

## FEMALE GENEALOGY: SILENT DIALOGUE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

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### Abstract

The methodology of this article, developed along the lines of Cultural History, is a biographical-narrative approach. Among other concepts, it discusses tradition, innovation, female genealogy from the perspective of new ways to focus on History of Education. It considers memory both as a discourse and as a presence in objects and material culture. An object stored and gifted from generation to generation, to be used by the women of a same family at the time of childbirth is analyzed. It problematizes the topic of human formation in spaces of family relations and in non-schooled modes, and asks what the sisters teach each other, what learning's occur in the relationships between women who are neighbors, friends, cousins, sisters, nieces.

Key-words: history of education, tradition, memory.

### GENEALOGIA FEMININA: DIÁLOGO SILENCIOSO ENTRE GERAÇÕES

### Resumo

Este artigo, desenvolvido na linha da História Cultural, adota como metodologia uma abordagem biográfico-narrativa. Discute, dentre outros conceitos, os de tradição, inovação, genealogia feminina na perspectiva de novos enfoques para a História da Educação. Considera a memória, tanto como um discurso, quanto como uma presença nos objetos e cultura material. Analisa um objeto guardado e presenteado de gerações em gerações a ser usado pelas mulheres de uma mesma família na hora do parto. Problematisa o tema da formação humana em espaços de relações familiares e em modalidades não escolarizadas e questiona o que as irmãs ensinam umas às outras, que aprendizagens ocorrem nas relações entre mulheres que são vizinhas, amigas, primas, tias, sobrinhas.

Palavras-chave: história da educação, tradição, memória.

## **GENEALOGIA FEMENINA: DIALOGO SILENCIOSO ENTRE GENERACIONES**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo, desarrollado en el contexto de la Historia Cultural, adopta como metodología una temática biográfica-narrativa. Trata los conceptos de tradición, innovación, genealogía femenina desde la perspectiva de nuevos enfoques para la Historia de la Educación. Considera a la memoria, tanto como un recurso, así como una presencia en los objetos y en la cultura material. Analiza un objeto guardado y transmitido de generaciones en generaciones, para ser usado por las mujeres de una misma familia a la hora del parto. Discute sobre el tema de la formación humana en espacios de relaciones familiares en modalidades no escolarizadas y cuestiona lo que las hermanas se enseñan unas a otras, que aprendizajes surgen en las relaciones entre mujeres que son vecinas, amigas, primas, tías, sobrinas, hijas, madres, abuelas.

Palabras-clave: historia de la educación, tradición, memoria.

## **GÉNÉALOGIE FEMININ: DIALOGUE ENTRE LES GENERATIONS**

### **Résumé**

La méthodologie de cet article, développé le long des lignes de l'histoire culturelle, une approche biographique narrative. Parmi les autres concepts, il aborde la tradition, l'innovation, la généalogie féminine dans la perspective de nouvelles façons de se concentrer sur l'histoire de l'éducation. Il considère la mémoire à la fois comme un discours et une présence dans les objets et la culture matérielle. Analysé un objet stocké et doué de génération en génération, pour être utilisé par les femmes d'une même famille au moment de l'accouchement. Il problématise le sujet de la formation humaine dans des espaces de relations familiales et dans les modes non-scolarisés, et demande à ce que les sœurs enseignent l'autre, ce qui se produit apprentissages dans les relations entre les femmes qui sont des voisins, des amis, cousins, cousines, sœurs, nièces.

Mots-clé: histoire de l'éducation, de la tradition, la mémoire.

This text<sup>1</sup> involves a perspective of cultural and social history, focusing on a topic situated at the edge of the great debates of current society, at the intersection between female genealogies, biographization, tradition, innovation and History of Education. Its empiria is a material object, namely: the *Breve* which affords protection at the time of giving birth, present in the daily life of the women of a family at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resignified here in the context of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The resignification also shows my position as a university professor connected to the field of History of Education and the possibility of problematizing new topics in this field. This text deals with a specificity of the female world involving age, health, beauty and motherhood.

### Discussions about the concept of tradition and innovation

I take support for the discussion of tradition and innovation from some authors in various fields of knowledge, such as Anthropology, History, Sociology, Philosophy:

The word tradition comes from the Latin: *traditio*. The verb is *tradire*, and it means mainly to hand something over to another person, or passing from one generation to the other generation. Secondly, the dictionarists refer to the relationship between the verb *tradire* and oral and written knowledge. This means that through tradition, something is said and what is said is handed from generation to generation. Thus, we somehow become part of a tradition from which it is very difficult to get away. In this way, the spoken or written element delivers something that passes from one generation to another, and this constitutes the tradition - and constitutes us (Bornheim, 1997, p. 18).

In this passage by Bornheim (1987) the meaning of tradition is clearly stability, as transmission of something from one person to another, from one generation group to another, of a bond between the past and the present. It is the traditional concept of tradition that involves transmission of a message without changes.

Expanding this approach, Bornheim (1987) highlights notions of prediction and safety that accompany the concept of tradition:

The will of tradition is that it wants itself to be tradition, and it wants itself so totally tradition that it claims to be eternal, determining not only the past and the present but the future itself, therefore everything is predictable, anticipation is demanded: everything will always be essentially identical, without any difficulties regarding the possible outbreak of alterity. Tradition thus claims to be very secure - we are part of the security itself, we live in a response, and we are assured in it, it is our principle. (Bornheim, 1997, p. 18)

Security, predictability, pre-determination are notions that accompany the idea of tradition which also involves values that constitute a society, values that significantly frame human behavior.

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally written to participate in the panel on Inventions and tradition in history of education, in which Marta Maria Chagas de Carvalho (USP) and Maria del Mar del Pozo Andrés (UAH/Spain) participated. This panel was included in the 6<sup>o</sup> Brazilian Congress of History of Education, held at the Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil, may 16-19 2011. The original version has been substantially modified.

In this traditional dimension of tradition the issue of authenticity is involved, and to what extent a tradition shapes individuals and groups through fixed and repeated practices.

These are strong statements by Bornheim (1987), namely, that we are constituted by tradition, that we are organized by tradition, that it is our principle and that we are assured in it. It sounds as though we are absolutely and irrevocably passive and ruled by traditions. From this standpoint, this topic may be exhausted in History and in History of Education.

There are, however, authors who propose a less restrictive comprehension of tradition, involving repetition, but also alterations, modifications. Hobsbawn (1997), coining the term *invention of tradition*, articulates the dimensions of reiteration and modification that could initially be considered opposed, and not contained in tradition:

The term invented tradition means a set of practices that are normally regulated by tacitly or openly accepted rules; these practices of a ritualistic or symbolic nature aim at inculcating certain values and rules of behavior through repetition, which automatically implies a continuity of the past [...]. In a few words, they are reactions to new situations that either take on the form of a reference to previous situations, or establish their own past through almost mandatory repetition. (Hobsbawn, 1997, p. 9)

Invention of the traditions, thus, expresses the understanding that stable, almost immutable structures that organize aspects of life are under tension in contrast with changes and new contexts. Hobsbaw (1997, p. 10), goes on to say, “the objective and characteristic of traditions, including the invented ones, is invariability. The real or forged past to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices such as repetition.”

A certain dynamic permeates the concept of invention of tradition, on considering the impossibility of separating tradition from innovation. Invented tradition is a broad idea that accepts, if we may say so, gradings in terms of its institutionalization and permanence in time; “It includes both truly invented constructed and formally institutionalized ‘traditions’, and those that appeared in a manner that is more difficult to locate in a limited and given period of time” (Hobsbawn, 1997, p. 9).

The idea of invented traditions suggests several associated elements. It considers the powers of the groups or individuals that established them - political, symbolic, economic - the groups that institute them and those that maintain them - elites or subaltern groups, women, groups of excluded - the forms of communication and dissemination, the ensemble of resources involved in this. Viñao (2002) uses the term *diffusion* synonymously with applying an innovation in several contexts, considering that diffusion always presupposes modification or adaptation. He emphasizes that the movement of renewal, of innovation is not homogeneous, and that it is impossible to avoid conflicts, deviations and dissidences within an innovative movement.

Invented traditions can become associated with institutionalization processes, the existence of practices that are present in a local and global sphere, and similar rules that have occurred or are occurring in other places. About the ambiguities between local and global, between cultures with more or less strong traditions, Burke (2003) refers to the cultural homogenization and creolization of the world. The author says that it is necessary to have various ways to expose relations between cultures “we need various [terms] to bring justice both to the human agent (as in the case of ‘appropriation’ or ‘cultural

tradition'), and to the modifications of which the agents are conscious (as in the case of hybridization and creolization)" (Burke, 2003, p. 63). The idea of cultural homogenization considers that at the global level we see a reduction of diversity, although "for the individual there are more choices, there is more freedom, an expansion of options" (Burke, 2003, p.109). About the creolization of the world, the author also adds:

We are seeing the emergence of a new form of cultural order, a global cultural order, but that [...] can fast diversify, adapting to different local environments. In other words, the hybrid forms of today are not necessarily a stage on the road to the homogeneous global culture (Burke, 2003, p. 115)

What Burke (2003) calls creolization is the result of diversification and adaptation processes which approaches the idea of diffusion of innovation in several contexts dealt with by Viñao (2002), which is also renewal, adaptation, that occur through clashes, deviations, infidelities.

Traditions are, however, a reference, a substrate for the innovations. Viñao (2002), referring to the movement of pedagogical renewal in Spain, in the 1960s, emphasizes the importance of traditions as references, as a point of support for innovation. For him, the weaknesses of such movements are the result of the absence of a tradition, in which the practices of renewal could support it self or serve as reference. In the absence of own references, there was a search in the practices of other countries. This external search for practices of renewal is not, however, free of adaptations, innovations, which prevent the possibility of a global cultural order, as Burke (2003) says. Viñao (2002) and Burke (2003) do not use the same terminology, but debate an ensemble of ideas that are close to each other.

I conclude, therefore, that associating invention with tradition suggests, inversely, that invention is contaminated by tradition, repetition, and continuism, so that not only is tradition altered by traces of invention. Invention is consolidated, receives adhesions, is institutionalized and traditionalized and becomes common, usual, establishing security by repetition, and intending to become eternal as the most traditional tradition.

Peter Burke, therefore, helps understand the less restrictive dimensions of tradition. He provokes us to ask: "when, under which circumstances, is a tradition no longer a tradition?" (2007, p. 17). In this question is the perspective that a tradition does not remain always the same, it is transformed, modified, adapted. It takes on traits of actuality or becomes blurred and is slowly abandoned, no longer being transmitted from generation to generation, or it is transmitted with restrictive changes. Peter Burke (2003) reiterates Hobsbawn's notion of invention of tradition, saying that every "innovation is a kind of adaptation " (p.17) It is in this sense that I stated earlier that invention is contaminated by tradition and that invention can become traditionalized by institutionalization and repetition.

Now, if there is no clear, firm cultural frontier between groups, there are also no frontiers between the different traditions of these groups: "Sometimes apparent innovation hides the persistence of tradition; at other times, the apparent continuity disguises innovations" (Burke, 2007, p. 20).

The author, therefore, discussing the processes of hybridization and culture, contributes to expanding this debate. Culture includes attitudes, mind sets, values and their expressions, and implementations or symbolizations in artifacts, practices and

representations: he says that “all cultures are involved with each other” and there is no unique or pure culture, all are hybrid, heterogeneous. According to him,

the price of hybridization, especially in the unusually rapid form that is characteristic of our times, includes the loss of regional traditions and local roots. Certainly it is not by chance that the current era of cultural globalization [...] is also the era of nationalistic or ethnic reactions. (Burke, 2003, p. 20)

The author underscores the tension between tradition and hybridism to the point of asking: “Can one speak of a hybrid tradition?” (Burke, 2007, p. 18), “since we find hybridization almost everywhere in history?” (Burke, 2003, p. 20). Cultural hybridism occurs in different domains of human life: in festivities, in music styles, in architecture, in the literature, in dietary practices and, logically, in traditions:

In other words, all cultural traditions today are in more or less in direct contact with alternative traditions... Consequently, traditions are like building sites, always under construction and reconstruction, whether the individuals and groups that are part of these traditions realize this or not. (Burke, 2003, p. 102)

One may say that the perspective of authenticity and permanence of traditions is unthinkable for the creativity of the reception and the renegotiation of meanings that each individual group articulates in their time and socio-historical space. Tradition from the perspective of reception takes into account, according to Burke (2007), a double process of decontextualization and recontextualization, of adaptation. Adaptation consists in loaning parts of a culture to incorporate them into a traditional culture, which is also called *bricolage* or appropriation or reutilization.

What are the approaches between Hobsbawn (1997) and Burke (2007) in dealing with the subject of tradition?

Burke (2007), calling attention to decontextualization and adaptation, emphasizes the recipient and their active role, and Hobsbawn (1997), referring to invented tradition, performs a greater problematization of the “it has always been and will always be so” (p. 1) perspective, the origins of tradition.

A large part of Burke’s discussions (2007), converges with those of Hobsbawn (1997). Adaptation sometimes arises to conserve old practices under new conditions, or to use old models for new purposes, however, “innovation does not become less new because it can easily be coated with an antique character (Hobsbawn, 1997, p. 13).

The invented tradition, coined by Hobsbawn, covers change and repetition. Burke (2007) does not refer to invented tradition, but to hybrid tradition, highlighting the interfaces with alternative traditions and the importance of the reception and movements of decontextualization and recontextualization of old, consolidated traditions.

### **Tradition and innovation in studies on History of Education**

Viñao (2002) contributes to the field of History of Education by discussing change, reforms, innovations and school culture.

In his book *Sistemas educativos, culturas escolares y reformas*, Viñao (2002) discusses the relationship between school culture and innovation. Educational innovation,

like change in school, is an adventure that is apparently not articulated and even “opposes the idea or even the existence of a school culture, of an ensemble of traditions and practices, with a certain continuity and permanence over time” (Viñao, 2002, p. 111). This opposition between innovation and school culture, since the latter is characterized by permanence and continuity, is not so real, because innovation is situated in the face of established cultures, that is, it innovates and renovates itself according to the context and the circumstances. Furthermore, “innovation and change create their own culture, their continuities, persistences and traditions” (Viñao, 2002, p. 111). This means that “innovation moves between the need for establishing continuity and the also need for always challenging both theory and practice” (Viñao, 2002, p. 112).

Viñao (2002) refers to the dilemma between continuity and change - “continuity does away with innovation and change by consolidating them” (p. 112). He highlights the need to consider the relationship between diffusion of innovation and the processes of adaptation: “diffusion or applying an innovation in a context different from that in which it originated - and by other teachers and students - always implies its interpretation and adaptation” (2002, p. 112). Thus Viñao brings the debate between tradition and innovation for the analysis of school cultures versus innovation and change to the sphere of History of Education. The adaptation processes do not necessarily operate in contraposition to innovative proposals:

The success or failure of all reforms, changes or innovations depends firstly on being able to interpret, accommodate or adapt them to the context and, secondly, on how it is done, since the said process includes all the way from creative and intelligent adaptation to ritualism, simple rejection or evasiveness which distorts the initial intentions. (Viñao, 2002, p. 119)

I believe that Viñao (2002) in some way discusses the processes of appropriation, when referring to educational reforms. This author does not formally pronounce appropriation, but the statement that the diffusion of innovation always implies interpretation and adaptation, and its highlighting of conflicts, dissidences and movements of accommodation suggests that, from his point of view, it is necessary to consider interpretive and insubordinate micromovements, even in the sphere of educational innovations.

The traditional view of tradition might simply record: “education does not change because the teachers teach as they were taught, or because of their conservative, traditional, routine, accommodated mindset, that is even recalcitrantly opposed to changes” (Viñao, 2002, p. 117), or describe the inertia generated by a certain bureaucracy, emphasizing that “over time, and through their own dynamics and internal forces, the institutions and educational systems generate a few school cultures - like institutional sediments - and some traits or tendencies that, to a greater or lesser degree are imposed on the protagonists or actors of education” (Viñao, 2002, p. 118). However, this traditional conception that inspires these descriptions does not take into account the capacity for normative unfaithfulness (Lima, 2011), the strategies of autonomy of groups and individuals, the movement generated by exercising local powers, the regional rearticulations and the actors’ capacity for appropriation, dialogue and negotiation.

The consideration of the topic of traditions leads from the traditional concept of tradition to those of invented tradition, hybrid tradition, traditions as areas in construction,

reception of tradition, adaptation, decontextualization and recontextualization of tradition. The discussion of tradition advances in a comparison with the idea of innovation, whose existence is erected over a prior reference, something that already exists, a tradition and, on the other hand, innovation creates its own tradition.

This set of concepts inspires and has resonance in the construction of objects of study in History and in History of Education. These present themselves under the tension of new topics, new approaches and methodological procedures.

Peter Burke (1992), intending to describe the New History, presents it briefly in six points, indicating what it is in contrast with the traditional paradigm of history: 1) traditionally History concerns Politics, involving the State, emphasizing the national and international perspective; New History takes an interest in all of human activity. 2) The traditional historians think of History as essentially a narrative of the events and New History works with marginal topics and considers the subjectivities. 3) Traditional history offers a view from the top; great men, great generals, great statesmen, great books. New History seeks to reflect on History seen from below. 4) In the traditional paradigm, History should be based on “documents, official records, preserved in archives, which generally express the official point of view” (Burke, 1992, p. 13). 5) The traditional paradigm proposes a type of questions that addresses the event and individual actions. New History questions processes, seeks dissidences, adaptations, movements of subaltern social groups. 6) Furthermore, the traditional paradigm considers that History is objective and intends to inform the facts as they really happened, but New History considers various voices, with a great contribution from oral history.

The points used by Burke (1991) to summarize the impact of New History on the traditional paradigm of History contribute to thinking about the History of Education, the expansion of its field and the perspectives of understanding tradition and innovation. New objects provide new methodological demands, provoke revisitation or a search for new sources -diaries, memoirs, copybooks, printed matter, school books, popular reading material, personal material. New objects require a different theoretical-conceptual support - gender, ethnicity - and lead to approaches to other fields of knowledge - sociology, anthropology, psychology. New objects inspire different methodological approaches and a distance from the merely narrative perspective of events and policies of State over the long term and macro approaches. History of the school disciplines, history of childhood, are examples of new approaches, as well as the study of forms of Education which are performed beyond the institutionalized spaces of the systems of education, outside the schools and classrooms.

A historical analysis of the changes in education involves dealing with issues that are difficult to solve. I demanded that the researcher focus on other elements besides the irregularities. A new focus on History of Education would lead to pointing out discontinuities in the historical explanation, and also to asking about other cultures - of the employees, of the lunch workers, of the managers, as well as of the teachers, the students, the families.

The new focus on History of Education can make us look at the specific traditional cultures of the different schools, of each academic level, of each group of actors, and to pay attention to the generations of actors that make up the institution. A new focus would provide the opportunity to discuss strategies that have not been characterized within the



traditional pedagogy, but that would imply a formation, more horizontal, solidary and collective educational experiences among the neighborhood, colleagues and family members, for instance.

Viñao (2002) points to the need to proceed to historical-comparative analyses on the innovation processes in the educational systems, also considering school cultures and sub-cultures when faced with reforms:

There is a lack of [...] studies on the conditions that make it easier or not for these processes to appear, together with the people who begin or promote them, the institutions, places and context that constitute the focus from which they irradiate, and the ways they are diffused, stopped, transformed and disappear or are slowed down. (Viñao, 2002, p. 115)

The author proposes instigating questions. At what levels of the educational systems did the innovations identified by the historians appear? Was the prevalence of studies about this or that level of education constituted due to the preferences of the researchers or through the peculiar characteristics of these levels of education, or due to both aspects? He says that

we need further studies on concrete processes of reform and innovation, performed from a comparative perspective, that will teach us both about their origin, diffusion and evolution, and about the relations that exist between them and between both, and the social, political and technological changes. (Viñao 2002 p. 117)

Viñao (2002) thus instigates a History of Education that will show the innovative movements, the resignifications of traditional practices, the appropriation processes that recontextualize the traditions.

### **The *Breve*: tradition, innovation, appropriation and recontextualization of a female object**

The following passage is a contribution to show forms of sociability and formation among women, considering a small object made out of cloth and paper, from which one interprets the grandmother-mother-daughter relationship at a special moment that does not occur simultaneously for all of them, since they belong to different generations, but to each of them at specific historical times: pregnancy and childbirth. It is a type of genealogical narrative that talks about women of a same family and somehow expresses the needs for mirroring and closeness on the one hand, and for differentiation and distance on the other, between grandmothers, mothers and daughters. The discussion about female genealogies contains a silent imbrication of the ideas of tradition, innovation, reception of traditions, decontextualization and recontextualization of traditions in the face of contexts that are different for each woman and each generation.

The importance of the female genealogies is highlighted by Luce Irigaray (2002, p. 1), “and affirming the difference, that the woman can liberate herself from the dominance of the male culture over her. To cultivate this difference she must define the mediations that are her gender’s: at a level of language, of law, of religion, of genealogy”. For her it is necessary “to bring back from oblivion the female genealogies’, not to cover up the figure of the father, but to strengthen “the identity of both” (Irigaray, 20002, p. 6).

For Almeida (2004, p. 2),

the texts that narrate the relations of the female protagonists with their peers in the family, be they mothers, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, granddaughters, great-grandmothers, sisters, godmothers, etc. are genealogical. Texts that narrate the relations of women with other women who are not part of their direct family ancestors or descendants, women who are decisive in their lives and biographies, whether they are students, teachers, neighbors, nannies, servants, friends, therapists, etc. And the texts that talk about the protagonists, readers or authors, that dialogue with authors and readers of other ages, in a procedure whose objective is to establish a line, the possibility of a literary ancestry.

The same author (Almeida, 2003), analyzing female genealogies in the field of literature, uses the support of authors who refer to the relationship between mother and daughter as bittersweet because of the permanent tension between seeming and being different, or as a connection by fusion, of ambivalent characteristics. The author asks: "What could women inherit from other women - grandmothers, mothers, daughters, great-grandmothers, aunts, godmothers - when the latter are not even masters of their own names, fates, and even less of their wills or patrimony?" (Almeida 2003, p. 22). In this part of the text I analyze a type of inheritance among the women of my family, an object that accompanies us at the time of giving birth. Not an economically valuable inheritance, important on the market. It is an inheritance of belonging, sharing, ascendancy, resemblance, women's spaces.

This text, therefore, is genealogical in the first sense presented by Almeida (2003). The narrative I establish involves my memories of something my mother did and information she offered, thoughts established in the context of my family and in the dialogue with memories of the other women who are part of my family constellation. It is also biographical insofar as I, the author of this text, contextualize myself, narrate my view and construct meanings about this object of memory. As Suárez (2009 p. 17) says: "Every narration or autobiographical testimony already presuppose in themselves interpretation, construction and re-creation of feelings, readings of one's own world and of one's own life."

Yes, this article is permeated by my visions. As Weiduschadt and Fischer (2009, p. 7) say "memory depends on the meanings that the person who testifies give to their reminiscences, they will evidence what gives it most meaning". On the other hand this part of the article is a retrieval of memories, mine and those of other family members - people and objects - since "memory besides being a product of discourse is also present in the objects, the artifacts, the material culture, and it is possible to remember by establishing relations with objects produced and preserved by the groups" (Weiduschadt; Fischer, 2009, p. 79).

On the one hand, this passage constructs a reflection on the line of female genealogy involving childbirth, a situation which women share among themselves, but that in their situation as grandmothers, mothers and daughter they do not experience together, but at different times of existence. Times of existence that are also historical and differentiated in terms of familial, socio-cultural, political and health care conditions. On the other hand, it is also a unique auto-biographical writing, drafted by me, the author of this article, a woman, and who in writing this interpretative-narrative demonstrates her female

identity, her professional situation, and attempts a construction of meaning regarding the *Breve* in a dialogue with what she supposes were practices of other women in her family - her grandmother and her mother. Here processes of construction of myself are expressed by recording feelings, space-time and relational contextualization which are also processes of singularization and appropriation when dealing with practices prevailing within the familial social space and, especially, with my grandmother, great aunt and mother. As Halbwachs (1990, p. 51) says “each individual memory is a point of view about the collective memory, which this point of view changes according to the place I occupy there, and that this place itself changes according to the relations I maintain with other means.”

In terms of female genealogy, this text is an effort of individual memory that is based on an object kept by women as a monument, made by a woman, my great-aunt, and valued by several generations of women - my grandmother and mother, perhaps the aunts - who maintained it as a practice, a keepsake and memory. This text has traits of the life history methodology, although no tape recorders were used, nor were transcripts of interviews made. The information obtained from my mother was in the form of conversation - daily conversations are often modalities of construction of one self, of identity and of formation - as reminiscences and memories of the past. It is known that “memory has to do with the time lived, and therefore subjects who participated in an educational process invent and reinvent their memories” (Weiduschadt; Fischer 2009, p. 75). Although the authors cited speak of educational school processes, in this text there is evidence of an informal educational process, on the lines of a family tradition that is presented below, and therefore with the formative impact invented and reinvented by different generations.

Preliminarily I seek the meaning of the word *Breve*, and then I present the object of women and how it reached this research circuit.

*Breve* appears to have various meanings, indicating both superstition, spells and prayers and religiosity. The *Guia das religiões populares do Brasil* - guide of popular religions of Brazil (Gaspar, 2002) characterizes *Breve* as artisanal. They are little cloth bags with different uses and spells that wrap around and protect magical objects, prayers and elements used to cast spells. The *Breve* for health is a small bundle with salt or herbs - the salt makes all spells last longer. The *Breve* made for protection is also a small cloth bag, triangular or square, containing coal, garlic, shells, buzio conchs, teeth - from wild boars, milk teeth - coins, stones, herbs, wood, iron, ribbons or threads. The *Breve* for love, is usually heart shaped, with red or pink cloth, and its content may consist of appropriate herbs, stones, coins, shells, prayers.

In the popular Catholic tradition, there are small prayers and requests written on paper, left at church altars or in front of images of saints to which a person is devoted. These prayers are also called *breves rezas*, prayer breves or devotional scapulars.

The word *Breve* may have come from *breviário*, which is a prayer book used by the catholic clergy:

The *breviário* is a medieval compilation of several books: The *antiphonary* or book of short verses (antiphones), *psalter* or book of psalms, *lectionary* or book of lessons, *martyrology* or book of martyrs and *hymnary* or book of hymns. It was instituted in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries for daily prayer of the

mendicant orders, whose members could not carry a 'library' on their travels. The breviary helped to privatize and clericalize the daily prayers of the Church. (The harper collins dictionary of religion, 1995, p 196)

I understand granny Alayde's *Breve* has nothing to do with the breviary, since its use is occasional, at childbirth. The breviary follows the concept of a book in its materiality, it is handled and read daily, used by the catholic clergy.

The *Breve* that I shall analyze now appears to be a mixture of the *breve* of the popular religions and the *breves rezas*, devotional scapular, left on the altars of the Catholic churches, although made to be used personally by women specifically at the time of giving birth.

Margaret Mead (1980), in her work *Culture and commitment*, discusses the nature of culture and the role of the different generations in its transmission, considering the contexts of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She begins the work with an inspiring dedication "to the mother of my father and to the daughter of my daughter" (Mead, 1980, s. p.). This dedication suggests a genealogy, it points to links with tradition and with innovation. It announces the chain between the past generations, the present one and the younger one, which is being born, and the promise of a future that it represents. Frankly, I almost read *To the mother of my mother and to the daughter of my daughter* - this is not a citation but a modified reading that I make of M. Mead. And why this mistaken reading of what is really written? Because I have hardly any objects from the mother of my father, almost all memory supports are gone, but I know many stories about the mother of my mother. These are stories that are connected to objects, and not to oral narratives or to written documents or photographs.

I will narrate one of them here. When I was expecting my oldest son, one day in January, my mother gave me a gift saying - this is a *Breve* to protect you at the time of giving birth. It belonged to my mother and has been with all the women in the family.

First of all, one should underscore my mother's attitude and her valuing of what belonged to my grandmother. The grandmother in this case is the referent, it indicates an origin, a descendance, a stabilizing belonging:

One of the fundamental links in the chain of narratives of female genealogies is the figure of the grandmother. If we look at the symbology of the grandmother in the literary imaginary, from the most ancient to the most contemporaneous, we find the old matriarch, the protector, the holder of wisdom, the person responsible for passing (on) to the grandchildren the tradition and experience of the women in the family. Also in this imaginary, the grandmother is a marked figure, a mediator of conflicts, a bearer of the memorial legacy, responsible for the extension of the lines of ancestry, a bridge connecting an identity or cultural past. (Bezerra and Figueiredo, 2009, p. 3)

Saying the passage that I highlighted from Mead (1980, s. p.) in the way I read it - "to the mother of my mother and to the daughter of my daughter" - the role of grandmother is intensely highlighted without citing this name; It is an intergenerational phrase that emphasizes the grandmother when saying "to the mother of my mother", but also suggests the grandmother who is or will be the one who reads/writes the phrase - "for the daughter of my daughter".

The *Breve* was not offered solemnly or festively, nor was the object wrapped in paper, it was simply handed over in a conversation between women.

What is this *Breve*? It is a small piece of beige linen, measuring ten by eight centimeters, with a light blue ribbon forming a loop in the upper part and skewed. A name was embroidered at the center of this piece of cloth - Alayde - my maternal grandmother's name. To the touch one could feel that there was a paper inside, a stiff piece of carton.

When it came into my possession, in my hand, I turned, looked at one side and the other. There was a mysterious touch to the object, and also a certain trace of belonging to someone. In the lower part there were marks that more clearly showed the linen cloth fibers. It was not an object that had passed unscathed by its owners.

Was it sweat that had been absorbed there? Or was it blood? Who knows, sweat and blood? Had this piece of cloth stuck to the skin of my grandmother and other women in the family? My aunts, perhaps? This object bore visible marks of the pains of childbirth. These marks alone already provided an example, were a form of teaching, an impression of a gift. As though they said: here there is strength, energy of life and of maternity. Almost like: You are not the only one, many women in your family have already borne a child, they lived and moaned in the pains of childbirth, they gave birth to their children. Or else, that *Breve* conveyed the message: childbirth is sweat, force and effort, it leaves marks on the bodies, in the minds and on things. That object also said: at the time of childbirth you need protection, or there are many possibilities and not everything always goes well. That small piece of cloth that was to make safe and protect from dangers made me feel uncomfortable. With it the doubt of childbirth, but also the trust in protection.

At the time I did not really ascribe too much importance of the object my mother gifted me. After all the approaching birth was to occur at a time in history when technology and science, surrounded, supported and gave this moment of hope, anxiety and joy a greater feeling of assurance. After all, before birth, at the antenatal visits, with the advances of technology, one could hear the baby's heartbeats, there was ultrasound to see the fetus moving in real time, and therefore, there were fears, but also clarity of the situation and the possible events. Thus, the object did not have the effect on me that it may have had on the other women in the family.

Childbirth now no longer took place at home, with midwives. It was not necessary to have a *Breve*, since babies were now delivered in hospitals with resources of medical science and health technology to be used in any emergency. It is no longer the *Breve* and everything it invokes - help at the time of birth, your ancestresses have already lived through this experience and dealt with it - but medical science that prevails.

Well, my mother gave me her mother's cloth, amid affections and thanks, but soon other conversations got in the way. That object of memory was kept in a drawer and not used for the purpose for which it was recommended to me, not during the first, nor in the subsequent occasions when I delivered a baby.

A few years ago, in a class of History of Education, when I was discussing the subject of prayers written on paper and carried as protection by men and women of a certain ethnic group in Rio Grande do Sul with a male student who was researching popular cultures, I was reminded of the *Breve* that the women of my family used at the time of childbirth. He said that this was a custom of the pomeranian evangelicals, to which I added: also among the catholics.

That is when I opened the little cloth bag that had belonged to my grandmother. How many surprises! “Any woman who has this prayer at the time of childbirth, even if she is at risk will be saved.” Prayers in latin and in portuguese were written on those three sheets of paper. A fine, transparent paper written on both sides. There were also a few figures, an image of Our Lady of Sorrows, another of Christ on the crucifix and another representing the birth of Jesus. The images had been cut out of magazines, and one of them possibly was a holy card. They had been cut out without much precision, without care for the straight cut and perfect angle. All of this folded and tied with a light blue ribbon, whose measures were described in the material, and also the way to tie them together, “the ribbon is tied in the shape of a cross. The measure is of *our lady of sorrows*, which belonged to my mother”. I remember again the dedication by Margaret Mead, with the bias I ascribed to her: to the mother of my mother and to the daughter of my daughter. On the last page, the final content, a date, 27-909, followed by “copy of a *breve* made more than 100 years ago”.

It should be recalled that among the Pomeranians in the South of Brazil *Cartas ao céu - Letters to heaven* -<sup>2</sup> were found similar to the one I describe in this text, but used by adults, men and women, in hazardous situations and during travel.

How is this very specific story that I am telling related to the theoretical discussions that gave rise to this article? The purpose is not to discuss the content written in the object pertaining to women, the mark of the formation, inheritance and superstition involved, although these matters cannot be treated separately from the support itself and its content, but I emphasize the characteristic of going down from generation to generation, and the objective of being present at the moment of childbirth during several generations.

This story highlights childbirth as a specific experience of the female world and shows an intergenerational strategy that creates a dialogue between women of a same family but from different generations. Furthermore, this story is permeated by matters of tradition. Why was this piece of cloth preserved throughout the many moves, deaths, and disassembling of homes, if there are so many objects that mark the family memories and could have been kept? After all, it was only a dirty, old piece of cloth. For how many generations of women was this female object preserved? Was it kept because of its powers of protection? Did all women who kept it believe in its protection?

Certainly, childbirths are marks that are impossible to forget. Granny Alayde's *Breve* is a keepsake, but can it also be considered a cloth that carries teaching and wisdom? It brings messages of faith, trust, strength in difficult times. This object carries a formative perspective - have faith, take it with you at the time of the childbirth that is your experience, but, remember, other women in the family have already been through this. It also brings a

<sup>2</sup> The *Cartas para o céu* found among the pomeranians in the South of Brazil and reported by Carmo Thum in his doctoral thesis are similar to granny's *Breve*. Thum describes them as small cloths with cords folded in the shape of small packages that could be carried around the neck, in the pocket or in the breasts. One of the people interviewed by Thum tells that these letters to heaven shown to him at the time of the interview had been written by the interviewee himself, who had copied it from those of his parents. These Letters were used on occasions of danger, when there were long trips and one did not know what might happen; it was a prayer for protection. Thum emphasizes that objects for protection are not exclusive to the Pomeranian culture and “are present in the gypsy culture, in the Black culture, etc, but they are present in the Pomeranian world in German and in Portuguese, and the people that use them believe that they belong to their culture and have the imagined power of protection” (Thum, 2009 p. 61). The Letters to Heaven in some cases were kept in small cotton cloth bags, in order to prevent them for being destroyed (Thum, 2009).

perspective of a line, of origins, articulation in time and with other women of the family. As I said previously, through this the generations enter into a dialogue and support each other.

This *Breve* is not actually a family memory to be given as protection to all, shared among men and women, but it is the markedly female memory, passed among generations of women. But even in the family memories? What would have been if my grandmother had only had sons? Whom would the object for women have been offered to? If I keep this *Breve* of granny Alayde's and hand it on to my daughter, and she hands it on to my granddaughter, what tradition will be preserved? Belief in salvation? But salvation in the form of a written paper, folded over and kept? Faith? But can faith be delivered from generation to generation?

Does this *Breve* of granny Alayde become only a mark of women and of their presence in the family, with a meaning only for women in childbirth, or does it have a meaning beyond the childbirths? Can it stop being a magical prayer for the time of childbirth and become a *Breve* for life under all circumstances? A mark of the force of women? A piece of cloth that shouts: courage in life! , Why at least did not the women who had it after my grandmother open the *Breve* and read what was inside? Did reading what was written mean breaking the desired protection? Does opening, reading the content mean lack of submission, unfaithfulness to tradition?

In the case of granny Alayde's *Breve*, it was written by her older sister; her mother died early. But should a *Breve* traditionally be written by the pregnant women's mother or by a woman in the family who was closest to her, and had already undergone the experience of childbirth?

This example is instigating to think about the tradition in our lives and in the History of Education. After all, which women write what? Why write and rewrite a *Breve*? What are the family sources that can inform us how women learn to be women? Who writes the story about how women help other women in their daily life? How do the generations communicate their knowledges about their experiences? How and what do mothers teach their daughters, and their daughters' friends? How and what do women who are sisters teach each other mutually?

Is this topic present in the History of Education? Does History of education consider female genealogy a source and instigation for research? The tradition of History of Education is predominantly turned to the history of the school, of school knowledges, of educational systems and policies. But do not the superstitions, religious practices and family customs reach the classrooms?

Is the dedication "to the mother of my father [or, in my reading, to the mother of my mother] and to the daughter of my daughter" from the book by Margaret Mead (1989, s.p.) part of this idea of tradition and female genealogy? My grandmother's *Breve*, written by her older sister, passed on to my aunts and my mother without their knowing its content, given to me, the second generation, also presentifies a tradition. But which? That it is important for women of a same family to maintain mutual help practices? That women of previous generations are references in our family and concern themselves with conveying practices that they consider important for the later generations? Or that the tradition connected to a superstition that the protection contained in the *Breve* was preserved and tied up inside that piece of cloth.

Yes, in the material that I called the object of women and in the reflection I made, there are contained tradition, innovation, appropriation, recontextualization. Why the name of my grandmother and not the name of each pregnant woman? To mark ancestry?

Granny Alayde's *Breve*, with its inside open, partly informs what grandmothers, great-grandmothers and mothers did to prepare for childbirth. It suggests traditions, habits and a strategy to maintain a lineage. It is a small piece of cloth that allows retrieving a fragment of the female practicess at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, it allows recovering the memory and telling the story of women and their form of relating to each other and to the different generations.

The small piece of cloth and the content it hides represent a form of silent dialogue between generations, involving an important event in women's lives: giving birth, childbirth. It indicates a strategy for interlocutions, although silent, between women of different generations, in a same family. It establishes ties, supports, secrets. One may conjecture that talking about the birth itself, the pains, the changes in the body and its impact on family relations and with oneself is difficult, painful. Is it the task of the *Breve* to carry unspeakable experiences? For the previous generations, might the piece of cloth with papers inside perhaps replace, represent, accompany or precede an intimate conversation? These are matters that remain as hypotheses and unanswered questions.

This piece of cloth, with its folded and tied sheets of paper, is a tie between generations, it carries a model for the younger generations, a proposal for formation - when your daughter is about to give birth, be present, give her this present. It acts as a tie between generations, it constructs affinities and offers knowledge of the past, which acts as reference, memory and historical and generational localization.

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