consequent demonstrations of pity from those that came close to me, the eleven-year religious life with no contact to the outside world, all has contributed to hamper my work in a profession whose main weapon is combativeness, even certain aggressiveness and initiative of action. This was not my temper, a mano f extreme shyness, a consequence of these accumulated traumas (Souza, 2003, p. 160).

Professional belonging

Three authors invent themselves choosing work as the axis. Coelho wrote *Rascunho de uma vida* (2001) when he was 80 years old. Similarly to Vicente de Souza, the author also gives to his trajectory a tone of overcoming, built from a car accident suffered in 1949, when he was 28 years old. The accident, which according to the author has handicapped him and let him in a wheelchair, made him adapt to a new work and life dynamic. Differently from Vicente de Souza, Allyrio re-tells his life highlighting the value of work, which appears as the great propulsor of this overcoming. During the work, the author tries to characterize his existence as a "lived, worked, tired, but good life" (Coelho, 2001, p. 43). For example, this is how work is highlighted when the author justifies his writing:

¹⁰ Translators note: Sanctioned in May 3rd, 1888, the *Lei Áurea* (Aurea Law) officially ended slavery in Brazil. The *Lei do Ventre Livre* (Free Womb Law) was promulgated in September 28th, 1871, establishing that the children born from enslaved women would be declared free.

[...] with the strings of my heart and memory trembling, touched by the memories of a past sometimes sad, others happy, as if starting again in the pathway of life, who knows, who knows if I can keep it for myself or to my children and grandchildren, as a testimony of the marks which, as if with red-hot iron, work has inscribed on me, an example or an act of courage of whom, even if tripping and falling sometimes, so many times have risen and will rise, though he may fall again (Coelho, 2001, p. 25).

The strong references to work have also marked the author's youth memories. When he reminds them, Allyrio emphasizes the works he did (as *caandeiro*, cowboy, bread seller in Guanhões, engineer helper, municipal agent of statistics, a sailor clerk, teacher and principal at *Ginásio Pirapora*, and secretary at Buritizeiro city hall) highlighting, at the same time, his identity as a 'tireless worker'. It is also through this belonging that the author evaluates his current condition. At the age of 80, Allyrio establishes the void he feels away from work and confesses:

I miss a lot my colleagues, whose names I wish I had space to tell, and the lack of work, which suffocates me. Human beings should not be forced to retired, to idleness. At 80 years old, I feel I still have a lot to give, with the experience I had acquired and the will and the courage which tell me: "Go, Fight. Work". Work became a habit to me and I wish a lot to serve. I will live a lot, yet. I want to return to work and serve. This will happen, if the Lord wants (Coelho, 2001, p. 21).

Similarly, at 82 years old, Abram Ribeiro also narrates his life through work. His writing is organized around the professions he practiced during his life and the displacements because of them. In this sense, the author details each of his professions, as when he was around 13 and learned to be a shoemaker:

I started to learn how to be a shoemaker (perhaps to always have shoes), as at that time, it was very common to see people barefoot on the streets. It was not fashionable, it was poverty. In the shoemaker shop of Mr. Antônio Gomes and his son Misael, I stayed a short time, but it was good; I liked and learned a lot. Until today, I normally make small repairs in my shoes and my wife's. 'Knowledge does not take up space' (Ribeiro, 2002, p. 28).

We can see that, even though poverty could also be an 'electable' belonging to guide his narrative, work becomes central. Among the occupations he presents, there are: salesman at *Bazar Palmeirense*, a salesman at a store in Amparo do Serra, clerk in a store at *Mercado Central* in Belo Horizonte, secretary at a representations office, representant of *Ziper*, manager of a *Ziper – REOR* warehouse in Belo Horizonte. Abram also affirms that, after officially retiring when he was 60 years old, he started to work as a director at his son's medical clinic, a work he was still doing when writing the autobiography at 80 years old.

Work is also the axis through which Vicente Guabiroba constructs his autobiography at 65 years old. His narrative is centered in his accomplishments in the public life, as Vicente dedicated a great part of his life to politics; Thus, in different moments at the text, his self-invention is supported by the idea of a vocation to the public life that, according to him, follows him since childhood. When commenting on the lessons given by his primary school teacher, he says: "It was also with Dona Isabel that I have learned the first notions of sociability and community life. She used to give as an example, the community work to clean the river: - Pay close attention, everyone helps everyone for the sake of everyone. This creates a healthy coexistence" (Guabiroba, 2006, p. 24).

The idea of a gift to political work was also the justification given by the author when he decided to abandon the seminary, at the age of 20:

All of this made me happy and, besides the leadership, it aroused in me questions on the broader social organization, untouchable to me in the position I was. [...]

All those questions made me doubt my real vocation in this life. I didn't want to live on the seminary anymore, I need to go out into the world, to something more, I felt a new calling, a new mission. I decided then to abandon the seminary and become more active (Guabiroba, 2006, p. 40).

Though crossed by the political bias, it is through the realizations accomplished as the result of his work in the public life that Vicente Guabiroba organizes his narrative: "My dynamism was very, very big. Work was my fun and my leisure. I was always about to do something, to work for a cause, no rest or leniency" (Guabiroba, 2006, p. 142). To legitimize the image the author tries to draw about himself, among the photos and newspaper articles, the author adds a letter received by former president Juscelino Kubitscheck, when he ran to be a mayor of Guanhões. In the letter, Juscelino highlights his spirit as a 'devoted hard worker'.

Regional/geographical belonging

Out of the eight autobiography, the one of Olney Jardim, who wrote at the age of 80, is marked by regional belonging. The author was born in Araçuaí, in Vale do Jequitinhonha region (see table 1), and organizes his narrative relating passages of his life and experiences lived/built in this scenario. When talking about his childhood, for example, the author highlights the presence of River Araçuaí and the innumerable farms he visited, in his memories:

The Araçuaí river, as well as the farms, are closely related to my childhood. It was in Araçuaí river that I learned to swim. My mother was extremely afraid of the water of the river. My brothers didn't learn to swim. Because I was more rebellious, used to go to the house of my cousins Nala and Maninho, children of Narciso Colares, and swim in the river with them (Jardim, 2006, p. 34).

Thus, in *Trajatória de lutas* (Jardim, 2006), it is recurrent the description of places and events in Araçuaí. Therefore, a great part of the work is dedicated to memories related to the seven farms he frequented as a child, besides the floods that took place in the city.

It is interesting to notice that, by reinforcing his origins – Olney was born in one of the poorest areas in Minas Gerais –, the author tries to potentialize the position he acquired as a 'doctor' in Odontology, drawing the idea of a winner, which justifies the title of his work: *Trajatória de lutas* (Jardim, 2006).

We could say that the choice of family and religious belonging, made by women, as the narrative threads, were not by chance; to be a woman was/is in the historically built social imaginary, connected to the dedication to the domestic space. Especially in the period lived by the authors, in the beginning of their adulthood, middle of the 20th century, marriage and motherhood were the 'natural' paths of women (Bassanezi, 2004). A similar analysis can be done regarding religious belonging, strongly present in Therezinha Gonçalves's autobiography, but also a support element in the narrative of the other female authors. It is an instance that, despite (partially) public, is historically and legitimately given to women. They not only can but must frequent religious spaces, as it connects the feminine image to the good moral conduct. It is, more than that, appropriate to have this theme as central in women's lives (Perrot, 2007). Therefore, it is highly predictable that these dimensions occupied an important place in the self-invention of female authors.

On the other hand, the male authors took their socioeconomic and professional belongings as the guiding axes of their self-inventions. The concern to survive and work are, historically, connected to the male world. To the men it is important not only to choose this dimension as the axis of their life, but to talk about it in the autobiography is an important part of self-invention and self-publicity in writing. It is interesting how, in the analyzed data, the dimensions of work are connected to other dimensions of public space occupation, prestigious occupations, the insertion in sociability networks, and in the strict sense of politics.

Gender relations and the meaning of aging

The belonging identity chosen for self-reinvention are equally translated in the perspective the authors have on the process of aging. To the women analyzed in this paper, to be an old woman is a type of continuity (or re-signification) of the life they had (or invented) of dedication to the domestic space¹¹. Gonçalves (2003) dedicates two chapters of her autobiography to the theme of aging: '*Como vejo meus setenta anos*' (How I see my 70 years) and '*Nova experiência*' (New experience). The author affirms that she had found in religiousness and self-knowledge a way to positively see this phase of life, giving a personal merit to her position. Thus, for the author, it is through the will of each individual that feelings as 'lack of affection', 'dependence', and 'loneliness' can and should be substituted by sensations of 'accomplishment' and 'freedom' in the old age.

Maria Horta writes about what happened after she became a widow, at 68 years old: "[...] little by little, [I started] to think more clearly in my life, what I still could accomplish. Little by little, I started to feel light, as if I had wings and could fly. I didn't want to stop living, I wished to be independent, I aspired new accomplishments, that would make me feel a renewed, useful, intelligent, and happy person" (Fernandes,

¹¹ If we had analyzed autobiographies of women that, at that moment, worked professionally, participated in women's emancipation movements and occupied the public space we would certainly have another set of results and conclusions.

2000, p. 115). She wrote the chapter '*Nasceu Maria Horta*' (Maria Horta was born) dedicated to his involvement with the theater, after her 70 years old. To legitimize her trajectory, she narrates interviews she gave and TV ads she worked in and, when writing her autobiography at the age of 90, she felt updated and with good health. Similarly, Maria da Conceição Teles, whose children own a big chain of bookstores and, therefore, had a stable financial condition, when reached her old age, went to the Work Ministry to inform herself about retirement, indicating a concern with her independence, as something important to be cultivated.

According to Debert (2004), when compared to men, many women have a more 'positive' relation towards aging, seeing this phase of life as more gratifying than the others, as they have no more obligations with the households responsibilities and are free to experience more pleasant activities, each time more available in a context of social and cultural changes in this phase of life, besides an increasing tolerance towards women nowadays.

On its turn, to the men analyzed in this research, old age represents a rupture, as they start to have limits to occupy the public space and have to deal with several restrictions, often been restricted to the private spaces, leading to frustration and unhappiness. Aging is associated to loss and nostalgic memories of friends. The absence of dreams and realizations make them frequently evoke the past, when they were supposedly happier. According to Abram Ribeiro, "Now, older, I remember what has passed as the good times, in which we were happy and didn't know" (Ribeiro, 2002, p.103). Allyrio Coelho, to whom work was central in his self-invention, laments the forced retirement, saying he felt he still had much to contribute. Not working is, for him, to experience a meaningless life of idleness:

I worked twenty-five years in the Legislative Chamber. I retired when I was 70 years old and forty years in the public service. Retirement: nostalgia, depression, pain, illness, suffering. Laid down, the sleep does not come, the dawn does not come. Loneliness, sadness, a desire to cry come. I cried. Stuck at home, unable to go at the street alone, I craved for company. I will leave this situation and will walk as before. The beaten challenges inspire (Coelho, 2001, p. 47).

According to Beauvoir (1976), women's conditions have traditionally placed them in a subaltern place in relation to men, so aging does not represent such a great rupture when compared to men. The male condition is modified with time, and retirement is an important event that can be experienced with great suffering.

In the analyzed autobiographies, women invent themselves as adapted and free people, willing to keep improving and going through new experiences. The men, more nostalgic, more frequently mention the qualities of the past: the toys built by themselves (Souza, 2003), the outdoor games (Jardim, 2006), the quiet traffic in Belo Horizonte in the past (Ribeiro, 2002), in contrast to the excesses and inadequacies of the present.

Final remarks

This research allows us to say that the elders' gender belonging is one of the most significant factors in the process of self-invention and attribution to different meanings for aging, produced by autobiographical writing. We can say that, for this generational group, writing is not only about re-invent themselves through writing, but a way to appropriate of their own history, as the awareness of the end becomes increasingly present. In a moment that memory, little by little, fades away, becoming blurrier and the proximity to death is a reality, writing seems to 'grasp' something – to the limit, to 'grasp' life itself.

In this sense, some studies (Lourenço, Massi, & Lima, 2014; Dias & Campos, 2016), done mainly in the area of Psychology, pointed that the autobiographic writing is, for the elders, a resource not only to re-signify their own existence, but a way to express their thoughts and emotions, even for therapeutical ends.

In traditional societies, the elders have a key social role – as they are the ones with the knowledge and pass it on to the new generations –, what has been going away in complex contemporary societies. Could writing represent this attempt to fill this void – by turning the elder into someone productive, with something to say, something to transmit (as there is no ritual space for listening) that, at least supposedly, could be read (as s/he cannot be listened anymore) by the new generations? The analysis allows us to affirm that writing about their own lives – which can be potentialized in educational practices towards/constructed to/with the elders – can allow a re-positioning of the place held by these subjects in contemporary societies, marked, especially, by the omnipresence of written culture.

References

- Bassanezi, C. (2004). Mulheres dos anos dourados. In M. D. Priore (Ed.), *Historia das mulheres no Brasil* (p. 607-639). São Paulo, SP: Contexto.
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1976). *A velhice. A realidade incômoda*. São Paulo, SP; Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Difel.
- Borges, G. M., Campos, M.B. d, & Castro e Silva, L. G. d. (2015). Transição da estrutura etária no Brasil: oportunidades e desafios para a sociedade nas próximas décadas. In L. R. Ervatti, G. M. Borges, & A. de P. Jardim (Eds.), *Mudança demográfica no Brasil no início do século XXI. subsídios para as projeções da população* (p. 138-151). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: IBGE.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). A ilusão autobiográfica. In J. Amado, & M. d. M. Ferreira (Eds.), *Usos & abusos da história oral* (p. 183-191). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Editora da Fundação Getúlio Vargas.
- Bruner, J., & Weisser, S. (1995). A invenção do ser: a autobiografia e suas formas. In D. R. Olson, & N. Torrance (Eds.), *Cultura escrita e oralidade* (p. 141-161). São Paulo, SP: Ática.
- Coelho, A. N. (2001). *Rascunho de uma vida*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Mazza Edições.
- Debert, G. G. (2004). *A reinvenção da velhice: socialização e processos de reprivatização do envelhecimento*. São Paulo, SP: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo; Fapesp.
- Dias, M. C. H., & Campos, I. F. A. (2016). Pra não dizer que não falei dos velhos: reflexões sobre a autobiografia. In *Anais do 17ª Jornada de Extensão da UNIJUÍ* (p. 1-7). Ijuí, RS.
- El Far, A. (2006). *O livro e a leitura no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Jorge Zahar Ed.
- Fernandes, M. C. H. (2000). *Outono dourado em prosa e verso*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Líthera Maciel.
- Galvão, A. M. d. O., N., L. M. R. d., & Jinzenji, M. Y. (2018). O lugar dos pertencimentos do escritor-adulto na reconstrução das memórias de infância. *Pro-posições*, 29(1), 192-213. Doi: 10.1590/1980-6248-2016-0064
- Gomes, A. d. C. (2004). *Escrita de si, escrita da história*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: FGV.
- Gonçalves, T. (2003). *Sem medo de se encontrar*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Mazza Edições.
- Grossi, F. C. D. P. (2014). *Os diferentes 'lugares' que a leitura, a escrita e a aula de matemática têm na vida dos alunos que estão na terceira idade* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.
- Guabiroba, V. (2006). *Impressões de uma vida*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Gil Braz.
- Hernández, R. M. T. (2010). La autobiografía forma de escritura de la vida para el conocimiento de sí. In P. P. Vicenti, & M. H. M. Abrahão (Eds.), *Sentidos, potencialidades e usos da (auto)biografia* (p. 49-66). São Paulo, SP: Cultura Acadêmica.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]. (1928) *Recenseamento do Brazil* (Vol. IV). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: IBGE. Recuperado em 25 de março de 2019 de https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/monografias/GEBIS%20-%20RJ/Censode1920/RecenGeraldoBrasil1920_v4_Parte2_tomo2_Populacao.pdf
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]. (1959) *Enciclopédia dos municípios brasileiros* (Vol. XXV, Planejada e orientada por Jurandyr Pires Ferreira). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: IBGE. Recuperado em 25 março de 2019 de <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=227295>
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]. (2017). *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio Contínua. Educação 2016: PNAD contínua*. Recuperado em 25 de março de 2019 de https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/media/com_mediaibge/arquivos/95090ddfb63a3412f04fedafd6d65469.pdf
- Jardim, O. (2006). *Trajatória de lutas*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Sografe.
- Kroeff, B. M. (2012). A escrita (auto)biográfica: caminho reflexivo sobre trajetórias de formação. In *Anais do 9º Seminário de Pesquisa em educação da Região Sul* (p. 1-11). Caxias do Sul, RS. Recuperado em 25 de março de 2019 de <http://www.uces.br/etc/conferencias/index.php/anpedsul/9anpedsul/paper/viewFile/2682/509>
- Kuhlmann Jr., M. (1998). *Infância e educação infantil: uma abordagem histórica*. Porto Alegre, RS: Mediação.
- Lejeune, P. (2014). *O pacto autobiográfico: de Rousseau à Internet* (Jovita Maria Gerheim Noronha e Maria Inês Coimbra Guedes, Trad.). Belo Horizonte, MG: UFMG.

- Lopes, E. M. T. (2004). Memória e estudos autobiográficos. In M. H. M. B. Abrahão (Ed.), *A aventura (auto)biográfica: teoria e empiria* (p. 225-242). Porto Alegre, RS: Edipurs.
- Lourenço, R. C. C., Massi, G., & Lima, R. R. (2014). Trabalho com a linguagem e envelhecimento: uma busca por ressignificações de histórias de vida. *CEFAC*, 16(2), 672-678. DOI: 10.1590/1982-021620148013
- Manke, L. S. (2012). *História e sociologia das práticas de leitura: a trajetória de seis leitores oriundos do meio rural* (Tese de Doutorado). Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Pelotas.
- Marques, A. M. (2004). Velho/idoso: construindo o sujeito da terceira idade. *Revista Esboços*, 11(11), 65-71. Doi: 10.5007/%25x
- Melo, J. F. d. (2008). *Modos e condições de participação nas culturas do escrito: Pedro Nava e a formação na família (1903-1913)* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.
- Oliveira, M. K. d. (1999). Jovens e adultos como sujeitos de conhecimento e aprendizagem. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 1(12), 59-73.
- Oliveira, M. K. d. (2004). Ciclos de vida: algumas questões sobre a psicologia do adulto. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 30(2), 211-229. Doi: 10.1590/S1517-97022004000200002
- Passeggi, M. d. C., Vicentini, P. P., & Souza, E. C. d. (2013). *Pesquisa (auto)biográfica: narrativas de si e formação*. Curitiba, PR: CRV.
- Peralva, A. (1997). O jovem como modelo cultural. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 1(5/6), 15-24.
- Perrot, M. (2007). *Minha história das mulheres*. São Paulo, SP: Contexto.
- Pinto, H. M. (2015). *Entre a casa e a rua. Uma história da mocidade de Diamantina-MG no final do século XIX* (Tese de Doutorado). Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.
- Ribeiro, A. (2002). *Minha vida & crônicas*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Sografe.
- Sarmiento, M., & Gouvêa, M. C. (2008). *Estudos da infância: educação e práticas sociais*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes.
- Souza, V. (2003). *Vá com deus, Mãe!* Belo Horizonte, MG: Imprensa Oficial de Minas Gerais.
- Teles, M. d. C. d. O. (2001). *Histórias da vovó: Contos populares passados de pais para filhos*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Leitura.
- Teles, M. d. C. d. O. (2003). *Minha vida, meu tesouro!* Belo Horizonte, MG: Redação.
- Thies, V. G., Manke, L. S., & Peres, E. (2009). Prática de leitura e escrita no cotidiano de uma família de agricultores do sul do Rio Grande do Sul. *Língua Escrita*, 1(6), p. 43-60.
- Tomio, N. A. O., & Facci, M. G. D. (2009). Adolescência: uma análise a partir da psicologia sócio-histórica. *Revista Teoria e Prática da Educação*, 12(1), 89-99. DOI: 10.4025/tpe.v12i1.14059

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Larissa Maria de Resende Neiva: Graduated in pedagogy at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* (2014), master's degree in education by the same university (2017). Currently works as a teacher on the early years of Elementary School in *Prefeitura Municipal de Belo Horizonte*.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2512-9372>

E-mail: larysmaty@hotmail.com

Mônica Yumi Jinzenji: Graduated in psychology at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* (1999), master's (2002), and doctor's degree (2008) in Education by the same university. Professor at *Faculdade de Educação* at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*, working on undergraduate and graduate programs (Master and Doctorate). Did an inter-university exchange at University of Michigan and at Indiana University (2006-2007), United States and a postdoctoral study at *Università degli Studi di Torino* (2018-2019), in Italy. Associated researcher to *GEPHE (Centro de Pesquisas em História da Educação- Research Center on History of Education)* and the Group of Studies and Research on Written Culture. Develops researches in the areas of History of Education in the interface with History of reading and History of Written culture, focusing on: women education, periodicals of 19th century, history of reading and writing practices, history of youngsters.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3639-9389>

E-mail: monicayj@ufmg.br

Ana Maria de Oliveira Galvão: Graduated in pedagogy at *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco* (1990), master's (1994), and doctor's degree (2000) in Education at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*. Professor at *Faculdade de Educação* at *UFMG*, working on undergraduate and graduate programs (Master and Doctorate). Did an inter-university exchange at Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (1998-1999), in France, and a postdoctoral senior study at Northern Illinois University (2012-2013), United States. Her interests focus on History of written culture, History of education, and Research methodology. Has written several book chapters, articles in journals, and books.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9063-8267>

E-mail: anamariadeogalvao@gmail.com

NOTE:

The authors were responsible for conceptualizing the article, its analysis and data interpretation, writing and critically revise the content of the manuscript and, also, the approval of the final version to be published.