



## Memory schools: representations of the school among new literate (Minas Gerais, decades of 1900 to 1930)<sup>1</sup>

Escolas de memórias: representações da escola entre novos letrados  
(Minas Gerais, décadas de 1900 a 1930)

Escuelas de memorias: representaciones de la escuela entre nuevos letrados  
(Minas Gerais, décadas de 1900 a 1930)

Cecília Rodrigues Fadul  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brasil)  
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/1830588144096290>  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1126-6309>  
[ceciliafadul@yahoo.com.br](mailto:ceciliafadul@yahoo.com.br)

Ana Maria de Oliveira Galvão  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brasil)  
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/6102383021147824>  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9063-8267>  
[anamariadeogalvao@gmail.com](mailto:anamariadeogalvao@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The article aimed to analyze the school representations that authors of autobiographies – born in Minas Gerais from the end of the 19th century and considered new literate – built throughout their life trajectories and produced in their works. We analyzed seven autobiographies, understood as meaningful documents to reach the personal experiences of a group that built singular representations about the school. It was concluded that the school, for the new scholars, was overestimated, especially as a mechanism of inclusion in a society that, over the years – between the time of memories and the time of writing – has seen the increase in the value of schooling and literacy. The authors sought, through the school, to be included in the group of those who, by the knowledge path, occupied distinctive places. The writing of a book seemed to shape the ideal outcome of this symbolic ascent.

**Keywords:** Education in Minas Gerais in the Republic. School Representations. Autobiography.

---

<sup>1</sup> English version by: Paula Brugger. E-mail: [paulamanzali@gmail.com](mailto:paulamanzali@gmail.com)

## Resumo

O artigo teve como objetivo analisar as representações de escola que autores(as) de autobiografias – nascidos(as) em Minas Gerais a partir do final do século XIX e considerados novos letrados – construíram ao longo de suas trajetórias de vida e produziram em suas obras. Foram analisadas sete autobiografias, compreendidas como documentos significativos para se alcançar as experiências pessoais de um grupo que construiu representações singulares sobre a escola. Chegou-se à conclusão de que a escola, para os novos letrados, foi supervalorizada, sobretudo como mecanismo de inclusão em uma sociedade que, ao longo dos anos - entre o tempo das memórias e o tempo da escrita - viu crescer a valorização da escolarização e da alfabetização. Os(as) autores(as) buscaram, por meio da escola, se incluírem no grupo daqueles que, pela via do conhecimento, ocupava lugares de distinção. A escrita de um livro pareceu configurar o desfecho ideal dessa ascensão simbólica.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação em Minas Gerais na República. Representações da escola. Autobiografia.

## Resumen

El artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar las representaciones sobre la escuela que autores de autobiografías, nacidos en Minas Gerais a partir del final del siglo XIX y considerados nuevos letrados, construyeron a lo largo de sus trayectorias de vida y produjeron en sus obras. Se analizaron siete autobiografías, consideradas como documentos significativos para comprender y captar las experiencias personales de un grupo que construyó representaciones singulares sobre la escuela. Se llegó a la conclusión de que la escuela, para los nuevos letrados, fue sobrevalorada, sobre todo como mecanismo de inclusión en una sociedad que, a lo largo de los años (entre el tiempo de las memorias y el tiempo de la escritura) vio crecer la valorización de la escolarización y de la alfabetización. Los/as autores/as buscaron, por medio de la escuela, incluirse en el grupo de aquellos que, por la vía del conocimiento, ocupaban lugares de distinción. La escritura de un libro autobiográfico pareció configurar el desenlace ideal de esta ascensión simbólica.

**Palabras claves:** Educación en Minas Gerais en la República. Representaciones de la escuela. Autobiografía.

## Introduction

The dawn of the twentieth century is marked by a new way of politically organizing the Brazilian nation: republicanism. “Replacing a government and building a nation, this was the task that Republicans had to face” (CARVALHO, 1998, p. 92. our own translation). When something new comes into play, we must clearly establish the differences that make it possible for the new to be innovative, and for the old to be outdated and worthy of being left behind. This is what men and women who defended Republic emphatically expounded, ascribing to the Empire the responsibility for the backwardness and non-growth of Brazil, and presenting Republic as the regime of equality and freedom<sup>2</sup>.

Republicans trusted in the belief of a more modern country and they counted on schools for that. According to Louro (1997), “the discourse on the importance of education in the modernization of the country was recurrent. Criticisms of educational abandonment in which most provinces were in could be found in the debates of the Parliament, the newspapers and even at soirees” (p. 443. our own translation).

The republican intellectual circle, that has devoted itself to education has advocated an high-priority educational renewal, attributing to the Empire the existence of a poorly organized and inefficient school education, as highlighted by Schuller and Magaldi (2008): “[. . .] imperial schools were understood, in the late nineteenth century, under signs of backwardness, precariousness, filth, scarcity and "mould". Mouldy and overcome would be ideas and pedagogical practices - memorization of knowledge, memorized multiplication table, paddling [...]” (p. 35. our own translation).

There is, however, an understanding - increasingly emphasized by recent historiographical reviews - that transformations in the field of education, such as those advocated by Republicans, had already taken place before "November, 15th, 1889", as well as constancy are decades after the establishment of republic in Brazil. Studies such as Schuller and Magaldi (2008), Viega (2012), Faria Filho (2000) and Musial (2011) point to the fact that schools of republican Brazil were not homogeneous. In this sense, it would not be abusive to speak of multiple schools, living in the same space and time. They varied in materiality and organization, as well as in the symbolic place they occupied for different social groups.

The symbolic place of education was the motivation of this study, that identified and analyzed the ways in which the early twentieth century schools from Minas Gerais State were assimilated, told, and to some extent, lived by new literate men and women. The main intention of this work is, therefore, to investigate the school representations that autobiographies' authors from Minas Gerais - born in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries - built throughout their lives and chronicled in their writings. The definition of new literates is based on the concept of “new readers”, coined by Jean Hébrard (1990) to designate subjects who became a new generation of readers in nineteenth-century France, after the expansion of schooling education. In this sense, the expression new literates refer to the first generation of individuals or social groups who perform, with greater intensity, participation in writing cultures (GALVÃO, 2010).

It is therefore a matter of telling “history from below,” as Burke (1997, p.3) clarifies: “[...] several new historians are concerned with “history from below”; in other words, with the opinions of ordinary people and their experiences of social change” (our own translation). In other words, as Stone (2011, p.30) put it, “[...] [new historians] tell the story of an individual, a judgment, or a dramatic episode not by themselves, but to shed light on the internal operations of a past culture or society” (our own translation). We believe that this work is able to, by recounting these individuals' history, shed light on the society in which they lived, particularly on how part of this society assimilated and lived school.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a deeper understanding of this topic, see Carvalho (1987).

## Theoretical assumptions and sources

A documentary research was carried out for the present investigation. Autobiographies were understood as significant documents to reach personal experiences of a group that built singular representations about school. These authors reveal a story, as stated by Galvão (1998), the document is no longer seen as demonstrating a “historical truth”, but only as an expression of one of several possible versions for the same fact. In his discussion of history and memory, Le Goff (1990, p.50) highlights how “the use of oral history, autobiographies, subjective history” is able to broaden the basis of scientific work, changing the image of the past, in a way in which gives “words to those forgotten by history. The author emphasizes the use of these resources as one of the “great advances of contemporary historical production” (LE GOFF, 1990, p.50. our own translation). The theoretical-methodological option of microanalysis was also made. The aim was to vary the scale of observation and to investigate how the analyzed group built this social reality: the school. In this variation, it was at stake: who was observed (new literates); how it was observed (from the meanings that the group attributed to school); as well as through which means it was observed (from the autobiographies). In this way we sought to “explain the logic of the significance of these experiences in their uniqueness” (REVEL, 1998, p.12. our own translation):

Not to give in again to the vertigo of the individual, if not the exceptional, but with the conviction that these tiny lives also participate in their own way in the "great" history of which they give a different, distinct, complex version. (REVEL, 1998, p.12-13. our own translation)

We based ourselves on the concept of representation proposed by Chartier (1990): “intellectual schemes that create the figures through which the present can acquire meaning, the other become intelligible and space can be deciphered” (p. 17. our own translation). The author considers “representations (individual or collective, purely mental, textual or iconographic) not as mere true or false reflections of reality, but as entities that build the very divisions of the social world” (CHARTIER, 2009, p. 7. our own translation). For him, it is important to note that “this notion allows us to closely link social positions and relationships with the way individuals and groups perceive themselves and perceive the others” (p.49-50. our own translation).

According to Lejeune (2014), autobiography is a “retrospective prose narrative that a real person makes of their own existence when they focus on their individual history, in particular the history of their personality” (p. 16. our own translation). Autobiographical writing is characterized by the search to make sense of the life to be read and, at the same time, the writing that will become the autobiography, in such a way in which certainly there are adjustments that do not respect neither the chronology nor the integrity of the scenes described in the memories. Like all stories autobiography still is the narrative of a life produced by the author himself, that is, a collection of scenes seen / lived by an individual, told according to their interpretation. According to Bourdieu (2006), “this propensity to become the ideologue of their own life, selecting, based on a global intention, certain significant events and establishing connections between them to give them coherence, [...] can only be led to accept this artificial creation of meaning (p.184-185. our own translation). In this perspective, autobiographies are not expected to transmit to the text every detail lived by the author, but an interpreted reading of the experiences that constituted their memory. The present work hypothesized that the writing of life makes life itself. With conviction about the possibilities of adjustments of varied natures (chronological, spatial and social) in the investigated narratives, it was more interesting for this work not what could be verified as official data or supposedly more faithful, but instead, what was possible to comprehend as a constructed representation, attributed to school by these authors.

Another important methodological concern was the perception, and consequent analysis, that the authors of autobiographies, when telling about the beginning of their lives, distanced themselves decades from the reported experiences, in the period of writing. There are considerable changes in their trajectories and in the societies in which they live in this time lapse, which are possibly incorporated into the moment of writing, given that time is “this all-mighty decorator of ruins,” as Certeau accredits it to Michelet (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 13. our own translation). In this sense, it is known that school representations were forged not only during the period of school experience or its absence but also at the time in which the autobiographies were written. Thus, a methodological work was carried out by moving between two historical moments: 1900-1939, when the authors were at their school age; and 1950-1980, the writing period of the considered works. In order to guide this movement, the research was based on axes of analysis present (or absent) in the construction/appropriation of school representations by the new literates, such as: urban x rural schooling, black x white schooling, female x male schooling, literacy x illiteracy, among others that arose during the investigation.

Seven works<sup>3</sup> were chosen to compose the main corpus of the present article. The selected works, in addition to being characterized as those in which there is more evidence that their authors were new literates, also met the mentioned time frames. It was observed how the authors presented the relationship between their parents and the writing cultures, so it was considered new literates those writers who claimed to have illiterate, poorly educated parents, and/or parents that rarely used reading and writing in their daily lives.

### **The researched group of works**

One can classify the investigated group, by several conditions that will be presented soon, as a group placed in the position of dominated, subjugated by social relations. Although it is understood that such a position has not removed their leading role from their own lives, it has bounded them according to the understanding they attribute to themselves as those who know little, and therefore should consider what the dominant groups say. Nevertheless, during the reading of the autobiographies a common idea was identified among the authors: they call themselves people whose life experiences are marked by much struggle not only in the quest for survival, but also in the search for a recognition that their lives were somewhat special, distinct (BOURDIEU, 1984). Many authors give advice to readers in their autobiography, reinforcing the idea that their lives are worthy of being written/registered in a book, being useful as examples and models to be followed, precisely because they recognize, in their self-perception presented, that they came from very adverse conditions and they had overcome it to some extent. According to Galvão *et al.* (2018), in studies that analyzed very similar sources to those used in the current study:

Authors of autobiographies seem to share the idea that writing is primarily motivated by the desire to show how ordinary people are able to overcome a difficult childhood and succeed in different ways (GALVÃO *et al.*, 2018, p.5. our own translation).

The table below displays the data of the main works analyzed:

---

<sup>3</sup> The sources were surveyed in the collections of Amílcar Martins Cultural Institute and Luiz de Bessa State Library, both located in Belo Horizonte.

**Table 1 – Main Corpus**

| AUTOBIOGRAPHY'S TITLE AND REFERENCE   | AUTHOR'S BIRTH YEAR | AUTHOR'S BIRTH PLACE  |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|
| BOTELHO, Luiz Rousseau. <i>Alto Sereno</i> . Belo Horizonte: Editora Veiga, 1976.   | 1892                | Leopoldina            |
| SANTOS, Luiz Gonzaga. <i>Memórias de um carpinteiro</i> . Belo Horizonte: Editora Bernardo Álvares, 1963.   | 1898                | Diamantina            |
| COSTA, Oswaldo José da. <i>História e mistérios de minha vida</i> . Belo Horizonte: Printed in Faculdade de Ciências Médicas de Minas Gerais, 1979. | 1898                | Bocaiúva              |
| OLIVEIRA, Honorino Soares de. <i>O meu pequeno mundo</i> . Belo Horizonte: Minas Gráfica Editora Ltda, 1974.  | 1906                | Piumhi                |
| FAGUNDES, Osório Martins. <i>Fragmentos de um passado</i> . Edição: 1977  | 1908                | Igaratinga            |
| JESUS, Carolina Maria de. <i>Diário de Bitita</i> . Sacramento: Editora Bertolucci, 1986.   | 1914                | Sacramento            |
| PORTES, José. <i>Memórias de Janjão de Souza</i> . Belo Horizonte: Editora O Lutador, 1985.   | 1916                | Santo Antônio da Mata |

The individuals researched were mostly from the lower classes, at least during their childhoods. They were born in cities in the countryside of Minas Gerais State, two of which said to be born in rural areas near those cities. Among these cities, however, there were different degrees of urbanization. In a very similar way, authors have experienced an alternating living between cities and rural areas, which apparently marked their life stories. They were either in the cities, when, for example, they began to study, or they were on the farms, for work or leisure. Regarding ethnic-racial belonging, the subjects declared themselves black in only two cases: Jesus (1986) and Santos (1963). Interestingly, only Santos (1963) and Fagundes (1977) reported the fact that they were raised by both father and mother. The absence of at least one of the parents was a constant among the new literates investigated. In some autobiographies, religious issues have been recurrently mentioned. In various circumstances their authors mentioned the divine and narrated the religious activities of which they were part of. These were the cases of Oliveira (1974), Santos (1963) and Costa (1979). It is possible to assert that all the new literates surveyed were Catholic, nevertheless, some of them indicated in the autobiography the proximity to spiritualism.

### Conceptions of school

This section presents an analysis of conceptions of school presented by the authors in their books. We were interested in systematizing notions of school associated with its value, its purpose and its consequences for the group analyzed. The categories described and analyzed below emerged from the very work with the sources.

## School: a cultural good

Above all, it seems that there is an appreciation of school among the new literates as a considerable cultural asset. In this sense, fifty-five small sections were located in the analyzed corpus in which such conception is present.

*Colonel Theophilo Barbosa was a quiet man of few speeches, but quite correct in everything; he had some culture, because he attended good schools in São Paulo, as his relatives have told* (BOTELHO, 1976, p. 16. our own translation). There is in this discourse by Botelho (1976) a clear association of school - which had to be good - with the idea of acquiring culture and wisdom. In the author's view it was because he attended good schools that the colonel was always "right in everything". It should be noted, therefore, that the definition of cultural good defined by the Franceschini Commission<sup>4</sup> and quoted by Zanirato and Ribeiro (2006, p. 257) is close to the meaning attributed to school by the authors: "every good that constitutes a material testimony endowed with the value of civilization" (our own translation). It was given to Botelho (1976) that, in order to "have" culture, it was necessary to attend good schools: it was "knowing" how to act and behave that differed the civilized from the non-civilized, as can also be observed in the following passage: [... ] *Nossa Senhora da Glória School, by D. Castorina de Almeida e Silva, became famous. It was a center of culture in the city...*" (PORTES, 1985, p. 28. our own translation).

The school was thus represented by the new literates researched: a kind of entity that was able to make men and women civilized beings, insofar it made possible, according to them, the acquisition of knowledge, "culture" and wisdom. Associating school education with the act of civilization was strongly present among the thoughts that directed the educational reforms of the analyzed period, and it followed the speeches of the intellectuals of education at the time. According to Boto (2003) such an association has been present since the seventeenth century, when the "structural mark of religious schools (both in Protestant and Catholic countries) [imposed] an educational pattern allegedly constituted with the purpose of acting as a civilizing reference; establishing itself. In its time, as a severe institutional paradigm "(p. 379. our own translation). Fernandes and Correia (2010) also stress that:

[...] it occurs, in the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, the beginning of the formation of the project of modernity in Brazil, whose slogan "civilize" meant to be on an equal footing as Europe in terms of daily life. , [...] and whose forms of specialized technical-scientific knowledge that would form the basis of this modern paradigm would mainly be in medicine (normalizing the body), **in education (conforming mentalities)** and in engineering (organizing space) (FERNANDES and CORREIA, 2010, p. 183. our own translation, emphasis added).

According to the narratives presented by the new literates, it were assigned multiple roles in the subjects' formation to the "studies" promoted by and at school. We can take, as an example, Jesus' statement (1986): "*I thought: Sisters are lovely because they have study, they are of a refined kind*" (JESUS, 1986, p. 208). The kindness that drew the author's attention was associated with schooling, showing that the development of this attribute, which is generally associated with a person's emotional behavior and not their cognitive ability, is also linked to school, corroborating the representation of a school that civilized, that brought "polishing". For the author, plunged, according to her report, into the harshness of poor life among many who lacked school knowledge, in spite of the constant use of rude words and physical violence - *My mother used to beat me every day. [...] My mother pulled me: - Shut up, bitch!* (JESUS, 1986, p. 28. our own translation) -

---

<sup>4</sup> Italian commission charged with conducting studies for the protection and enhancement of the Italian historical and artistic heritage, which conducted studies between 1964 and 1967 and elaborated its results in a Declaration of Principles (ZANIRATO E RIBEIRO, 2006).

kindness was seen as an attribute that originated from studying: *People who become enlightened and prudent know how to conduct themselves in life* (JESUS, 1986, p. 219. our own translation). The notion of study as enlightenment is associated with the Enlightenment conception of education whose essential notion was the need to enlighten men and women from reason. In the words of Boto (2001):

The enlightenment brought by knowledge's power would lead to an openness of the understanding of the individual in their freedom, without the need for external guidance or orientation, leading the human being to the path of illustration, depending on what the philosopher [Kant] calls social and political majority (BOTO, 2001, p. 134. our own translation).

There was, therefore, among the new literates investigated, a general idea that the school civilized, educated, brought/promoted wisdom. It was understood as a mechanism that changed people, allowing them to leave their ignorance behind. *Delayed country. It was not the country; it was its inhabitants who could not instruct themselves* (JESUS, 1986, p.60). Note in this excerpt from the work of Jesus (1986) the proximity to the republican ideal of education that attributed to people's instruction a determining condition for the nation's progress: "The first Republicans in Brazil idealized the school not only as the country's regenerating factor, but also as propelling progress and social and economic development" (CARVALHO *et al.*, 2016, p. 257. our own translation). Other passages from Jesus' work (1986) reinforced this conception, like this example in which she presented studying as responsible for equipping people to defend the nation: *The one who speaks with knowledge is teaching. Our territory is immense, everyone must study to defend and conquer our lands* (JESUS, 1986, p. 53. our own translation). There is a notion that there was a need to spread knowledge across the country and this would be done through school.

Thus, anchored in the notion that the school represented such a good, the investigated authors lamented its absence, which justified many harms they perceived in their life stories, those around them and even the nation's, as Jesus' comment shows: "*It was with regret that I left school*" (JESUS, 1986, p. 157. our own translation). In the valuation attributed by them to school, the new literates presented the idea that without school for all, conditions for education, the country would not develop:

The elders said: - Our commitment is to this small people. To found several schools to illustrate them. [...] **Because Rui said** that this great Brazil he imagined will come when there are no more illiterates in our clod. May the fuel that drives the engines and the knowledge moves the man (JESUS, 1986, p.57, emphasis added. our own translation).

Since the late nineteenth century, primary or elementary education has received the recognition that it was necessary even for the popular classes of Brazilian society, trusting that without it this very population would determine the nation's underdevelopment: "the officials' discourses emphasized popular education as a condition of progress and civilization" (VEIGA, 2008, p. 513. our own translation). In *Amansando Meninos: uma leitura do cotidiano da escola a partir da obra de José Lins do Rego (1890-1920)* Galvão (1998) depicts how, in literature, means by which he studied the school routine of the early twentieth century, the idea of the civilizing school was present: "taming was synonymous with civilizing, rendering aristocratic behavior, teaching new cultural habits" (p. 114. our own translation). If the mill kids needed to be tamed to constitute the progress of the country, it was also the school that lent itself to this service, - "education was perceived [...] as a means of transforming human behavior, "civilizing", leaving "barbarism" (p. 113. our own translation). In the same way, the new literate presented themselves as those who needed to be rescued from the ignorance and unpreparedness of life to which they were predestined, according to their analysis, taking into account the family milieu of which they



were part of, where school absence prevailed. For them, school could play this bridging role between rudeness and politeness of their actions and intellectual capacity.

School was seen as a good to be pursued by the authors and their families - *We spent the whole year of 1920, attending classes in the city and in the morning, on top of that! We really had to get up early and walk about three kilometers to school in order to attend classes from seven o'clock on* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 43-44. our own translation). It had to be persecuted because most of the individuals analyzed found obstacles for school attendance. They needed to work full time, they could not afford private schools, they found adversities in getting to school and for the offer of vacancies, among other particular - but certainly representative of a collective - issues, mainly related to gender, ethnicity and geographical provenance. Thus, to the extent that the school was understood as necessary for the personal growth of the new literate and the possible salvation of their hard life, it was also worthy of sacrifice, especially for the older authors. The researched authors depicted deprivation from themselves and their families, to guarantee their education:

Poor mom, **sacrificing herself to the fullest, getting up early, so we wouldn't go to class without having breakfast before anything** [...] Oh, how regret comes later! But only later! How much did we lose when we left school! We could have left school a year before and **taken another direction on the path of life**. (FAGUNDES, 1977, p.48-49, emphasis added. our own translation)

It is important to observe how the report above highlights the adult Fagundes assessment of school in his life, relying on what he was not, what he did not live - an effective dedication to his student task. The author regretted “skipping classes”, taking the fact as responsible for his failing, intensified by the disregard for his mother's sacrifice.

For the authors and/or their families, studying corresponded to the possibility of social mobility, belief that judging by the (non) life change that the authors presented in the autobiography, hovered more on its symbolic than material action, as it will be shown hereafter.

The new literates researched stated that [school] education “improved” people's lives: *They [the teachers] show us the horizon of knowledge before it gets dark and we can no longer see it. They seek to improve the lives of others through education and science* (OLIVEIRA, 1974, p. 22. our own translation). In their writings, they thus attributed high value to school, considering it a cultural good and a legitimate means of access to culture.

### **School: condition to “diplamate”**

The school represented, to the examined group of authors, a sort of light, a lantern that lightened the paths of life, making a better life possible to those who attended it. An accurate description of what this improvement in their lives would be like was not found among the writings of the autobiographers, but in general terms the authors put forward the notion that it was possible to seek better jobs with a diploma, and the school is a way of getting it. It seems that much of the importance attached to school was due to the fact that graduation was not possible without it: *It was with regret that I left school. I cried because I was only two years away from receiving my degree* (JESUS, 1986, p.157. our own translation). According to the author's comment, the regret was not in the absence of school daily life, or in the loss of what would be experienced there, but in the fact that she had not completed primary school and, therefore, had not received a diploma. In these comments there seems to be an appreciation of school for what is obtained through it: the certificate. In a prayer to God, Costa (1979) says: *Give us what is necessary to educate our children, giving them what we cannot achieve because of poverty: a diploma, a dignified and ever-growing education in our view* (COSTA, 1979, p. 101, emphasis added. our own translation).

Graduating is even more strongly linked to the possibility of better placement in the job market, understood as a way of escaping manual, hard work and engaging in less stressful and higher status jobs, such as demonstrate the statements of Jesus (1986): *I noticed that white people were calmer because they already had their livelihoods. And because black people had no education, life was harder for them. When they got some work, it was exhausting* (JESUS, 1986, p. 66, emphasis added. our own translation); *The poor man's child was already destined to work in the field. The children of the rich were raised in boarding schools. It was a time in which only the minority received formal instruction* (JESUS, 1986, p. 50, emphasis added. our own translation). Note that in the distinction made by Jesus (1986) between rich and poor there was a crucial point: the absence of school for the poor. While the poor people were working, the author states, rich people attended boarding schools and received instruction. Although the overall schooling rate was small in the country<sup>5</sup>, Veiga (2008) explains that public school places, especially at middle and high school levels, were mainly filled by upper classes' boys and girls.

Jesus' statement (1986) regarding the predestination of the poor man's child to work in the field, in contrast to the time allocated to school for rich people, highlights once more the occurrence of child labor dividing the analyzed authors' time between school and the struggle for survival. One can infer that, in the author's view, school, even if present for poor children, was not the same as for the rich ones. For poor people there was, besides school, work. In research on childhood in rural locations of Minas Gerais State during the 1920s to 1950s, Jinzenji *et al.* (2012) highlight that:

Work is the predominant theme in the narratives, be it related to rural activities [...] or domestic [...] All of them worked, as did most of the poor children in Brazil since the previous centuries [...] in several regions of the country (JINZENJI *et al.*, 2012, p. 14. our own translation).

The new literates wrote in their narratives that better jobs could lead to better lives. They thus evidenced the possibility, through the school certificate, "to establish convertibility rates between cultural capital and economic capital, guaranteeing the cash value of a given school capital" (BOURDIEU, 2001, p. 79. our own translation). From this angle, Bourdieu (2001) pointed out the function assigned to the diploma of establishing "the cash value for which it can be exchanged in the labor market - school investment" (BOURDIEU, 2001, p. 79. our own translation).

Interestingly, among the analyzed authors, only one clearly presented some economic rise and, ironically or not, it was the one that had the shortest time of schooling. *I was born and raised, immersed in humility and poverty* (COSTA, 1979, p. 5. our own translation). Having attended the third primary year - a year of schooling - he became, according to his account, a fabric entrepreneur, ensuring his family a much less humble life than he had in his childhood. *It was there that we sold the first meter of fabric; Our progress was born there, giving us the fulfillment of all the success of our family life* (COSTA, 1979, p. 119. our own translation). It turns out, as it will be demonstrated by the following comment, that even Costa (1979) having succeeded in life without a degree, nurtured and/or disseminated a belief that life would be less difficult if he had graduated. Receiving a school diploma was, for the author, a particular sort of happiness, which would accomplish the feat of making life easier:

*Two hard-working people [his son Sinhô and his daughter-in-law], always steadfast in their arduous daily work, in one purpose: to raise their four children with love and to offer them all what we were not fortunate to obtain: a diploma, to make things a little easier in this difficult life we are going through* (COSTA, 1979, p. 207, our emphasis. our own translation).

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1920, the schooling rate in Brazil was 8.99%; in 1940, 21,43%; in 1950, 26,15% (ROMANELLI, 1978).

Costa (1979) did not know the fact that, among the considered authors, those with higher education - Portes (1985) and Santos (1963) - did not report in their autobiographies the economic enrichment that he, himself, declared:

*At that time we had a reasonable fortune, two good farms, four hundred and sixty head of cattle, a good horse husbandry, two houses in Bocaiúva, [...] two wagons with more than thirty oxen, one old truck, a passenger car, a big store, money in the hands of hundreds of people, my customers, [...] (COSTA, 1979, p. 223-224. our own translation).*

Even without a degree, Costa (1979) became a businessman and mayor of his hometown. As a mayor, his greatest wish was to bring to his city a school, so much value he attributed to it, the continuity of his studies. When addressing his tenure as mayor, he said: *The second item of our program is of utmost importance: the education of young folks. Every self-respecting city has a school for youth education (COSTA, 1979, p. 134. our own translation).* Was there a correspondence between the concrete social/financial change that occurred in the author's life, the lack of the diploma and the belief that life would be better with the diploma? Would the newly literates "struggled" less if they had graduated?

Costa reported several years shifting from one manual job to another, as well as several failures from being a drover to other duties, until the day his business acumen, according to the way he presented himself, led him to buy a fabric store. At one point in the narrative, Costa (1979) mentioned the fact that he had difficulties dealing with some subjects necessary for his business: *Everything was hard for me because I needed to talk about different and higher affairs with everyone, as well as talking to traders, not only topics related to business but the most recent events in the life of the country (COSTA, 1979, p. 59. our own translation).* It seems that Costa (1979) attributed to his low school education the fact that he did not master "more important" topics.

Carolina de Jesus (1986), who regretted the absence of the diploma, since she had attended two years of primary school, achieved international fame with the publication of her book<sup>6</sup>. The *ugly, crazy, slutty black girl* who once went to the streets begging for alms<sup>7</sup>, later released her books on many other days in the country, giving interviews, winning awards and being recognized as representative of a class - black and poor women (PERPÉTTUA, 2003). The absence of a diploma did not prevent the author from achieving social ascension, on the other hand it is not possible to conclude that not graduating was the reason for so many "exhaustive jobs" experienced by the author throughout her life. It is true that, in the view that Jesus (1986) disseminated in her autobiography, that it is a regret, an anguish of those who valued school, valued certificates and did not obtain it:

*I was jealous when I saw the kids coming and going from school. The streets became sad, there were no more children to play with. [...] - Mommy! Hey mommy! I want to go to school because the kids earn a hundred mil-réis on the lessons ... My mother didn't answer. She had already explained that I should turn seven. (JESUS, 1986, p. 121, emphasis added. our own translation).*

The degree was presented as a search, an overriding necessity, the possibility - if not denied to new literates, at least surrounded by obstacles and effort - of living better: better jobs, social

<sup>6</sup> The mentioned book is *Quarto de Despejo: diário de uma favelada*. São Paulo: Ática, 2005. Published for the first time in 1960.

<sup>7</sup> *In the second house where I rang the bell and asked for alms, the housewife said to me: Go work slut! I was out of action. I myself, who have the fighting spirit, of unwavering boldness, that I am strong in resolutions ... I cried. (JESUS, 1986, p. 205. our own translation).*

recognition, written proof of "wisdom." Obtaining it, therefore, was portrayed as a valuable achievement:

*My whole former class from 1920 went from 3rd to 4th grade in November 1921 and so, at the beginning of the classes in March 1922, we restarted, side by side, our journey towards our diploma together at the end of the year. Long live God!* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 53, emphasis added. our own translation).

Cheers are given when graduation is possible. The ordinary fact passes without celebration; however, completing primary school was an extraordinary fact among the studied group: in 1920, the average number of years of study in the country was two and a half years, which demonstrates the paucity of graduates in primary school, that had minimum duration of four years ( FERRARO, 2010). In 1940, the schooling rate in the central-south region of Brazil related to primary school was 57% of the corresponding school-age population, while in secondary school the rate decreased to 3.8%. Among those who enrolled in primary education, there was a considerable number of those who did not continue their studies until graduation and others who, although graduating, did not enroll in secondary education (ROMANELLI, 1978).

This appreciation of the school certificate is, in Bourdieu's analysis (1979/2001), the "objectification of cultural capital in the form of the diploma" (p. 78), whose acquisition would correspond to a sort of:

*[...] certificate of cultural competence that gives its holder a conventional value, constant and legally guaranteed with respect to culture, social alchemy [...]* (BOURDIEU, 1979/2001, p. 78. our own translation).

The school was ergo appreciated as the mean that promoted and determined the achievement of the diploma. It was, therefore, a necessary condition for the obtaining of this good that, in the authors' view, could have changed their future. Among them there was the judgment that certification (as well as schooling) was an important mechanism for social and cultural ascension. However, like other assumptions to achieve a supposedly peaceful and happy life, the degree was another denied opportunity for most of the researched group.

### **School: a family aspiration**

As they understood schooling as a way of entry to a happier life, the authors highlighted in their writing the familiar attendance in school-related matters:

*My father had promised to give each child a year at middle school. Before my turn came, my mother passed away and things have changed* (OLIVEIRA, 1974, p. 41. our own translation).

*[...] my sister Lia (Maria) started attending school, as my father wished* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 8. our own translation).

*I think that, at that time, his [father's] move from Cambira to São Gonçalo do Pará was motivated by his longing for the older kids, Maria and José, to get in school* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 7, our emphasis. our own translation).

It is possible to detect in the excerpts above the understanding by the authors that promoting the possibility of studying was among the finest purposes that parents had for the lives of their

children, expecting that they would achieve some success and a better life than their own, through studies. As Oliveira (1974) puts it, schooling was a promise from father to child.

Fagundes (1977) made clear that school attendance was of such importance to his parents that, to achieve it, the author supposed, it was even valid to change the place of their residence. Also, Costa (1979) moved from the countryside of Minas Gerais to the capital because of the desire to be with the children who lived in Belo Horizonte to go on with their studies: *As my business in Bocaiúva needed my presence, I was forced to return, even against my will, since the main purpose of our coming to the capital was to live with our student children, who also missed us [...]* (COSTA, 1979, p. 212. our own translation). There was, therefore, a reference of school, ascribed to the families of the newly literates, as an object of consumption of such importance for the lives of the children, that great efforts were justified to have it. At another point, Fagundes (1977) stated his own will to keep on attending school when moving his family to another location would make such aspiration impossible:

*At the beginning of the second semester of 1919, my father decided to move again and this time to Itaúna [...] It was school period. We were at school, and yet he didn't wait for December, vacation time. At least I had agreed that my brother José and I would stay in the village until the exams were over in late November. I was in 3rd grade and Jose was in 4th grade. As I was a church altar boy and also took part in a play that Father Sebastião had organized, he told my father that I could stay at his residence until I passed the exams (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 34. our own translation).*

Notice how this author's family was prepared to face disjunction of parents and children to maintain the opportunity of schooling. From this point on, the author reported a whole process of sorrow, such as homesickness, for chancing to complete the school year.

In his study on schooling and socialization in the reform of primary education in Minas Gerais, in the early twentieth century, De Melo (2010) highlights, among the representations attributed to the school by the students' families, the speech of José Augusto Lopes, director of the Central Elementary School of Juiz de Fora. For him, with regard to “the image that parents attribute to school as a place for their children”, it is possible to identify three aspects of the service of this institution: “sometimes to allow them to rest (the parents), sometimes for kids to learn how to read, sometimes to shape the character of the future citizen, the future head of the household [...]” (DE MELO, 2010, p. 167. our own translation). The last two notions of school also stood out in the new literates' writing. Knowing how to read and write as well as acquiring a more "cultured" and "enlightened" personality was a family's wish for their descendants. It was a belief in the opportunity of having children less exposed to the difficulties experienced by the underprivileged ones. The school would be the place that would provide them the tools needed to struggle in life.

The school was also presented for Jesus (1986) as an expectation of its family members, highlighting its natural ability<sup>8</sup> for the acquisition of knowledge, in contrast to the adversities related to the prejudices suffered by their ethnic and racial belonging: *She [her mother] explained to me that black people were ignorant. That the man who cannot read stands like a tree in one place. - When you turn seven, you will start going to school, you will learn to read* (JESUS, 1986, p. 112. our own translation). There seemed to be a yearning for the arrival of school age so that, finally, the child could start an important process in their education. Apparently, there was in Jesus' view recognition of her special intellectual capacity by those who lived with her<sup>9</sup>. This ability would be wasted if she did not attend school. There was a commotion in the community for Jesus (1986) to study: *My mother went to do laundry at Mr. José Saturnino's residence and his wife*

<sup>8</sup> My aunt Adriana used to say: - If Bitita [Jesus' nickname] heals, she'll be rich! She's very smart. But she won't heal. My mother said: - When you were a little girl, you were so smart (JESUS, 1986, p. 177. our own translation).

<sup>9</sup> Here the notion that their lives were special and distinct is present again among researched autobiographers.

*Dona Mariquinha told my mother to put me in school. My mother went to talk to the teacher. I accompanied her* (JESUS, 1986, p. 149, emphasis added. our own translation). And they still insisted: *Dona Mariquinha Leite insisted with my mother to send me to school. I went there just to find out what school was like* (JESUS, 1986, p. 150. our own translation).

Given the already discussed notion of distinction that marked the narrated life of each one in the autobiographical writing of the researched authors, the school occupied the position of paramount place to develop natural skills and talents they believed to have. Without this “culture-developer”, civility-promoting space which enabled people to learn less manual labor jobs, the new literate people would not be able to make good use of the natural gifts with which they were born: intelligence, cleverness, effort, dedication. Once again, the quoted passages suggest a positive view of the school, which was presented by the authors as the gift that parents wanted for their children.

### School: a place to learn how to read and write

Based on three examples - life (the world), cinema and storytelling - it was possible to see how, among the examined authors, there was a distinction between the so-called school knowledge and the one that could be learned outside school, although not always what was learned outside school was presented as a sort of knowledge:

*I met thousands of people, and in contact with this world of God, I learned more than schools could teach. On the other hand, I also suffered a lot* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 27. our own translation).

*The movies, besides the speed in reading, would teach me a lot, giving me agility to think, showing me more and more landscapes, big cities, the ocean, finally, a wide panorama that I was far from finding in the modest primary schoolroom. I do not remember learning anything bad* (PORTES, 1985, p. 27, emphasis added. our own translation).

*Then she [his mother] would start telling us wonderful stories and we would be soaked in the words she said* (BOTELHO, 1976, p. 63. our own translation).

*We worked together and my father spent the day telling me several stories from ancient times, many of which will be told in this book* (SANTOS, 1963, p. 51. our own translation).

However, there was a knowledge continually told by them as a particular knowledge of the classrooms. The most unanimous conception of school among the authors was related to an attribution given to it: teaching reading and writing. Among all of the seven authors it was possible to find at least one example for all, in which the notion that it is in and by the school system that one learns to read was present. In a given circumstance, Fagundes recounted his regret for “skipping” classes and described the expectation of what should be learned at school:

*What about the regret of deceiving our parents? Especially my mother who worked very hard so we could learn to read! We hope, however, that our current confession can warn future generations that lying, deceit is not worth it and that the pain of remorse and regret, really hurt us, especially if the fault was committed against our parents* (FAGUNDES, 1977, p. 49, emphasis added. our own translation).

It seems that teaching reading and writing was, according to what the new literates reported, more than the school's role, the main reason for its existence:

*“I [Portes' great-uncle] [...] never got hit. I was good at reading. [...] I even went to middle school. But those students, most part of them, could not stand the struggle of studying... It was not because of a degree either. It was just for learning to read, write and count. And many of them, so stupid, did not even learn that<sup>10</sup>”* (PORTES, 1985, p. 29. our own translation).

It is worth remembering that the school of most of the individuals surveyed was primary school. Many studies<sup>11</sup> have shown the centrality of the teaching of reading and writing in Brazilian primary education in the first decades of the 1900s, so that, according to Zotti (2006): “In practice, primary education remained restricted to writing, reading and calculus teaching”(p. 10). Notice in the passage above from Fagundes where “learning to read” replaced “going to school” - his mother sacrificed herself so that the author and his brothers could attend school, which is the same as learning to read, for the author - *my mother who worked very hard so we could learn to read!* The grown-up author's understanding of his childhood memories attributed regret to the fact that he had not strongly devoted himself to school's obligations, rewarding his mother for her commitment to her son's studies, in which it was very important to learn how to read and write.

The comment attributed to Carolina de Jesus's mother: - *When you are seven, you will enter school, you will learn to read* (JESUS, 1986, p.112, emphasis added), made clear this paramount notion of school among the authors. It represented the most conspicuous utility given to schooling and reinforced the direct association between school and reading learning. Among the new literates this association may have originated, or gained strength, from the fact that the scarce use of reading and writing by those around them determined, to some extent, that the available and elected literacy space was the classroom<sup>12</sup>. In this claim, there is an important element in the valuation of school insofar the family environment had no elements that boosted these learning skills. School occupied a space that parents could not replace.

*My grandfather's eight children could not read. They worked on rudimentary labors. My grandfather was bothered because his children did not learn how to read and he used to say: - It was not lack of will from my part. It was because at the time my children were supposed to study, schools were not available for black people* (JESUS, 1986, p. 68. our own translation).

The speech attributed to Jesus' grandfather reinforces our hypothesis when it is said that the lack of education justifies the fact that his eight children cannot read. That is, if you did not go to school, you did not learn how to read. The hope, according to what Jesus (1986) wrote in his book, was that school could solve this problem, since not knowing how to read conditioned some adversities, such as working in *rudimentary labors*.

Portes (1985), the only author among those surveyed who claims to have gone beyond primary school, also went to school to learn how to read: “*Wait a minute. Do you know how to read?*”[question asked by a school disciplinarian] *No, ma'am. I came to learn. Her eyes widened and she exclaimed, “Poor thing!” She was probably figuring out what I was going to pass through* (PORTES, 1985, p. 28. our own translation). The disciplinarian's expectation that the author could

<sup>10</sup> Quotation marks used by the author, Portes, to refer this speech to another author; in this case, his great-uncle

<sup>11</sup> Among these studies, see Veiga (2008), Fernandes and Correia (2010), as well as Ferreira (2013).

<sup>12</sup> It is important to emphasize that this association was not explicitly made by the authors in their writings. None of them stated they had to learn to read at school because their parents were illiterate or semi-literate. That is a research hypothesis.

already read is probably due to the fact that he had gone to school at the age of eight, not at seven, as asserted by law. His moving from the countryside to the city might explain this delay in starting school. Portes (1985) highlighted his condition as he began attending class: *Poor Me! It had been a year since I arrived from the countryside, completely illiterate, at the age of eight. She [the aunt who raised him] joyfully bought me a spelling book and dispatched me there* (PORTES, 1985, p. 28, our emphasis. our own translation).

The defense for literacy gets very strong after the proclamation of the Brazilian Republic, which brought to the scene the urgent need for national progress. According to Ferraro, “for almost four centuries, since the so-called discovery until the Empire's last decade, illiteracy was not a problem in Brazil” (2004, p. 113). Illiteracy emerges as a national problem only at the end of the Empire, especially due to debates about Saraiva Law and by liberal thoughts' dissemination (FERRARO, 2004). After the regime change, illiteracy prominently grows in modernizing and progressive proposals that comprised the plans for a new Brazil. Data from the Map of Illiteracy in Brazil (2003) indicates that in 1900 the illiterate rate in the population over 15 years old was 65.3%, going to 65% in 1920. There was, therefore, more than half of the enrolled Brazilian people in this situation. We must remember that fighting illiteracy was fundamental in the words that Jesus attributed to Rui Barbosa: *Because Rui said that this great Brazil he imagined will come when there are no more illiterates in our clod* (JESUS, 1986, p. 57. our own translation). Cavaliere (2003) points out that illiteracy, “viewed as a disease by the intellectuals of the time, as the country's greatest enemy [...] should be heroically fought. It was a moral crusade”(p. 32. our own translation). As well as the researched authors, the intellectuals and politicians of the new Republic of Brazil also attributed the task of literacy to school.

In the dialogues attributed to the teachers, the authors analyzed also showed that the concern on seeing them literate reached not only the students and their families:

[The teacher said] - *You are becoming a young lady, you have to learn how to read and write, and you will not have time to nurse because you need to prepare the lessons. I like to be obeyed. Can you hear me, Carolina Maria de Jesus ?!* (JESUS, 1986, p. 151, emphasis added. our own translation).

The speech reported as being by Jesus' teacher reinforced the widespread concern among the actors of education to literate students. The most immediate and appealing inflection that makes up the teacher's speech denotes the wish to literate children so that Jesus, already being young, could no longer postpone this learning. However, it should be noted that the author says she entered school when she was seven years old, an age corresponding to what stated the educational legislation.

The national commotion, fostered by the republican intellectual circle, to eliminate illiteracy may be another key to understand this sense attributed to school - regarded as the space to instruct how read and write. The analyzed authors were born, raised and went to school amid this debate,. In the 1950s and 1960s – the presumed moment of biographies' writing - the evaluative discourses of literacy were still present, especially regarding adult people.

### **School: an inheritance**

In the specified context, describing school education of family members, especially children, constituted a constant and extraordinary situation in the new literates' writing. Many of them made long comments specifying the educational background of their children, including schools attended and careers followed by them:



*Marcinha [his daughter-in-law] is a normalist, brilliantly formed in this capital. Vavá [his son] is a dental surgeon, graduated at UFMG's [Federal University of Minas Gerais] School of Dentistry (COSTA, 1979, p. 289. our own translation).*

*[...] my older brother came from Lavras high school and, confident of his student autonomy [...]* (OLIVEIRA, 1974, p.104. Our own translation).

*My brother Tatão studied pharmacy in Ouro Preto, my godfather was the one who paid for it [...]* (BOTELHO, 1976, p.262).

Some authors mentioned the education of the brother, the cousin, the daughter-in-law, suggesting a search for relatives who somehow went beyond their own school attendance. They wrote about others' fulfillments when they could not write about their own, but somehow they felt their frustrated wish for formal education contemplated by the education of their family members: *Matilde, my cousin [...] was studying in Taubaté (in Sao Paulo State); she was very polite, she spoke French very well, because she had a French teacher just for her, she studied for six years and then she graduated* (BOTELHO, 1976, p. 29, our emphasis. our own translation).

The narratives acquire a different inflection when telling about their direct descendants' education, as Costa (1979) exemplifies: *Our esteemed Walter [ his son] is a doctor, graduated from the Federal University of Belo Horizonte [UFMG]. He has a Public health course. He is the coordinator of I.N.P.S. [National Institute of Social Security]. He is also head of the State Health Center* (COSTA, 1979, p. 175. our own translation). There seems to be a feeling of pride embedded in this short excerpt: finally, the school was no longer a denied dream, but a real conquest, taken over by their hands... and, furthermore, it seems that such yearning was only dispelled in a later generation (their sons and daughters). The presence of this sort of account, as presented, implied the understanding that the conquest, the victory, was theirs. The valuable prize of their own struggles, sacrifices, was seen as a kind of reward for the way they had overcome life's hardness. The school finally shaped and thus socially raised them, through their graduated sons and daughters: doctors, dentists, lawyers, and teachers. After all, school was the promised step of the desired growth in life. We consider that transferring one's own desire for schooling to children is the last representation of school found in the analyzed corpus. In his prayer, Costa (1979) begs: [Praying to God] *Give us what is necessary to educate our children, giving them what we cannot achieve because of poverty: a diploma, a dignified and ever-growing education in our eyes* (COSTA, 1979, p. 101, emphasis added. our own translation).

Costa (1979) even mentioned the school performance of his grandchildren: *They are: our dear godson Oswaldo, who graduated at the Federal School of Dentistry [...]* (COSTA, 1979, p. 207. our own translation). Oliveira (1974), who reported having attended school when he was already 66 years old, elaborated a long list describing the school education and professions of all his children:

*In all there are seven children, thus dispersed throughout this Brazil: the first, Donaldo, Civil Engineer in Brasilia. The second, Ley, Professor in Belo Horizonte. The third, Wilton, Criminal Expert of Brasilia's technical police. The fourth, Edson, an employee of Brasilia's International Airport. The fifth, Ésio, Architect-Engineer in Sao Jose do Rio Preto - Sao Paulo State. The sixth, Maria, is a Social Worker in Brasilia. The seventh, Anaid, is also a Social Worker. She was in the United States for over two years* (OLIVEIRA, 1974, p. 125. our own translation).

Santos (1963) mentioned the education of one of his four children: *After graduating my son in primary school, I returned to Diamantina [...]* (SANTOS, 1963, p. 76. our own translation). It should be noted that unlike Oliveira (1974) and Costa, whose children attended higher education,

Santos (1963) seems happy to enable his son to graduate from primary school. Santos (1963) and Costa (1979) are born in the same year, 1898, the first in Diamantina and the second in Bocaiúva. Both cities are located in the northern region of Minas Gerais state, but Diamantina has greater urban development. The two authors told about their poor childhoods, but something important in Brazilian history differs them and may elucidate the fact that Santos (1963) is satisfied with the possibility of his son completing primary school, while Costa (1979) has medical and dentists sons: Santos (1963) is a black man, and Costa (1979) is a white man. Although Santos (1963), son of a former slave, has described Diamantina as city free of racism, there are in his writing excerpts that reveal several racist acts. Among the consequences of prejudice suffered by black people in Brazilian history, two instances particularly concern education: the discourse around a natural intellectual disability and the low expectation of socioeconomic mobility that accompanied the Brazilian black population. According to Veiga (2008):

*[...] in the first 60 years of the twentieth century, [...] the presence of black people in school was quite limited, not only because they belonged to the poorest segment of the population, but also because of the known disparity of opportunities at school between white, brown and black children (VEIGA, 2008, p. 502. our own translation).*

Thus, according to what one could aim for, given the social conditions of each new literate, parents presented their children's schooling as a victory standard, reinforcing the representation of school as an important and valuable good, which one should seek earnestly, though a great level of dedication was necessary. We consider, therefore, that transferring one's own wish for schooling to children is the last representation of the school found in the analyzed corpus.

### **Concluding considerations**

Throughout history, school has occupied distinct symbolic and material places for the numerous groups that attend/attended it or did not have/had access to it. In this article, we have benefited from the contribution of denaturalization that historical studies demonstrate from the many processes that constitute human experiences and, in particular, experiences related to the school institution. We amplified the voice of a social group that was growing up in Brazilian society at the specified moment studied: one composed of people who constituted the first generation, in their family lines, to establish a closer relationship with reading and writing.

Many historians have already reported the history of school groups', individual schools and educational reforms that marked the beginning of the twentieth century in Brazil and particularly in Minas Gerais State. They went through laws; newspapers and magazines; private writings and public reports of teaching inspectors; teachers' notebooks; students', managers' and teachers' writings; as well as dissimilar valuable sources to depict the history of the early-20th-century Minas Gerais State's educational past. These studies supported and complexified the current paper that analyzed how school, and more precisely, notions of school, figured in life stories told in autobiographical writings of Minas Gerais' ordinary people.

Throughout the analysis, the will to work well with the concept of representation determined three concerns that guided the work: relate the different belongings of the group studied with representations of school that they presented; increasingly understand the implications of perceived school conceptions with the particularities of the new literate group; and finally alternate the observation scale of the studied phenomenon, sometimes evaluating the meanings given to the school found in the autobiographies, sometimes relating them to other studies on education in the covered period, in which it was possible to make visible the diversity of contexts that constituted the studied past.

In the case of the new literates, two important elements shaped our conclusions: the complexity around the condition of literate and non-literate, and the importance credited to reading and writing skills present in Brazilian society in the early twentieth century and the period after-1950's, when the analyzed autobiographies were written. These points informed the way in which the new literates viewed school, conferring it, above all, the role of teaching them how to read and write. Learning how to read and write was a goal of great value for the researched group of authors. This goal was portrayed as an essential device for the life's changes they were aiming for, in order to achieve the sociocultural insertion they sought. In turn, school was, by the new literates investigated, elected as the major literacy space of reference.

School, as well as reading and writing apprenticeship, was seen a necessary tool for building a better life, insofar it was a way to get a better job, as well as wisdom and enlightenment.

Enlightenment, according to the authors, would enable new literate people to be included in a society that valued, increasingly and historically, literacy and formal studies. It could be found long lists of achievements and equally long lamentations in the seven autobiographies analyzed, as it could be expected in life stories that are intended to be real. Sorrow often refers to either lived situations that are later reflected as regrets, or wishes that have not been fulfilled. Obtaining the school diploma is certainly in the second case. And because of it, school was longed and valued.

As it has been shown, more than a concrete change in their socio-economic conditions, schooling was a symbolic good that, according to them, would rescue them from the position of excluded and marginalized in society. Importantly, at the time when the authors were of regular school age, the number of enrollments in Brazilian primary education was low (many Brazilian girls and boys were not in school), a circumstance that was different from the moment in which they wrote the autobiographies when massive school attendance presented significant growth. When these adults recalled their childhood memories, and school was not present in them, they attributed to this absence a source of great lamentation and wrote about it. For a group that chose writing a book as a valuable moment in their lives, which chose writing as a way of perpetuating themselves, making all their struggles and penalties worthwhile, school represented the space for writing and reading; the space of knowledge, wisdom, enlightenment, politeness, apprentice of noble occupations; the space where it was, to some extent, what they believed they did not have, especially in childhood and youth. They represented, therefore, what they did not have, precisely because the possibility of schooling, due to the adversities of life, was not possible for them. However, it is clear that many times everything they said they did not have because they did not attend school, was present in their narratives about childhood and youth: reading, writing, wisdom, enlightenment, cleverness, fame, social status and social ascension, despite the low educational level they reported in their writings.

It was concluded, thus, that school was overvalued by the newly literates, especially as a mechanism of inclusion in a society that, over the years - between the time of the reported memories and the time of writing - saw the appreciation of schooling and literacy grow. This society relegated the weight of backwardness and unpreparedness for life to those who did not acquire such goods. The authors sought through school, reading and writing, in their legitimate uses, to include themselves in the group of those who, through the knowledge path, occupied different places from those intended for them. The writing of a book - an autobiography - seemed to shape the quintessential outcome of this symbolic ascension.

## References

- BOTO, Carlota *et al.* Ética e educação clássica: virtude e felicidade no justo meio. **Educação e Sociedade**, v.22, n.76, p.21-146, 2001. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/v22n76/a08v2276.pdf>. Acesso em 22 abril 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-73302001000300008>
- BOTO, Carlota. A civilização escolar como projeto político e pedagógico da modernidade: cultura em classes, por escrito. **Cadernos Cedes**, v.23, n.61, p.378-397, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-32622003006100008>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. **A distinção: crítica social do julgamento**. Porto Alegre, RS: Zouk, 1984.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. Os três estados do capital cultural. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; CATANI, Afrânio (Org.). **Escritos de educação**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979. p. 73-79 (3. ed., 2001).
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. **A ilusão biográfica**. In: FERREIRA, Marieta de Moraes e AMADO, Janaína. (org.). Usos & abusos da história oral. 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 1996/2006. p. 183-191.
- BURKE, Peter. **A Escola dos Annales (1929-1989): a Revolução Francesa da Historiografia**. São Paulo: Fundação Editora da UNESP, 1997.
- CARVALHO, José Murilo de. **Os bestializados: o Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987.
- CARVALHO, José Murilo de. **Pontos e Bordados: Escritos de História e Política**. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1998.
- CARVALHO, Carlos Henrique de *et al.* O projeto modernizador à mineira: reformas administrativas e a formação de professores (Minas Gerais, 1906-1930). **Revista História da Educação**, v. 20, n. 49, p. 255-271, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-3459/60386>
- CERTEAU, Michel de. **A invenção do cotidiano - artes de fazer**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1994.
- CHARTIER, Roger. **A história cultural entre práticas e representações**. Tradução de Maria Manuela Galhardo. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil; 1990.
- CHARTIER, Roger. **A história ou a leitura do tempo**. Tradução de Cristina Antunes. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2009.
- FARIA FILHO, Luciano Mendes de. **Dos pardieiros aos palácios: cultura escolar em Belo Horizonte na Primeira República**. Passo Fundo: UPF, 2000.
- FERNANDES, Ana Lúcia e CORREIA, Luís Grosso. O ensino primário nos espaços-tempos da I República no Brasil (1889-1930) e em Portugal (1910-1926). **Revista da Faculdade de Letras – HISTÓRIA** - Porto, III Série, vol.11 – 2010, p.181-200. Disponível em: <http://hdl.handle.net/10451/5500>. Acesso em 23 out 2016.
- FERRARO, Alceu Ravello. Analfabetismo no Brasil: desconceitos e políticas de exclusão. **Revista Perspectiva**, v. 22, n. 01, p. 110-126, 2004.

FERRARO, Alceu Ravello. Escolarização no Brasil: articulando as perspectivas de gênero, raça e classe social. **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 36, n.2, p. 505-526, 117 maio/ago. 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/v36n2/a06v36n2.pdf>. Acesso em: 19 set. 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1517-97022010000200006>

FERREIRA, Ana Emília Cordeiro Souto. **Organização da instrução pública primária no Brasil: impasses e desafios em São Paulo, no Paraná e no Rio Grande do Norte (1890 1930)**. Tese. (Doutorado em Educação). Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia. UFU, 2013. Disponível em: <https://repositorio.ufu.br/handle/123456789/13661>. Acesso em maio 2017.

GALVÃO, Ana Maria Oliveira. **Amansando meninos: uma leitura do cotidiano da escola a partir da obra de José Lins do Rego (1890-1920)**. João Pessoa/PA: Editora Universitária, 1998.

GALVÃO, Ana Maria de Oliveira; LOPES, Eliane Marta Teixeira. **Território plural: a pesquisa em História da Educação**. São Paulo: Ática, 2010. 112 p.

GALVÃO, Ana Maria de Oliveira; *et al.* O lugar dos pertencimentos do escritor-adulto na reconstrução das memórias de infância. **Pro-posições**, Campinas, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2016-0064>

HÉBRARD, Jean. A escolarização dos saberes elementares na época moderna. **Teoria & Educação**. São Paulo, Pannonica, n. 2, 1990.

JINZENJI, Mônica Yumi; GALVÃO, Ana Maria; SILVA, Simone Alves. Memórias sobre a infância no meio rural: a escola e os outros espaços de sociabilidade (Minas Gerais-Brasil, 1920-1950). **Revista Portuguesa de Educação**, v. 25, n. 2, p. 09-33, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.21814/rpe.3000>

LE GOFF, Jacques. **História e memória**. Tradução Bernardo Leitão [*et al.*] - Campinas, SP. Editora da UNICAMP, 1990.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. **O pacto autobiográfico: de Rousseau à Internet...** Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2014.

LOURO, Guacira Lopes. Mulheres na sala de aula. **História das mulheres no Brasil**, v. 2, p. 443-481, 1997.

DE MELO, Cleide Maria Maciel. **A infância em disputa: escolarização e socialização na reforma de ensino primário em Minas Gerais 1927**. (Tese de doutorado). Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.bibliotecadigital.ufmg.br/dspace>. Acesso em 02 maio 2017.

MUSIAL, Gilvanice Barbosa da Silva. **A emergência da escola rural em Minas Gerais (1892-1899): quando a distinção possibilita a exclusão**. 258 f. (Doutorado em Educação) – Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2011.

PERPÉTUA, Elzira. Aquém do Quarto de despejo: a palavra de Carolina Maria de Jesus nos manuscritos de seu diário. **Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea**, n. 22, p. 63-83, 2003. Disponível em: <http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php>. Acesso em: 18 abril 2017.

ROMANELLI, Otaíza de Oliveira. **História da Educação no Brasil (1930/1973)**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978.

SCHULER, Alessandra Frota Martinez de; MAGALDI, Ana Maria Bandeira de Mello. Educação escolar na primeira república: memória, história e perspectivas de pesquisa. **Tempo**, vol. 13, n. 26, Niterói, 2008. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/scielo.141377>. Acesso em: 28 ago. 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-77042009000100003>

VEIGA, Cynthia Greive. Escola pública para os negros e os pobres no Brasil: uma invenção imperial. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, v.13, n.39, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782008000300007>

ZOTTI, Solange. Organização do ensino primário no Brasil: uma leitura da história do currículo oficial. In: LOMBARDI, José Claudinei; SAVIANI, Dermeval; NASCIMENTO, Maria Isabel Moura (orgs.). Navegando pela história da educação brasileira. Campinas-SP: Graf FE: **HISTEDBR**, 2006, p. 2-27. Disponível em: [http://www.histedbr.fe.unicamp.br/acer\\_histedbr/seminario/seminario7/TRABALHOS](http://www.histedbr.fe.unicamp.br/acer_histedbr/seminario/seminario7/TRABALHOS). Acesso em 23 out. 2016.