

Sources for writing the history of young women: dialogues between the diaries of Helena Morley and Bernardina Constant

Fontes para escrita da juventude feminina: diálogos entre diários de Helena Morley e Bernardina Constant^{1 2}

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Abstract:

The article analyzes the use of diaries on the writing of the history of youth, establishing a dialogue between two documents, written by Brazilian women who were transitioning from childhood to adulthood in the late 19th century. On the one hand, the article analyzes the conditions of production, conservation, and publication of the diaries. On the other hand, it focuses on the authors' social experiences, considering their generational and gender identities, as well as their social and racial contexts and their familial relationships. By studying these diaries, it is possible to apprehend the possibilities and limits of social participation of the young women of that period, observing the singularities of each narrative.

Keywords: history, youth, women, diary

¹ Supported by *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* [National Council for Scientific and Technological Development] (CNPq), with the productivity grant I-B and *Edital Universal* 2016.

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Resumo:

O artigo analisa o uso de diários na escrita da história da juventude, estabelecendo um diálogo entre dois documentos, produzidos por autoras na transição da infância para a idade adulta, nos últimos anos do século XIX no Brasil. Tem-se em vista, por um lado, apreender as condições de produção, guarda e publicação, bem como as estruturas dos relatos. Por outro, busca-se analisar as experiências sociais das autoras, considerando a identidade geracional, de gênero, a condição socio racial e o pertencimento familiar. Mediante o estudo dos diários é possível apreender as possibilidades e os limites da participação social da juventude feminina no período, resgatando as singularidades de cada registro.

Palavras-chave: *história, juventude, mulheres, diário*

Diaries constitute a powerful source for history, especially when used by social history. The use of such source has contributed to amplify the concepts of historical actor and of history making by giving visibility to the everyday activities of ordinary subjects. Studying these writings, one can apprehend the uniqueness of the processes of participation in social life of subjects defined by distinct identities, based on markers of gender, social class, race, and generation which are analyzed in their entanglements.

In this article, we analyze two diaries written by young Brazilian women in the late 19th century. We aim to comprehend, on the one hand, how the gender and generational markers influenced the social experiences portrayed by the authors and, on the other hand, how familial background, socioeconomic conditions, place of birth and residence, among other factors, confer to each text a singular quality.

To form a basis for the description and the analysis of the sources, we firstly explore the concepts of gender and generation. Later, we characterize the diaries, discussing the possibilities and limits of their use as sources. Finally, we analyze the writings, understanding them as indicators of the experiences made possible for young women in a particular historical period of the country.

Gender and generation in the analysis of female youth

Motta (2010) defines gender and generation as relational biosocial categories, since they are based on the biological distinctions between the male and the female bodies, and between the adult and the child bodies. The author indicates that the biological dimension is used to justify oppressive relations by opposing the “frailty” of the female body to the strength of the male; the immaturity of the child body to the maturity of the adult.

The term “generation” evokes two distinct, but interconnected, senses in social sciences presented in Mannheim’s (1923/1952) classical study, *The problems of generation*. According to this author, the term refers, in one of the senses, to individuals who are part of the same age group. In the other sense, it refers to a collective who lives in the same social time, has approximately the same age, and shares some form of experience (as cited in Motta, 2010). It is important to indicate that, in this second meaning, which is more explored by the author, age constitutes a potential factor, but not a defining one, for generational description, while the participation in historical changes takes a central position in the analysis.

The use of the term “generation” to refer to an age group has its origins in anthropology (Motta, 1999) and is nowadays present in the fields of childhood and youth social studies. Qvroutrup, a childhood sociologist, defines generation as a structural category informing distinct processes of concrete subjects’ (children, young people, and adults) participation in social life (Nascimento, 2011). In his studies, he points out that such category is permanent in the social world, even if its transitory in personal trajectories.

The centrality of the concept of age cannot result, as Archad (1998) and Graff (1997) indicate, in a reification of the biological dimension, since the representation of the biological distinctions between individuals are constructed socially and historically. According to Graff (1997, p. 9) “each stage of the life course includes ‘universal’ dimensions (and their historical variations) and the shifting or conflicting meanings taken from and given to them”.

Graff (1997) observes in historical studies about generational times a nominalization of the category, with the creation of distinct fields such as childhood and youth history, a factor also indicated by Motta (2010) in sociological studies. For the historian, the different generational times are analyzed in a hermetic manner, instead of being comprehended from within the course of life. Thus, he proposes something he denominates a “history of growing

up” aimed at a historical study of individual trajectories from childhood to adulthood. Using diaries and autobiographies, the author seeks to apprehend how individuals, throughout their lives, are located within discourses and practices which confer meaning to the different generational times.

There is, significantly, a relational dimension to these categories. Elias (1998 as cited by Veiga, 2009) already indicates that childhood and youth can only be understood from within interdependency relationships with other generational groups, marked by different historically constructed power and control positions.

Regarding the production of a history of generational times, there is still only a small number of studies on childhood and youth. In this case, history is confronted with the difficulty of retrieving the experiences of individuals who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood in periods when this generational time did not yet have the visibility and the strong identity it now has. Levi and Schmitt (1996), in the introduction to their classic collection *A history of young people in the West*, point out the difficulty in defining the term “young people” due to its instability and imprecision. The authors observe that youth is a sociocultural construction limited by the mobile margins between childhood dependency and adult autonomy. In a more radical manner, Bourdieu (1983) provocatively affirms in the title of an article: “‘youth’ is just a word”.

The 19th century is marked by the construction of youth visibility. The expansion of secondary education (especially in the second half of the century) increased the period of dependency, postponing the entrance in the workforce, especially in European middle classes. Analyzing the British youth of the period, Tebbutt (2016) affirms that, given the changes in the traditional forms of regulation and control, adolescence came to be understood as a problematic time of life. If the concept is historical, it is also sociologically located. This generational time’s experience is markedly distinct according to the social class and the gender of same-age individuals.

If Mannheim is known as the “father” of the term “generation” in sociological studies, the emergence of the concept of gender is attributed to the feminist movements of the 1960s and to authors from the field of anthropology, resulting in a renovation of feminist studies. Joan Scott (1986, as cited by Pinsky, 2009) brought this concept over to historiographic reflection by criticizing what she considered a reductive treatment of the female condition, circumscribed to the theme of women’s history. Tilly (1994), though highlighting the importance of the initial

investigations about the history of women and their contribution to resignifying the idea of historical actor, defends that the female condition was understood, in these studies, based on the biological distinction between the female and the male body.

Scott (1986, as cited by Pinsky, 2009) proposes overcoming the nominalization of the female condition in these discussions by referring to the concept of gender. This concept should be constituted as a historical category contemplating the diversity of the forms of relationship between the genders and the distinct representations of the male and the female present in several contexts and cultures (Pinsky, 2009, p. 163).

The use of the concept of gender as a sociological category gave visibility to the constitution and resignification processes of female identity throughout women's lives. Moreover, the concept conferred this identity a relational dimension, in which the male and the female poles are not taken as opposites, but are placed in a dialogue, informing the identity construction of both men and women.

The constructionist and relational perspective of the concept of gender in history allows for an understanding of how women and men from different generations and with distinct gender identities relate to each other in social life, producing different experiences of femininity and masculinity. Such relationships are characterized by the asymmetry and the hierarchy of gender and generation positions.

Back to the writing of the history of female youth, Tebbutt (2016) observes that studies usually focus on the construction of a markedly male and public youth culture during the 19th and 20th centuries. This results in the invisibility of the female youth experiences, confined to ideas of domesticity.

Facing this invisibility, it is necessary to resort to documents which give access to the realm of private life. Hence, autobiographical writings, such as memoirs, autobiographies, and diaries, become powerful sources (Lejeune, 2008).

However, we must question whether the cult of domesticity, historically constructed, defines the diverse female experiences. Michelle Perrot (1998) already supported that lower-class women occupied public spaces, due to participating in the workforce and to forms of sociability different from those of middle- and upper-class women. The riveting historiography about the experience of women during the 19th century in Brazil demonstrates that the notion

of domesticity (Del Priore, 1997) was confronted by experiences of participation in social life, not only among black and poor women (Figueiredo, 1998), but also among upper-class women who exerted activities of land control and administration (Samara, 1989).

It is important to notice the complex relations between the realms of public and private life in the female experience. Pinsky (2009) draws attention to the political dimension of private life. The relationship with written culture, thus, tensions the rigidity of this separation between the social and the particular in the history of women in which they, even if restricted to the domestic space, participated in the public life through writing. Especially in the second half of the 19th century in Brazil, we can observe the expansion of the reading and writing practices by women, with the production of magazines and newspapers written by or for the female audience—some even active in the defense of an increased female participation in society. The emergence of female writers, who reached increasing success in the editorial market, is also significant in the period. It is in this context that the diaries written by women emerge, most of which were then forgotten or ignored.

Diaries in the writing of childhood and youth history

The production of diaries is related to the historical construction of the modern concept of the individual, entailing a reflection and interiorization process. Swindells (1995) considers this advent to be related to the decay of traditional community bonds inside societies whose focus increasingly shifts towards the individual. Siegel (2005) denominates diaries such as these as “writings about the self”, in which authors try to give sense to everyday life from an introspective look establishing a distance from what was lived.

Lejeune (2008, 2009) identifies two historical moments of individualization in the writing of diaries. The first, characterized by a self-monitoring intention, contemplates the registry of sins as a way of purging them. It is, at once, an interiorized and a repressive perspective, exemplified by the writings of Saint Augustine. A second moment of interiorization (as opposed to the self-monitoring one) was that of a “friendly look” which appeared in the second half of the 18th century. According to the author, these writings did not aim to establish a confessor, but a confidant, which corresponded to the interiorization of a letter between friends. In his own words this is “what happened in Europe during the second half of the

eighteenth century: the incredible idea of taking a sheet of paper to write to no one, to write to oneself, to write the self” (Lejeune, 2009, p. 335)

The 19th century is defined by Lejeune as the moment of the proliferation of this type of writing—something that can be described as an “autobiographical fever”. With the spread of literacy, the practice was extended to lower-class men and to middle-class women. To Perrot (2005, as cited by Jinzenji, 2012), the diary was one of the only writings authorized for women in the 19th century, something also indicated by Lejeune (2008) and Swindells (1995), who also point out the progressive feminization of this form of writing.

Not only historical, the diary also has a strong cultural aspect, and is less common in catholic countries due to lower levels of literacy and a less significant presence of writing. Lejeune (2008) also highlights its generational dimension, progressively characterized as a writing present in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Such production would have an ephemeral aspect, tending to disappear after youth. It is important to notice, in this case, the mediating role of the school institution, in which children and young people are encouraged to record their experiences and their thoughts as a literacy strategy.

It becomes necessary, however, to question the power of such registry. Jerome Bruner (1983) affirms that diaries provide a reconstitution of experience, and not its transcription. Authors select what becomes the object of their writing according to existing sociocultural codes, making some events possible targets for oversight, censorship, or fabrication. Cox (1996) also criticizes, in works using this type of sources, the understanding that the writing mirrors what was lived. The author affirms the idiosyncratic aspect of the diary, indicating that experience is variable, contingent, and not very transparent.

Record, conservation, and publication trajectories

Based on the previous reflections, we will analyze two diaries, produced by young women, between 13 and 16 years old, in the same historical moment of Brazil (the transition and the first years of the republican period). We must first indicate the production, conservation, and publication conditions, as well as the materiality of the sources. Later, we will characterize the record objects, portraying the distinct sociocultural contexts informing their singularities. They will be analyzed in light of shared categories, establishing a dialogue between the sources.

One of the diaries, *Minha vida de menina* by Helena Morley (a pseudonym for Alice Dayrell Caldeira Brant), written between 1893 (when the author was 13 years old) and 1895, is a Brazilian literature classic. This diary has many different editions, was translated to several languages, and has been analyzed in the fields of literary criticism, gender studies, history, and history of education either as a source or as a research object³.

The first question we must ask regards this diary's publication process, which happened 49 years after it was written. In the author's own words:

I do not know if today's reader might be interested in the everyday life of a countryside town in the end of the last century, seen through the impressions of a young girl, from a city without electric light, piped water, telephone, nor even a bakery, in a time when one lived with little, without today's concerns. (Morley, 1971, p. 3)⁴

At the end of the introduction, the author addresses her granddaughters: "You who were already born with so much and were so moved while reading some of the episodes... do not pity the poor girls just because they were poor. We were so happy!" (Morley, 1971, p. 3)⁵.

The author's history of poorness needs to be historically situated. Alice wrote her diary in the city of Diamantina, which, since the 18th century, had been the world's largest producer of diamonds. By the time of the diary's writing, however, deposits had been found in South Africa, making the prices of Brazilian diamonds plummet. This had a strong impact in Diamantina, a city with a population of 8 thousand inhabitants, and the authors family was particularly affected, as her father was a mine administrator.

Four years after writing her diary, Alice got married to a wealthy cousin. She then moved to Rio de Janeiro, after her husband became president of *Banco do Brasil*, the biggest financial institution of the country.

The decision to publish her diary comes from the intention to present her possible readers (nominally her granddaughters) with a contrast between a childhood defined by material

³ There has been a vast production concerning this diary in theses, dissertations, books, chapters, and articles. For a more detailed review of this material, refer to Pinto (2016). In the present article we will focus our discussion on two texts: first, Roberto Schwarz's riveting essay *Duas meninas* (1997), in which the author also establishes a comparative analysis, in this case between Alice Dayrell Caldeira Brant's diary and the character Capitu from the classic Brazilian novel *Dom Casmurro* by Machado de Assis; second, Helder Pinto's excellent doctorate dissertation which uses Alice Dayrell's diary for a study of the period's youth in Diamantina, Brazil.

⁴ In this paper, we have translated all quotations taken from the analyzed diaries from Portuguese to English.

⁵ Schwartz (1997) questions if Alice was the author of the introduction's text, and attributes it to her husband.

precariousness and the present, in a privileged financial situation. In the conclusion of the introduction, the author affirms: “Happiness does not mean material goods, but harmony at home, affection in the family, a simple life without ambitions—things that money does not bring, and many times takes away” (Morley, 1971, p. 3).

The author also emphasizes the opposition between the poverty of her household and the opulence of her maternal family, especially of her grandmother, who frequently aided Alice when she was in trouble. Despite being financially privileged, the grandmother had little cultural capital—she was practically illiterate, according to Alice. This situation was inverted in the author’s paternal family: her grandfather was a British doctor who had prestige and respect in the town. In spite of their cultural capital, the paternal family was also described as poor. Her aunts, for example, who were schoolteachers, valued the ability of saving money and resources, a behavior regarded, by the population of Diamantina, as an exotic cultural habit connected to the family’s protestant roots.

The decision to share her diary beyond the borders of her domestic circle, by printing it, implicated in making a private experience public. This decision was, at the time, explained by the author as resulting from her husband’s pressure who, while reading her diaries, recognized in them a literary quality (he was himself a failed writer).

The publication of the diary did not mean the publication of the originals. The texts were edited, something partially recognized by the author: “No changes were made to these writings, beyond small corrections and some name substitutions, only a few, for reasons which are easy to understand” (Morley, 1971, p. 3). However, the translators of the work (the north-American poet Elizabeth Bishop and the Brazilian scholar Marlyse Meyer) report never having had access to the originals, which the author did not want to share due to the presence of spelling and grammar mistakes and of less-than-flattering references to some people of Diamantina (Schwarz, 1997). Marlyse Meyer (2006) describes a dinner in which the husband corrects Alice when she was retelling one of the events of her book, indicating: “Alice, this is not what you tell in your book, you thought of things differently, don’t you remember?” (p.283).

Schwarz (1997) also questions, in his essay, to what extent the text had been edited, attributing interferences both to the husband, to the writer Cyro dos Anjos, and to the preface’s author Alexandre Eulálio. Thus, it is impossible for historians to recover the manuscript, enclosed in the familial circle, which compromises the analysis of the source’s materiality. The

morphologic characteristics of the writing, the organization of the text, and the correction marks are still unknown to the researchers of this work.⁶

Regarding the conditions of production, the author only registers the places and times of writing: in her bedroom, before sleeping, in bed, in her grandmother's house, or even climbing on a tree in the vegetable garden. When she comments on the usage of this last place, she indicates her need to distance herself from daily life; the discovery of the tree as a writing place was celebrated as the conquest of a place for intimacy, which was absent from the other spaces. Nothing is said about the difficulty in obtaining notebooks, even though there is a systematic record of the inaccessibility of other products, such as clothes or even food.

While the publication of Helena Morley's diary was justified by its literary quality, the printing of the second analyzed diary was due not to the desire of the family or of the author, dead in 1928, but to its social position and to the family it belonged to, as well as to the historical context of the writing. The second diary only has 97 pages in its print version and was written in 1889, although it was first published in 2009. Actually, the author wrote four notebooks, but only two were preserved⁷, narrating a history of the period of the Proclamation of the Republic and printed by the historian Celso Castro.

Bernardina, born in 1873, was only 16 years old when she wrote the published diaries. She was the daughter of Benjamin Constant, a key figure in the Brazilian republican movement, a professor, a general, and one of the most prominent supporters of positivism in the country. Constant was part of the first republican government in the position of second vice-president, minister of War and of Public Instruction, Posts and Telegraphs.

Benjamin Constant, despite his position of public visibility, was not part of the economic elites, and his daughter's diary narrates the containment of expenses, consistent with the registry of debts from the period (Castro, 2009). Constant indeed faced economic difficulties throughout his life. His father had been a baker and a schoolmaster, and his family relocated frequently in search for better conditions. Due to the early departure of his father, his family experienced economic precariousness which caused a mental disorder in his mother and a

⁶ Meyer (2006) reports on a meeting in Diamantina for the centennial celebration of the diary, in 1995, with the presence of family members and scholars. According to Meyer, the discomfort was evident among scholars due to the impossibility of accessing the originals and to the doubts regarding not only the interferences done to the text, but also the abrupt ending of the published diary.

⁷ We must recollect Meyer's (2006) questioning of the existence of a single diary by Alice Dayrell. Was the autobiographical writing of the author really interrupted?

suicide attempt by Constant. Seeking conditions to access higher education (unattainable for someone of his position) and upward social mobility, Constant decided to join the army and fought in the Paraguayan War.

Differently from Alice, who highlighted her family's financial difficulties, this matter was not present in Bernardina's writings, but for one episode: "Aunt Olímpia wanted, by force, to give me 10 *reis* from some money she had borrowed, since it was near my father's birthday" (Magalhães, 2009, p. 34).

The notebooks from which the published diary derives are part of the archive from *Museu Casa de Benjamin Constant* [Benjamin Constant's Home Museum], meaning they are public. As Celso Castro (2009) indicates in the book's preface, the author did not denominate her notebooks as "diaries" and the only record found in their covers is the following: "continuation from the notes of 1899" (p. 19). According to the historian, the record of information, the minimal definition of a diary, entails a continuum that goes from a simple appointment book to the registration of an author's intimate thoughts. Castro (2009, p. 11) affirms that Bernardina's notes stand somewhere in between these poles.

To Castro, the conservation of the material by the family, after the author's death, invest it with a sense of memorabilia, holding the memory of a late loved one. At the same time, its presence in the Archive reveals its condition of documental proof, recording an historical event told from the perspective of the private sphere.

The writing

Celso Castro believes Bernardina registered her daily life following a suggestion from her father who had produced his own long notebook filled with notes on everyday happenings throughout the 1860s (Castro, 2009). As we have previously indicated, Constant came from a poor albeit literate family, and had devoted his efforts to accumulating cultural capital (in accordance to his positivist perspective). Both authors, therefore, had parents who valued literate culture and who encouraged writing practices.

Alice evidences her intention of narrating her daily life. In a registry from July 24th, 1893, she affirms:

Every day, I believe more in my father's advice to write in my notebook what I think or see happen. He has told me: "Write what happens to you, with no need to tell your friends, and keep your memories in this notebook for the future". (Morley, 1971, p. 47)

Also, in November 25th in the same year:

this advice that my father gave me to not tell my friends about my life and secrets and to write them in the notebook is, actually, good on the one hand and bad on the other... I write everything in this notebook that is my only confidant and friend... I am the only girl at School who writes everything she thinks and everything that happens in the letters and the compositions to Mr. Sebastião. I know he does not mind, and evens likes it, but even so there are a lot of things that I do not have the courage to show him. (Morley, 1971, p. 78)

We can infer that the identity of Alice's diary was based on the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition of valuing reflective writing, beyond the mere registry of what was lived. Despite her frequent notes on trivialities, she would complement these occurrences with reflections and commentaries which presupposed a distancing from the happenings. It is interesting to notice that, by publishing the diary, Alice used as her pseudonym her paternal grandmother's name (even though they had never met, and this grandmother is not mentioned in the diary), evoking, perhaps, the cultural background which informed her writing.

In the following passage she criticizes and distances herself from the Brazilian origins of part of her family, imputing it with the absence of a reflective posture:

I am about to be 14 years old and can already reason better than everybody else in my family. I started to reach some conclusions at 10 more or less, I believe. An I swear I have never seen a single person from my mother's family think about things. They hear something and they believe in it and it stays that way for the rest of their lives. And they are happy like this. (Morley, 1971, p. 174).

Alice also opposes written and oral narratives. In this passage, she writes:

Mother never looks at what I write, but grandmother wants me to read everything to her and also to other people. Poor woman, she is very intelligent, but she has barely learned how to read and write and thus she thinks that telling things to people in ink is otherworldly. It is funny that she is not surprised by me telling her things with my mouth. It is because she thinks writing is more demanding. (Morley, 1971, p. 86).

We can observe in this passage a context in which orality prevailed—82.63% of the Brazilian population at the time was illiterate, according to the 1890 census (Ferraro, 2002)—

and writing was not socially valued. Alice, a Normal School student, understood this practice as “natural”, not “demanding”.

In relation to other reflective social practices present in that context, the catholic ritual of confession was described by the author, with its meaning being apprehended from the African cultural tradition, which conferred other senses to the notions of sins and of the ritual of confession. Hence, Alice narrates an episode in which she believed, as she had been taught by a former slave, that she had committed a mortal sin by thinking a priest was “ugly”. After torturing herself, Alice confessed her sin to the priest, who then reprimanded her for the foolishness of her thoughts. Therefore, Alice does not seem to regard confession with a notion of analysis of conscience (Morley, 1971).

The writing of Bernardina, conversely, has as its objects the records of the everyday activities of her household, or of the people surrounding it, and centers in the domestic space, as in the following example, from August 31st, 1889:

Father went to Laranjeiras to vote and came back for lunch; there were elections here at the Institute. Elvira came today from Aldina’s house. Benjamin had a holiday. I fixed a bodice. Mother had someone buy, per my request, a bottle of cologne for me to take to Aunt Leopoldina, whose birthday is soon; it cost \$3. Alcina has also bought a box of fine soap to give her. (Magalhães, 2009, p. 31)

The difference between both texts cannot authorize us, however, to affirm that the authors were gifted with varying conditions of reflectivity. Clearly Bernardina did not regard this material with a sense of interiorization, reflectivity, and distancing from what was lived, as Alice did. Perhaps she did so with other writings which were not preserved, or her reflectivity was better developed in other social spaces.

The female condition

In his essay about Alice Dayrell’s diary, Schwarz (1997) observes, in the three years registered in the book, the adulting process of the author, expressed in her emerging angst regarding her Normal School graduation and her insertion in adult life due to the vulnerability of her economic position—a concern not present in the first registered year. If the diary begins when she is 13 years old—with the author still closer to childhood, describing plays and the

family world—gradually it acquires a greater density, while she faces concerns about her future. Thus, the diary is similar to what Graff (1997) defines as a *history of growing up*, in which we can observe, even if in a brief period, a life trajectory. Conversely, Bernardina’s diary does not provide us with a portrayal of her progressive adulting, as it is limited to the registry of a single year.

Studying the history of emotions, Blauvelt (2002) analyzes a 700-page diary from a 14-year-old girl who lived in Massachusetts, USA, covering her trajectory until she was an adult of 45. Blauvelt proposes that the diaries constitute a record of the scope of possible emotions for social groups at a certain time. In this sense, the variety of emotions described reflects the possible future universe for women of that social group.

A description of the female social space is present in both Dayrell’s and Bernardina’s narratives, as crossed by matters of economic position and of racial belongingness. In Alice’s case, living in an impoverished Diamantina in the late 19th century, we can observe the record of a certain female protagonism, or of women’s autonomy in life-management.

Furtado (2003) notes that, according to the 1774 Arraial do Tejuco’s home census, from 510 residences, 229 were headed by free or former-slave women. Figueiredo (1997) highlights the originality of the history of women in the province of Minas Gerais where, since colonial times, female participation in social practices and economy confronted notions of submission and passivity.

This seems to be the case with Alice’s grandmother, then a rich widow who, throughout the diary, demonstrates being in control of the family. The grandmother administered and shared the financial resources between her children, protecting the less fortunate (such as Alice’s mother) while giving orders and advices.

On her paternal family, female autonomy is also represented in the lives of her single aunts, who were poor schoolteachers. Former slaves, too, are frequently described in work activities which provided sustenance and independence. The relations depicted by Morley (1971) are distant from the notions of female submission usually found in this socio-racial group: among other situations, the author narrates an episode in which a woman, a former slave, gave her husband a beating, something apparently frequent at the time.

Alice analyzes the dilemmas of female identity as it intersects with social condition, indicating the alternatives of construction of a social place. Hence, the diary expresses a tension belonging to this generational group, between child dependency and adult autonomy. The range of possibilities is narrower for women than for men, which is a growing reason for the author's anxiety when facing the two alternatives existing in that context.

Her first option was the teaching profession. Alice was preparing herself for adult life as a student from Normal School; therefore, if she remained single, she could find work as a teacher. The author feared and rejected following on her English aunts' footsteps, who were single and taught mostly poor black children how to read and write. Forced to substitute one of her aunts for a few days, Alice could not control the students and was horrified (without losing the wit she developed in writing) with the possibility of taking up the teaching profession. Alice gave up on teaching, declaring to her aunt: "Aunt Madge, I am really not fit for being a teacher. God made this happen so I would know it and look for another livelihood. I have been thinking, and I will become a grocer..." (Morley, 1971, p. 233). As research on the conditions of the teaching profession at the time indicate, becoming a teacher was an alternative for young ladies from the poorer social strata of the population (Gouvea, 2004; Veiga & Silva, 2014).

It is in the second half of the 19th century that the teaching profession becomes dominated by women in Brazil, and it becomes associated with characteristics which approximate it to motherhood, something consistent with the dominant notions of domesticity. It is also since 1872 that the Normal Schools in the province of Minas Gerais are expanded, acquiring a greater level of organization as a teacher education space. As Normal Schools grew in number and their curriculum was enhanced, teaching gained greater legitimacy as a profession (Veiga & Silva, 2014).

The other option was marriage. Alice reflects on this institution, placing it historically in her family trajectory. She describes her Brazilian aunts' experiences, whose husbands had been selected by their fathers, thus: "The only ones who married according to their own choice, knowing their husbands beforehand, were mother and Aunt Aurélia, because they got married after grandfather died. He chose the others' husbands" (Morley, 1971, p. 267). She confronts this possibility by observing her mother's experience, who, having married for love, faced constant financial problems. Alice realizes she was responsible for her marital choice, while regarding it as a form of social and economic ascension, a characteristic of the changes in the

matrimonial definitions of the time. Del Priore (2005) also indicates this shift, in which, since the second half of the 19th century, still-existing arranged marriages were confronted with romantic marriages. From an institution destined to the maintenance of lineages, under the guidance of a patriarch, marriage gradually became based on affection, the choice of which belonged to the betrothed. It is important to notice, however, that Alice's diary lacks any reference to an ideal of a romantic love, or to the expression of affectionate desire.

The author's perception of her future project and of the gender relations of the time is mediated by one of Alice's personal characteristics, repeatedly described in the narrative: the criticism of the social universe she inhabited. Alice did not simply register what she found odd in her surrounding, she also vocalized this feeling, which made her be considered as a questioning and somewhat eccentric girl—and those characteristics could compromise her marriage plans. Seen as not particularly attractive, for being too light-skinned and having freckles, she was recognized as an ill-behaved child, nicknamed Storm by the boys, and was therefore insecure of her own situation in the “marriage market” of her town. We find frequent descriptions of her foolhardiness, of her preference for loitering over studying, of her having masculine behavior: “I envy everything my brothers do, and I can not rest until I am doing it too” (Morley, 1971, p. 88), and one of her brothers calls her a “boy man”

Her questioning worldview seems to have been accepted by her family and school, as she is described as her paternal grandmother's and maternal aunt's favorite and she was valued at school not only for her studies, but also for her memory and personality. As she comments: “My father always tells me he prefers my way than Luisinha's, that I am frank, I say what I think and what I do” (Morley, 1971, p. 197). Alice's behavior was not, therefore, a source of social rejection, even if it caused her trouble sometimes—on the contrary, it seems to have granted her distinction. Beyond describing her own attitudes, Alice portrays, on the other girls, behaviors which circumvent the notions of femininity of the time, as in a friend who “noticed she was missing a carnation and had a blade in hand, saying she would cut the thief's hand for stealing it” (Morley, 1971, p. 197). In another episode, she describes a collective fight at Normal School: “The other girls swarmed over her hitting her, but she would not let me go... If the principal had not arrived just in time, she would have ripped my face apart with her nails” (Morley, 1971, p. 207).

Helder Pinto (2016), in his study on the youth of Diamantina during the same period, refers to Alice Dayrell's diary and compares it to other autobiographical writings and to publications by young people in the town's newspapers. This research demonstrates how the criticism to the adult world and its contradictions, as well as manifestations of iconoclasm, are not idiosyncratic to Alice. From the sources used by this doctoral dissertation, we highlight the 1901 newspaper *Voz Feminina* [Female Voice], written by women from the municipality and directed towards the defense of women's suffrage, among other writings which reveal the presence of a critical view of the social world by other young people in the city.

Miriam Moreira Leite (1997), in her analysis of foreign travelers' writings in Brazil during the same period, comments on how the implicit qualities of women (delicacy and a natural vocation for domestic labor) were not always present, although they were part of the expected behaviors. For this author, there have always been fearlessness in Brazilian women's behavior, able to confront rooted cultural patterns, which reinforces the reading that Alice was not an exception in that social universe. Del Priore (2005) also identifies behaviors breaking with notions of femininity characterized by docility and submission, despite this being the hegemonic perspective in dominant classes.

Alice's verbal and body expressions clashed with the material circulating in Brazil to educate girls and young women from wealthy social groups, found in literature, magazines, newspapers, and conduct books. These writings valued modesty, restraint, obedience, and domesticity. Alice's narratives allow us to visualize a broader range of expressions of the possible female behaviors in that universe, beyond what was prescribed (which even led her to a successful marriage).

Bernardina, conversely, registers no concern about the future, nor does she analyze her possibilities. She also does not evoke her past—her writing focuses on the present. As we have indicated, it is not a diary which contains the proper conditions for reflectivity and for a distancing from the lived experience. The author's concern seems to be the objective and concise record of daily events, and she never uses any adjectives to refer to herself or to others (something prominent in Alice's writing).

Both authors' sensibility educations were not based on reading. Alice rarely reports on what she was reading, thus it is difficult for us to notice what influence this activity might have had in shaping her worldview. She, however, produces an interesting critical analysis of the role

of reading on her own education by commenting that, due to an indication from her aunt, she had read Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* and *Character*⁸, two of the first examples of self-help literature according to Turmina and Shiroma (2014). These books were aimed at workers and expressed values related to work ethics. Alice posits:

I am certain that reading these books was absolutely worthless to me. I have acquired no willpower at all. My character has not changed a single bit. Kindness, no more than I already had. The only thing I have learned, and I do not know if it was Samuel Smiles who taught it to me... was to keep what I have. (Morley, 1971, p. 39)

In another passage, while criticizing the unethical behavior of an aunt, Alice opposes it to her literary education, ironizing her: "Aunt Iaiá who is the most civilized one, who even read novels and tells us everything about them, became a proper devil because of the money" (Morley, 1971, p. 251). During the diary, when commenting on her own education, the girl draws special attention to the advices and opinions of the adults, especially of her father, grandmother, and mother (the latter to a lesser degree).

Bernardina also does not usually mention what she was reading, though she registers every piece of clothing she embroidered, every sweet she made, and every piano lesson she attended. From her literacy process, she only writes that, at night, her mother would read her written stories. She makes notes of reading operas, in anticipation of the events, certainly as a strategy to understand the plot. Lastly, she indicates reading only one book: "I have begun reading *Heart*" (Magalhães, 2009, p. 115). According to Castro, on a footnote in the published diary, this is probably a reference to Edmondo De Amicis's *Heart*, from 1886. This novel, which had a widespread circulation at the time, narrates the daily episodes of an eight-year-old boy's life and constitutes a reading aimed at the civic and moral education of young people.

Alencastro (1997) and D'Incao (1997) observe a proliferation of written material and a development of the reading habit of the Court in the period. D'Incao (1997) mentions the advancement of female reading, with the publication of romantic novels, the appearance of women's magazines, and the expansion of the newspapers destined for this audience. It is noteworthy, then, that Bernardina does not refer to her readings, since her other activities were

⁸ According to Bastos (2000), these books circulated broadly among Brazilian intellectuals in the end of the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th, spreading an ideology of individual success among the national elites.

carefully recorded. Does this absence mean that reading was not a widespread practice at her home?

Both authors are similar in not portraying themes that would become increasingly frequent in women's diaries during the 20th century: the registry of the first menstruation, the first romantic interest, or even manifestations of sexuality. Thus, while on the one hand Alice lavishly comments on her individual features—especially on her rebelliousness, independence and ability to analyze the surrounding world—she does not write about her own body and its transformations, nor about her sexuality, something which we can also observe in Bernardina's diary. Neither author mentions a single exchange of glances with any of the boys in their lives. Both girls record balls they attended and, after one, Bernardina affirms she went back home with her family at 5 in the morning. This event is thusly described: "I danced only a square and a polka, and, as I realized I did not know how to do it, I did not want to dance further" (Magalhães, 2009, p. 101). Nothing is told of the boys present there. Alice narrates an episode of a ball in which she is annoyed by the language mistakes of one of the boys, commenting that "How can one not be dispirited by the boys here?" (Morley, 1971, p. 211), indicating her lack of interest in the local boys.

Hence, we must question to what degree their silence constitutes an expression of authors censoring more intimate experiences from becoming objects of their narratives in accordance to the codes of the period. This absence is an expression of that which, albeit present, is never spoken, not even to oneself.

Daily life

Another divergence between both diaries is in how each record daily life. Since the authors lived in different cities, their circulation through the urban spaces was also distinct.

Bernardina focuses on family routine. As Castro (2009) indicates, women rarely left the house by themselves and, during the night, Bernardina would only go for a walk accompanied by her father or by another adult. Her diary then focuses on domestic spaces, where activities included, for the author, sewing clothes (for her family and for herself), embroidery, piano lessons, and talking not only with family members, but also with frequent guests in a form of socialization based on visiting each other's houses. The description of daily life expresses what

Louro (1997, p. 454) calls a “cult of domesticity” typical of the period in Bernardina’s social group, which, according to this author, represented the valorization of the female function at home through the building of connections between the domestic space and the broader society, to the degree in which the home progressively acquired a number of roles in the social, political, religious, and emotional order, now wider than before.

The cult of domesticity is not inconsistent with the expansion of the expressions of sociability, with the amplification of the presence of women in social life, because this group circulated in the reproduction of the familial world in the public space. As D’Incao (1997) posits, the idea of intimacy acquires a more extensive meaning, and women become accepted in other sociability spaces, subjected to the evaluation of other people, in terms of public behavior.

When registering social activities, Bernardina highlights the operas, an activity which Alencastro (1997) and Del Priore (2005) describe as central in the cultural life of the Court’s elites in the period. This form of entertainment was greatly valued by Bernardina’s family, who attended four presentations of the opera *O Guarani*, preparing for it by integrating the work’s plot in the socialization among the relatives.

It is interesting, in this case, how school was absent. Bernardina does not mention her education, if it took place in the home environment or in a formal institution, and only registers her piano lessons in the mornings. Learning of this type was common and well regarded for wealthy girls at the time. Freire, Zecca, and Penello (2012, p. 1) affirm it was a common understanding that musical ability (displayed only in private spaces) contributed positively to a family’s presentation, indicating a social position of good level. Bernardina’s brother was still studying, and the record of him missing classes because of rain, or for not waking up on time, is repeated throughout the book, and it does not seem to be cause for reprimands. School appears to belong in the past, with no effects in the present, and is not associated to qualification for work, as is the case with Alice. Bernardina narrates only one activity regarding her school learning, when she aids her siblings, helping them with some schoolwork by spending time and effort.

Alice writes about frequently walking around the city and its surroundings, and experiences immense pleasure by being outside. This led to reprimands by her mother and other family members, as she was contrasted with her sister Luiza, who kept herself to the domestic environment. When commenting on the girl’s constant presence outside, the mother reproduces

the following rhyme: “The woman and the chicken/ Should never go for a walk,/ The chicken will be eaten,/ And the woman spoken about” (Morley, 1971, p. 249).

If this rhyme represents the type of behavior expected for women, bound to the house, Alice does not depict any restrictions to her own circulation. On the contrary, she defends her choices, questioning her mother’s values associated with domesticity:

I really do not understand that you have raised me with so much freedom since I was little and now you want to lock me inside the house. It is useless, mother... there is no other way except for you to go out too and let go of this nonsense of staying at home, doing nothing, mulling over sadness. (Morley, 1971, p. 250)

Once again we can verify that, even without presenting a compatible social behavior to the female domesticity models of the middle and high classes of the period, there was some social acceptance of her attitudes, albeit they were taken as expressions of the author’s eccentricity.

Alice does not describe only her own walks, she also went out in the company of other girls, which evidences a greater permissiveness regarding the female presence in the town’s public spaces. This, nevertheless, was restricted to the specific places where the presence of women was permitted, such as relatives’ houses, of families from different social classes and races, churches, the Normal School, the river, shops. There is no reference to frequenting (or even wanting to frequent) spaces of male sociability, such as the town’s bars, which were commonly referenced in the autobiographical writings of Diamantina’s boys of the same period, according to Pinto’s (2016) research.

In the sociability described by Alice, something that becomes clear is her intense interaction with former slaves, especially at the farm where her grandmother lives or near her family’s house. Such behavior, indeed, was the source of censorship and prohibition—Alice reports that she enjoyed nursing her neighbor’s black children, but was prohibited by her mother, who intervened “in her obsession of nursing little black kids” (Morley, 1971, p. 65).

This type of interaction is not present in Bernardina’s diary, who only narrates the visit of one of her former nurses, to whom she gave some coins, a sum which was later replaced by her mother. They were distinct familial universes, and the stratification and the distance between social classes and race groups in Bernardina’s life were different from the proximity described by Alice. This proximity, however, did not imply that barriers were broken, but that they were

subtle. In several situations in Alice's diary, when hierarchies are threatened, the racial condition is named to mark interdictions.

In the case of Bernardina, since her diary is centered in the familial universe, we cannot unveil women's daily lives in the public space of the Court, where poor women and former slaves made a living. The girl's narrations of her own daily life grant us a partial and restricted portrait of the Court's social universe, while providing a description of the daily life of the women from her social group. The central aspect of the familial universe in her life is not questioned by the author, who registers no desire for more autonomy and independence.

History and record

Bernardina found herself near the center of one of the most momentous events in Brazilian political history. Though her records focus on the domestic space, these historical events breached into the family context, with the presence of conspirators who would soon afterwards occupy the country's positions of power. Bernardina does not overcome the private look in the analysis of the public event. Celso Castro observes the momentous events of the period, such as the ball at Ilha Fiscal and the description of the family's boat trip to follow the arrival and the departure of the ball's guests. Other records indicate how the city took part in the event, by watching the boats leaving, as is the case of Bernardina.

In this sense, the records are shifted. If before Bernardina repetitively narrated a daily life centered in the familial world, now the public events invade the text, and the author annotates the unfolding of the republican movement. As the Proclamation of the Republic drew near, the records grew in size, if not in density. On November 15th, 1889, Bernardina describes the factual narrative from her domestic space:

I woke up today to the sound of soldiers blowing their horns and scared I got up and knew, from mother, that during the night some official had come to accompany father to the headquarters, because they thought the Republican movement would burst today; and truly, around noon, the Army in full, associated with the Navy, arrested the minister in a meeting of the Council. (Magalhães, 2009, p. 84)

Continuing with the description of the day, she later writes: “Dr. Alvaro came to speak with father and to have lunch, Dr. Marcelo also had lunch here, Dr. Algiberto came here to compliment father, but did not find him here” (Magalhães, 2009, p. 85). As we can observe, the object and the rhythm of the writing were altered, but the domestic perspective remains.

Bernardina tries to emphasize her father’s protagonism in the Proclamation of the Republic, and his name is increasingly present. There is a marked contrast with the initial records, when her father was associated with the time and space of work, distant from the world of the house. Domestic routine was altered, with the present of political actors, something that the author points out, making her admiration for her father clear—noticeable in the repetition of the registration of compliments and homages.

The country’s political events also assume distinct dimensions in both diaries. Alice does not refer to the Proclamation of the Republic, but to the dispute between Floriano Peixoto and Custódio de Mello for presidency, at a later moment. In one episode, while discussing the political developments, she hears from a friend: “Why do you care about the victory or the defeat of any of them? Do they even know who you are? To me, whoever wins, things stay the same” (Morley, 1971, p. 104). Evidently, due to the geographical distance to the centers of power, the effects of the end of monarchy were lessened, and barely affected daily events.

In Alice’s diary, the country’s profound changes at the time impacted her daily life mostly due to the end of slavery. Alice writes in a context when the marks of slavery were still common, even though this regime had already ended. These permanencies went beyond displacements and influenced the everyday values and the relationships between white and black people in the small town.

The book contains many records of racial tensions at the end of slavery, mentioning its strong impact in daily life: the “insolent” black man who was beaten for daring to question his boss; her grandmother’s slaves, who were firmly reprimanded for celebrating the abolishment of slavery; her black neighbors, who hired the protagonist’s brother to teach their children how to read and write; the use of the term “renting” a black person, as opposed to “hiring” them, even after the end of slavery.

Bernardina does not mention the Abolishment, nor does she register inter-racial interactions beyond the visit of her former nurse. The effects of the end of slavery were distinct, due to the diverse presence of the system in that context. It is interesting to notice that Lima

Barreto, then a child living in the Court, comments that the Abolition was not particularly significant to him, since he did not personally know any slaves, in a Rio de Janeiro where most black people were already free (Schwarz, 1917).

Conclusion

The analysis of these sources sought to point out what Cox (1996) identified, that is, the idiosyncratic nature of autobiographical productions. More than the writing of a history of the youth of that period, they speak about a range of behaviors, sensibilities, emotions, and life projects which were possible in that context. Hence, in a pre-Freudian universe, the diaries express what is spoken and what is silenced when recording the female experience.

By analyzing the diaries we could unveil a broader spectrum of the forms of participation in social life and of female behaviors in literate social groups, going beyond what is visible in sources such as books, magazines, and newspapers directed to women at the time. It is possible to perceive a much more complex and much less normative female universe than those other sources might inform. The reading of the diaries reaffirms that subjects are historical actors, reinterpreting the social discourses in circulation. As Theriot (1996) posits, discourses are not indicative of the actions of subjects, who attribute meaning through the mediation of the possible experiences of their social universe. Hence, we must contemplate, in the writing of women's history, diverse sources which give visibility not only to discourses, but to social experiences.

Conversely, we must be careful when analyzing the relationship between experience and language. Scott (1987, as cited by Pinsky, 2009) indicates that there is no experience that goes beyond language. For this author, there is no social reality outside or before language, i.e., it is impossible to separate meanings from experiences, there is no social experience separate from people's perception of it (Scott, 1987, as cited by Pinsky, 2009, p. 164). Thus, the diaries constitute discourses about the experience, and not its translation.

The diaries also allow us to complexify the idea of the differences between the genders, especially in the case of Alice's text. The construction of her female identity is more complex, and we could observe her ebb and flow through behaviors regarded as masculine and feminine, demonstrating that gender boundaries were somewhat malleable. This allows us to come closer

to the main question posited by Pinsky (2009) to researchers: how, in concrete and specific situations, are gender differences invoked and how do they pervade the construction of social relations?

Evidently, this question is mediated by other conditions, such as social class. Tilly (1994) affirms there is a more rigid and controlled understanding of gender differences and of the roles attributed to each gender in the dominant strata, something that seems to be portrayed in the more restrict female universe of Bernardina. Although throughout this article the category of “social class” has not been more deeply addressed, it informs, as it crosses with other identity categories, how gender differences are signified in concrete and specific situations.

Finally, Alice’s and Bernardina’s diaries allow us to visualize the abundance of the social fabric of a country abolishing slavery and entering the Republic, experiencing the effects of the radical transformations and recording the permanencies. The diaries provide us with an understanding of how those young women gave meaning to the historical developments surrounding them, evidencing the impacts of these events in daily life.

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Submitted to evaluation in September 1st, 2017; reviewed in April 1st, 2018; accepted for publication in April 22nd, 2018.