Review Article

Chronicle of a Research Project: Counter-memory Testimonies of its Researchers

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Abstract

I was part of the team of researchers of a research project funded by a Portuguese state body, based on action-research and very oriented to the promotion of local development, in particular the Murça region, in the north-eastern interior of Portugal. The required self-reflection of the team's researchers was helped from the outset by keeping records of their personal testimonies on the implementation of the research, through the continued writing of a "notebook" called the Chronicle which was passed around the project researchers and fellows. This paper aims to analyses such written records, using the theoretical notions of counter-memory and ego-research principles.

Keywords: Research team; Counter-memory; Ego-research; Personal testimonies; Research process

Introduction[1]

In his 1972 book Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, Michel Foucault, corroborating the German philosopher, criticizes metaphysical philosophy and historiography for being guided by the pursuit of truth in original events. By contrast, he argues that there is no "essential meaning", with the presentation of the development of humanity being a "series of interpretations" which are not timeless and objective and not disconnected from everything, but rather adjusted by the struggles underlying historical discourse, the knowledge of which is also determined by power. The text thus focuses on the discussion of the concept of genealogy, which M. Foucault seeks to oppose to history, and brings out the notion of counter-memory as opposed to memory. On that basis, history monumentalizes past achievements, emphasizing their magnitude against the ordinary sense of the present, whereby it leads to and calls for the reverence of the past. In this process, history claims to achieve an absolute truth, ultimately sacrificing the knowledge-producing subject. Genealogy is thus proposed as 'another history' contrary to this metaphysical notion of history. In genealogy, knowledge is accepted as having a perspective and the truths claimed are recognized as a succession of interpretations. Counter-memory associated thereto emerges as being able to question authorized memory, since it is not based on the reverence and claim of an absolute truth but makes room for less monumental and canonical memories. This allows the establishment of a relativized memory and/or related to particular contexts.

Bearing in mind this notion of counter-memory by M. Foucault [1], whose scope is essentially epistemological, I see it can be applied to and be useful for the processing of personal testimonies collected in the Chronicle and produced by the researchers and fellows of the Project in question. This is a transdisciplinary research project funded by a Portuguese state body and based in Murça, a region in the interior northeast of Portugal, which defined as its main objectives the implementation of four tasks. First, safeguarding and reusing regional cultural heritage, seen as an endogenous resource of the region; second, training of human resources that can help to protect and exploit regional cultural heritage as a means of economic enhancement and of social cohesion through the potential development of cultural tourism; third, creating an Education Memory Centre, based in one of the buildings of an old school cluster of the town, composed of three buildings and adjacent recreational areas, the preservation of which provides a representative illustration of the evolution of school buildings from the early 20th century to the present day; finally, the promotion of innovative forms of cultural democracy using the Centre as a platform for the achievement and/or dissemination thereof, in order to dynamize this heritage space made available by the municipality and, at the same time, transform it into an enabler of the initiatives of local social agents. In methodological terms, the Project uses numerous strategies that include the collection of ethnographic and archival data, oral history, and material cultural studies, rooted in a broad vision shaped by the action-research concept. As this research project brings together people from disciplinary areas as diverse as education sciences, history, museology and anthropology, and arts and geography, the scientific coordinator of the Project suggested at the project launch meeting that the team, in parallel with the research activities to be carried out, write their personal and individual testimonies about their participation. A 'notebook' was thus presented wherein the researchers and fellows should register their testimony. It is to the material gathered in this notebook, where all of us, as researchers and fellows, leave our testimony, that I have henceforth called Chronicle and I try to look through the notion of counter-memory.

In addition to this theoretical concept, the present analysis will also be guided by the principles of ego-research. In this regard, ego-research begs an explanation, since, within different disciplines, different names are used to specify quite comparable, though not completely overlapping, approaches. In literary studies one speaks of 'autobiography', in anthropology of 'autoethnography' and in history of 'ego-history', all of which refer to discursive practices of a self-reflexive or biographical nature. These biographical narratives are, however, used and valued differently according to the disciplines, depending on the contrasting epistemological positions adopted about the relevance of the individual and their particular experience in the production of knowledge [2].

The prevailing epistemological foundations in literary theory support the view that the particular characteristics of an author will inevitably manifest themselves in the author's work and, conversely, the insuperable sociocultural dimension of every literary work is also affirmed. Therefore, by not following the Cartesian divide between objectivity and subjectivity – or of a watertight separation between object of study and subject of study – in literary theory, the autobiography is merely the intensification of the subjective dimension present in the production of all knowledge. It is thus looked upon as a rich material teeming with meaning [3].

In the case of anthropology, since the beginning of its practice in the early 20th century, the traditional ethnographic account has been regarded as encompassing a double strand. While still meeting the demands of academic-scientific discourse, it also translates the unique individual experience that the researcher has undergone in the field. By the end of the 20th century, however, the self-critical movement sweeping the discipline demanded that this recognition of the subjective and culturally determined content of ethnographic narrative cease to be merely tacit and be effectively assumed and discussed. Within the scope of discussions initiated in Palo Alto, United States, and which culminated in the collective publication of Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of Ethnography, edited by James Clifford and Georg Marcus [4], autoethnography emerges as a multiplication of the debates about the need to clarify the subjectivation inherent to the production of the anthropological text [5]. The practice of autoethnography emerges as a means that will allow us to narrate our own research process in its successes and hesitations. It will help to question to what extent the usual conceptions/claims of truth and objectivity in cultural studies were not a means to legitimize a Eurocentric discourse about non-European societies [6]. It is thus verified that the inflection determined for anthropological and ethnographic practice is towards the appreciation of self-analysis and the recognition of the intersubjective nature of the experience. Field diaries gain increased relevance as a means to increase self-reflection on the very process of knowledge construction.

As regards history, it can be said that the prominence given to the source about the narrator led to the ideal of the 'objective' account, making what was lived by the individual more illegitimate [2]. Truth be told, the emergence of the so-called micro-history from the 1980s onwards resulted in a shift, in that the category 'individual' was resized, since its central proposition is the idea that variation in the scales of observation of phenomena brings heuristic benefits. However, in general, this new proposition was received with many reservations and was considered unwelcome by most historians [7]. The collective book Essays de Ego-histories, organized and presented by Pierre Nora [8], emerged as a novelty that succeeded in making further progress and opened the way towards the acceptance of personal experience as a possible source of theoretical validation. The work brings together texts by seven great French historians such as Jacques Le Goff or George Duby, those who accepted the epistemological and methodological challenge of exploring their individual memories as historians trying to raise awareness to the "connection between the history made by each individual and the history that shaped each individual" [8]. If we consider the few people who accepted P. Nora's challenge, the fact that the focus of the texts produced still tends to be limited to the respective intellectual trajectory, without the exposure of more personal choices, and also the admission of discomfort caused by carrying out this exercise [9], we understand that for historians this shift is not easy to achieve. Even so, it can be stated that in history

the beginning of the change in paradigm is beginning to take shape towards the legitimization of biographical or personal narratives as having heuristic potential.

In the light of the above, it should be understood that the use of the term 'ego-research' is not intended to refer to the positions of any specific disciplinary area. On the contrary, on the basis of what unites them, my intention is to refer to the various recent interdisciplinary developments concerning the legitimacy and merit accorded to biographical narratives. In this paper, therefore, the principles of ego-research are broadly linked to the use of personal narratives as vehicles of self-reflection in research processes in which the subjects of study participate. The endorsement of this epistemological position – less positivist and more in line with the idea that every research is always a social process of construction – helps to explain the intersubjectivity underlying the outcomes of any research and highlights the many-faceted and reconstructed nature of the identities of the individuals involved.

Thus, the Chronicle is addressed as the personification of the Project's research process. With its analysis, I intend to achieve a certain horizontalization of the memories related to the Project, as it will not be remembered only through a single voice, the institutional voice; moreover, I also seek to understand how personal narratives produce theory within the Project. The aforementioned trajectory on the issue of the legitimacy of personal narratives between the different disciplinary areas lets us foresee, from the outset, how writing or talking about oneself seems to entail many difficulties. We will see how far the project researchers were able to expose them and expose themselves.

The Chronicle and its Narratives

Taking the Chronicle as an object of study, for ease of presentation only, I will try to subdivide the analysis and focus first on the topic of the Project's counter-memories. In a second moment of analysis, I will tackle the characteristics and tendencies of self-reflection of the narratives that make up the Chronicle, even though this compartmentalization is not always easy to organize.

However, before doing so, systematization of some data is in order. It should be noted that the Chronicle brings together eleven individual narratives, assembled in arbitrary order, except for the first one, since it was thought that the project coordinator should initiate the records. The first narrative was written on 5 January 2019, about three months after the effective start of the Project, and the last one on 1 April 2020, which means that 15 months elapsed between one and the other, implying, therefore, different times in the Project's implementation. The first narrative, the one written by the Project coordinator, is quite explicit about endorsing the idea that the 'register of impressions' in a Chronicle format will be an effective means of creating communication channels between all team members, encouraging bridges between diverse 'ages, background, experiences, and expectations. The coordinator also recognizes its heuristic potential in terms of theoretical options to be taken and the results to be achieved:

(…) we are all on an equal footing in sharing our perspectives, impressions, reactions, and criticisms about the process, which

I believe will dissipate the fear of expressing ourselves. With this more personal narrative we will all hold information that will allow us to analyze the process, comparing our opinions along the way. It will allow us to better evaluate what we have done, our limitations and the weaknesses of our institutional partners, and to adapt/modify whatever is necessary. We will thus have individual and collective data that will allow us to reflect on the methodology followed, produce reports which reflect the process in an enriching way, to assess the effects of the word, and produce methodological knowledge. (R1)

It can therefore be noted that, in this first narrative, there is a kind of implicit endorsement of the two lines of analysis that I have adopted here to try to unravel the content of the Project's Chronicle: its potential as a means of counter-memories and as a component of a collective ego-research. At the same time, however, the same narrative also denotes the author's awareness of the reservations that the suggestion to write the Chronicle could or would raise among some of the team members:

This narrative should have started right away. I feared some reluctance and saved the proposal for later. This first moment of the narrative therefore portrays these three months of the project in an amalgamated manner. The aim is to have from here on, and for each moment, a narrative of each one. (R1)

It can be said that this position reflects the 'biographical turn' achieved by the history of education during the 1990s in several countries [10]. This turn translates into an increasing number of teachers reflecting on their experiences and their training processes. At the same time, the narrative also reflects the awareness that the assumption of the subjective and biographical dimension in academia and among staff members is not widespread. It anticipates that some of the researchers, because they have anthropological training, would adhere more spontaneously to the spirit of the Chronicle: "I would have preferred A. or B. to initiate the record, as they have training in anthropology". But there is also the conviction that extending the exercise throughout the entire research and by the whole team would confirm their contributions to the Project. This seems to be the case, as it is confirmed by the choice of the Chronicle being the object of analysis for this article. It is important to note, however, that the aforementioned objective of registering everyone's personal narratives for each moment of the Project could not be fully achieved due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent first general lockdown imposed on 12 March 2020 in Portugal. This new circumstance prevented the 'notebook' from continuing to circulate among the team members, as it became difficult and also unadvisable to make circulate among us a material object that could be a transmission route[2]. Thus, the 1 April record, which closed a round between all team members, became the last one, and it was decided not to continue with new rounds of narratives. This meant reducing the total number of records and, for each researcher, cutting short their biographical writing exercise to only one experience. This set limitations on the size of the Project's Chronicle but did not invalidate the relevance of its analysis.

In terms of the Chronicle's general characteristics, two other aspects must be mentioned. On the one hand, and taking into

account all the narratives, the Project coordinator's central role in the process seems to be striking, standing out as its mentor, a pillar that many expressly refer to on many occasions, and clearly as the pivotal figure around which all of the team members revolved, from many directions. It is due to a connection to her that we would all end up crossing paths in this Project. On the other hand, while recognizing the central role of the coordinator and wanting to respond to her challenge of writing personal narratives, committing to what was requested was not uniform. This was made more difficult by the many communities of epistemological belonging to which the different team members feel affiliated. In other words, because the investigative identity of researchers is not totally shared among all, overcoming the myth of scientific objectivity, which would allow self-narratives to take on a more personal tone, undergoes significant variations and even shows different levels of effort. Interestingly, in general terms, it can be said that underlying the eleven registers is the idea that a discourse constructed in the first person (singular), does not necessarily imply addressing insignificant issues. In this sense, they all provide some subjective approaches that make the Chronicle a rich source of information worthy of exploration. The example below is illustrative:

I must admit I don't know where to start, or where to end. There is nothing new in that. I'm a geographer … (…) I soon realized that I like geography very much, but that 'my' geography, essentially historical, is not exactly the trend among geographers. Whenever I send an abstract to a geography congress they have to find a special section for me. As a rule,

I am usually sent to the ''odd ones out', where unspecific papers are sent. This affection for historical geography made me someone who is 'no longer part of the gang', who is more of a historian than a geographer. (R5)

At the same time, however, it is also apparent that some researchers find that it is not easy, or even possible, to completely free themselves from the usual and more orthodox forms of academic discourse. This makes their narratives vary between an attempt at a personal and confessional tone and, on the other hand, seeking to keep to the principles of the Cartesian approach of reference, regarded as the only way to achieve the desired objectivity. In this case, the situations in which the authors of the self-reflections show the need to use bibliographical references, and even quotes, together with other personal narratives, are particularly illustrative thereof. It is true that this strategy is a mechanism for legitimizing the narrative produced and a way of demonstrating erudition and academically validated knowledge. However, this strategy is also contradictory to what is requested for the Chronicle, insofar as it implies not abandoning the type of register that will prevail in other materials produced as part of the Project, which must meet the requirements of academic-institutional discourse. To the extent that making a quotation, following the appropriate academic rules,

implies having to look for (and finding!) the respective text from which one is quoting, the personal narrative made in the Chronicle ends up being the opposite of what was intended. I see this attitude as reflecting an epistemological affiliation from which it may not be easy to break readily. But I also see it as linked to the difficulty felt by every person in our societies – which are not primarily oral societies – when faced with the request for a written exercise but is asked to show fluidity and spontaneity closer to orality than in the usual texts produced by these researchers.

Having said this, it is important to stress that although this extreme case of not abandoning intellectual grounding/legitimation sometimes occurs, the opposite case is much more frequent. There are numerous occasions in which narratives take on a personal reflective tone and their authors agree to address and expose biographical dimensions.

And this is how I became a professional and a person who can still be a dreamer, who likes to make things happen, creative and determined. I would say that this determination (…) brought me to Murça, following the project. Murça is (we are never sure of anything) maybe the end of my trajectory (…). (R11)

I wonder if not having been able to anticipate this greater convergence is not due to some prejudice I have about the educational sciences; more or less unconsciously accepting the rule according to which all scientific areas that need to use 'science' in their name are under threat of disqualification as such. (R3)

The project means a lot to me, in personal terms (daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of primary school teachers) and professional terms (I attended up to the 2nd year of primary teaching course) because I am interested in the learning process, in knowing what a school is/was. (R4)

I am unionized and active, as an expression of my civic commitment. (R1)

After reading all the narratives that make up the Chronicle – as I had to do in order to analyze it for this article – I learned about many aspects and dimensions of the lives of my research team colleagues of which I was not aware. Interestingly, I was also able to understand that my own narrative was not one of the most biographical ones. I realize that to assume that it would be is perhaps now clearly somewhat unfounded. However, my connection to anthropology and its usual practice of cultural immersion, with the recurrent use of field diaries as working tools, may have driven me in this direction. This is not the case. I note that my own written narrative does not refuse the self-reflexive character required and has a personal tone, allowing for some states of mind. However, other team members have exposed themselves more in biographical terms in that they have included in their records, for example, information about their family relationships.

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[2] It should also be added that at different times some team members or their family members and co-residents tested positive for Covid-19.

The Counter-Memories Offered by the Chronicle

Moving on to the topic of counter-memories as the axis of analysis of the Chronicle, it is now a matter of investigating which 'other stories of the Project' we can access through it. The notion of counter-memory, as formulated by M. Foucault and explained in the introduction to this article, refers to the consideration of less monumental or authorized landmarks and references. In this case, it means accessing memories that are less institutional than those produced by official reports and organized scientific-academic events and/or products, memories visualized herein through the personal testimonies gathered in the Chronicle. It is not a question of contesting or belittling the reports produced on a regular basis, nor the positive impacts already raised by the achievements, namely in the town community, but only of complementing them through counter-memories, usually with nowhere to be accommodated. The idea is to horizontalize the Project's memories by accessing counter-memories to remake the research process in a different way, using more fragmented references put into perspective that enable to accommodate even contradictory aspects, because they intersect with specific contexts of decision or action. Thus, the memory resulting from the research process will be less categorical and more diverse, effectively considering the group of researchers that make up the multidisciplinary team.

The first counter-memory I would like to refer to is the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, only the last narrative mentions this pandemic and how it's devastating effects forced the interruption of the programmed activities which, at the time, were in progress. But there is no doubt that all team members will find it impossible to remember the Project without associating it to the pandemic context, which, albeit indirectly, was effectively felt in the subject matter of the Chronicle, in that it was due to the mandatory lockdown that the second round of narratives was not continued. Mention should also be made of the great difficulty I had in physically getting hold the 'notebook' which embodies the Chronicle, since when we decided to start its analysis, the notebook was in the possession of one of the team members, and some of their relatives in their household had been diagnosed with Covid-19. It took some time and a few detours until I received the Chronicle.

Another counter-memory, profusely stated in the Chronicle, concerns the distress and hesitations felt by all the researchers about the operationalization of the project. In contrast to the generally affirmative and assertive tone typical of reports, the Chronicle shows constant distress about how the objectives of the projects could effectively be achieved and how results would be operationalized in the ground, and specifically in the town community. In the Chronicle, many voices are quite concerned about the urgent need to implement lines of action to reach the communities, establish contacts and gain their participation; how to quickly implement the Project, which requires a considerable amount of time and dedication, when the team members do not work on it full-time and have many other commitments outside Murça; about the fact that the people who would be working exclusively in the Project had not yet been hired; how effective collaboration would be established among the various team members; how to overcome the difficulties found in the relationship with local public entities, who are recognized as an indispensable partner, in particular for resourcing the basic equipment for the Centre, which is intended to become a focal point for boosting the local socio-cultural life … By accessing this counter-memory, the research process is exposed as a less categorical and linear process and is viewed as being much closer to its actual implementation. It becomes clear that this process implies – as it always will, even though at times this may be expunged – overcoming many doubts and anxieties. What comes across is a more hesitant discourse about the decisions taken and the many questions posed.

It cannot be stressed enough that these spaces are inseparable from and deeply intertwined in the local contexts and issues. This Memory Centre will be located in a community and will be wholly part thereof. But this will not be enough: the community also needs to become an essential part of this Centre. Are we ready to let it shape practices, programmes and policies? (…) How can we let the community 'in'? Is the community separated from and left outside of this project, needing to 'be allowed in'? What does 'community' mean? (R2)

(…). We all have different ages, experiences, background, and various expectations. All this excites me, but also leaves me uneasy about working in coordination, achieving the objectives we set ourselves. We are also dealing with local power, with all its potential and uncertainties, which makes me apprehensive. (…) (R1)

More specifically, the question that distresses me is how we can help achieve the mediation between the future Memory Centre and its surrounding community; (…). I know that 'to make it work' the project must 'work with the populations' and not 'for the populations!!' So, there is no other way to go about it but to do field work!! The first attempt at finding and motivating the local people to the project through the training course at the Vocational School was a bit of a fiasco and training for teachers is still tethered by red tape; we haven't managed to put any master's students on the ground; the doctoral student hasn't been found yet either; (…). (R3)

Meanwhile, we got to know the 'ins and outs' of what we want to do, we've been testing the waters, getting to know the spaces, and gave training (but there were so few of them!). I feel like we have just scratched the surface (…). (R5)

A third counter-memory gives an account of the Project's implementation stages, referring less to the achievement of the four major predefined objectives and more to recalling some particular contexts that occurred and the conviviality established between the team members and several other people. These actual meeting moments, where work and sociability came together to more or less extended degrees, are the most tangible milestones in the implementation of the Project in the territory. The town and some of its population members appear as real entities in these records, since the data gathered are not likely to fit into the more formal format of official reports. The adhesion to and enthusiasm for the Project shown by various entities and locals are also explicitly shown in the Chronicle's narratives, as well as the thanks given by all, without exception, to the team member who is a native and

resident in the town and who was always available, steadfast, and enthusiastic.

[I began] contacting different people, creating routines – eating routines, for example – and was able to grasp the local imaginary (…). When I visited the region, I initiated contacts with the town council and socialized with teachers, common people, young people and, obviously, familiarized myself with the space. There were times, for example, at the 1st Colloquium (…), where I saw people excited and willing to see the Education Memory Centre come to fruition. (…). On 1 February 2019, I visited the town again, now as a trainer. A dreadful storm scared away the trainees, but no one was brave enough to come. We managed time, exchanged ideas (…). I had lunch with Dr I. B., who in the afternoon took me (with insight and knowledge) across the council's regions. (…) (R8)

In one of those meetings with Dr V., we decided to participate in the Summer Camp organized by the City Council. Teacher I. and I prepared and ran the activities in an old classroom and in the playground of the Memory Centre for the children and young people. Then I came to town between 15 and 18 July. (R10)

The strong communion of efforts and in-depth work between the Education Memory Centre, the School Cluster and the Vocational School added a great deal of value to the work. (…). In addition, the families tried to look back on their family history (children, grandchildren, grandparents, great-grandparents). (R7)

When we went to the town, I. B. always showed first class hospitality and made us feel right at home, giving very relevant and opportune explanations that we could have added to a travel guide or a guide for tours around the region. (R6)

(…). And I can't forget the hospitality, including dinner, overnight stay, and breakfast, offered by I. at her own home in the town, during my training session at the Vocational School. (R3)

One last counter-memory is also noted, although expressed in a more subtle way and comprising several interconnected aspects. The fact that the team members self-realize that the team is divided into two sub-groups (the seniors and the juniors) is also somewhat apparent. This might be expected, insofar as the Chronicle also contains narratives of the fellows, and the members are between the ages of 68 and 24. But there is more to it. Alongside the already mentioned central role of the project coordinator, there were two groups of people who refer to each other differently. One such group calls each other by their first name, even when referring to the coordinator, while the other group uses the academic title followed

by the respective first and last names. On the other hand, it can also be seen that almost all members give information about their age, which shows the importance given to this biographical data. Most of the team members indicate their age, but interestingly the senior members choose to indicate their year of birth. Finally, and even more subtly, we can note complicities, but also dissatisfaction or minor disagreements, showing some potential tension. Through such a subtle counter-memory it becomes clear how the team works in a clear hierarchy, where not everyone has the same power and relevance, or feels they deserve the same deference. All this may appear expressed only through the choice of the first-person plural or the third person singular to refer to the team as a whole: the difference between 'we all want' or 'everyone wants' is almost imperceptible.

The Autobiographical Nature of Narratives and the Heuristic Potential of the Chronicle

In order to analyze the second line of research of the Chronicle, following the principles of ego-research as stated in the introduction to this article, I must address the preliminary issue of the specificity of the discourse constructed in the first person. As could be seen in the comments produced about the narratives and their transcripts, the team accepted the challenge of writing the Chronicle and embraced the issue of its legitimacy and heuristic usefulness. Therefore, if there had been any difficulty, this was removed; moreover, I have also mentioned the high level of biographism shown in some of the accounts given. From this perspective, the issue is clarified, and I will leave the explanation of other heuristic dimensions of the Chronicle for later.

However, we need to immediately address the fact that the self-reflexive narratives produced have some particular features as regards what can be called autobiographical discursive practices. The personal narratives collected do not fully comply with the characteristics of the genre insofar as each individual exercise of self-reflection is somewhat small in size and, on the other hand, are elements of a broader and collective whole. It is therefore true that the narratives that make up the Chronicle do not show the whole and retrospective viewpoint of a life, typical of an autobiography. In this sense, they do not even remotely correspond to The Confessions by J-J. Rousseau (1782), the philosophical autobiography of the Enlightenment author that P. Lejeune [11] considers as setting the guidelines for the genre[3]. That much is clear and was never intended to be otherwise.

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[3] According to P. Lejeune (2008: 65-66), the guidelines for the autobiographical genre present in The Confessions are: the use of Romanesque techniques to talk about the past and of personal narrative to create rapprochement with the reader; the account itself being taken as a means of broadening knowledge about oneself; the emphasis on childhood accounts and the importance of this for the adult personality; the approach to new dimensions of the personality through the description of related or ridiculous experiences.

In addition to this abyss, however, the narratives in the Chronicle maintain an immense affinity with the autobiographical genre, and it is only on the basis thereof that the narratives can be the foundation of a collective ego-research. This affinity is the 'awareness of the self' manifested by the narratives. In other words, in addition to the already mentioned specific features, the Chronicle's records fit into the discursive model of M. Foucault's "self-writing" [12]: a discursive practice in which the subject places himself vis-à-vis the self. In this regard, an author such as G. Gusdorf [3] is more useful to us, as for him autobiography is not identifiable by any particular format, but rather by the intention of offering the reader privileged access to the subject who writes it. As regards the materials under analysis, it is important to confirm this self-implicated and self-reflexive character manifested in the narratives, even if other characteristics of the autobiographical genre are not present. This second line of analysis focuses on the narratives of the Chronicle, regarded as a means of ego-research, precisely insofar as they constitute records of personal thoughts and impressions. Their confessional nature cannot be overlooked, and the writings and meditations therein are viewed as contributions to better organize ideas and decision-making processes.

Having clarified this aspect, I can now continue with the analysis, seeking to highlight the heuristic dimensions of the Chronicle. The aim is to explain how the narratives are means of self-discussion and self-awareness regarding the research process in which the authors are involved. It should be noted that the eleven researchers wrote their impressions knowing that they would all carry out the same task and that this task would be repeated throughout the research. On the other hand, although nothing concrete had been decided about the processing of the materials, it was also clear from the start that the team members would all read these narratives. These two factors served as incentives to the writing of the narratives themselves, in that they translated an implicit enhancement. At the same time, they also facilitated the perception that the individual narratives were part of a broader collective product, which was the Chronicle itself.

Looking at the Chronicle as an object of study but considering it as an exercise of ego-research, a first observation that should be made concerns its role in strengthening the feeling that everyone is part of the team. The consolidation of the group's sense of belonging, even though it may be diffuse, is important in that it facilitates the exchange of knowledge and the circulation of learning among the team members. The Chronicle makes it quite clear that the people responded positively to the challenge. But it also shows that they agreed to play the game expecting that it would be useful for the pursuit of the Project. Whether they imprint a more personalized or a more intellectual tone when recording their individual trajectory in the Project, the tone of the enthusiastic conversion to the new methodological practice stands out, in addition to all the expressed hesitations and anxieties that they may manifest. Without wanting to put undue weight on it, I would venture to say that this idea will be reinforced by the contribution of this article, whose writing and publication gives the Chronicle a heuristic status that until now had only remained latent.

The comments made in these lines and the reflections they provoked in me (…) made me understand that I participated in the initial tasks of the project as if in search of a feeling of belonging in the team, as a pre-condition that needed to be met before I could actually give my contribution to the project. I believe we achieved that. (R3)

Speaking of the project, I recall its difficult, painstaking start (…). Its financing was a burden owing to the huge commitments made and responsibilities related to the project. It is now important to reconstitute a narrative of collaboration, agreements, disagreements, and happy coincidences (…). (R6)

As an ego-research exercise, the Chronicle also enabled a panoramic overview of the research process that is being carried out. Its many narratives give us a multifaceted picture with a significant amount of detail about the research process and its difficulties. The heuristic potential of personal narratives is evident in the fact that through them it is possible to understand the difficulties, hesitations and successes that had to be dealt with before achieving knowledge and being able to talk about the results. The lack of time and the urgent need to expand the field work were notorious, theoretically highlighting the relevance of empirical work in this type of research.

(…) my contributions were mainly in terms of methodology, supporting the collection of materials and contacts with people from within the community, as well as in the 'musicological' aspects of the project and the proposed programme of the future Memory Centre. (…). I have tried to collect various documentation in a piecemeal fashion and preparing some lines of intervention (for example, from the organization of festivals, recreational games, or traditional tales to the use of the so-called participatory photography) (…). (R3)

In the construction of the Education Memory Centre puzzle, I consider that we are all part of a whole, which concerns everyone. In this sense, we have the interviews conducted by the trainees T. and M. with several people in the community, which portray some of the wishes of these people in relation to the Centre. These people can bring other people with them (…), and we can organize workshops with them (…). The joint effort and in-depth work also added great value (…), especially the younger ones and their families (…). I also believe that it is necessary and urgent to be more out in the field, to listen more to people and, consequently, to be more active. (…). Moreover, the submission of a structured proposal for the Centre to the City Council so that it can be easily approved in the Municipal Assembly …is more URGENT than ever! (R7)

Community is not just an association of people around common interests or even a shared geography, but the way in which these shared understandings act collectively. Perhaps this is one of our biggest challenges (and finding the word(s) to do so!). This challenge implies working transversally and in other lines of politics and poetics. (R2)

I feel we need members who can work full-time, which would help us all. The hiring process will take time. (…). I had a look at

the proposal submitted by C. for holding a meeting to discuss the concepts, to create a common understanding. (…) We need to think about the spaces/functions/objectives/feasibility of the Centre to be created, to present a structured proposal, but I feel that something is missing. How can we meet with the City Council architect? How should we present the proposal so that it can be approved by the councilors and presented to the Municipal Assembly? (R1)

Finally, one last aspect of the Chronicle related to its ability to be a kind of total archive of the Project. By listing the many events and activities in which each researcher was involved, their critical and self-reflexive narratives can be used to reconstruct a large number of events, dates and dynamics in order to obtain a global repository of all of the Project's implementation stages.

For me, the first project team meetings were precisely an introduction (and approach) to the place; October 2018 marks the trips to the town (…). I visited the Adães Bermudes Schools where the Memory Centre is based in October 2018 – or on the day of the colloquium, I don't quite remember. Along the way between the library (where the project team and the consultant, Prof. A. E., met with the Council members) and the schools allowed me to understand how the urban space is organized; (…). In the schools, the exhibition 'Education Memories of Bygone Days' was on display. I stopped to look carefully at five photographs. (…). In November 2019, at the time of the 2nd Colloquium on Education, Cultural Heritage and Development, I was able to meet M. J. S. again (…). In October, I went to town for a teacher training activity. (…) this message was magnificently captured by the teachers and illustrated in their final course works, presented, and discussed on 7 December. (R8)

In the meantime, although the trip to Berlanga del Duero in early March, to use up the Carnival holidays to visit the CEINCE and try to understand how it worked, helped me to consolidate that embody that feeling of belonging to the team that I mentioned before, it was however of little use in giving me suggestions regarding lines of work to apply in this project. (R3)

I believe the project has progressed a lot in these last six months, even though there is still much to do. The Centre is already running and is equipped with furniture, internet, cleaning, staff, and has a contract signed with FCPE and the City Council. Other initiatives are also up and running partnerships with the School Cluster and the Vocational School, photography intern, two temporary exhibitions, the 2nd International Colloquium, a teacher training course, some written scientific articles, support facilities for the storage of objects. I think about this and am happy with how far we have come. (R11)

Despite all my doubts, the Colloquium demonstrated the local institutions' genuine desire to collaborate. The schools (Cluster and Vocational School) collaborated tremendously, as did the Council and the National Vale Agency. The question I ask myself is: how do we transform this ad-hoc collaboration into a continuous one? It even made the local newspaper, which gives visibility to the project. (R1)

In order to talk about the project, I almost feel compelled to take a trip back in time. I joined the project almost three years ago when I started my Master's (…). My interest in working in places linked to non-formal education [led me to] the Education Memory Centre and to the possibility of doing my curricular internship there (…). The CME became an important goal that I wanted to fulfil (…) I gradually became part of the community, made my contacts, and left some impressions. I left the town in March 2018 always hoping that the project would succeed and that I would return. In April 2019 I learned that the competition for a research fellow was going to be launched (…). I returned on 15 October 2019. (R9)

Final note

For William Spengemann [13, the work Confessions, written by St. Augustine in the 4th century, will be the great model of Western autobiography, as reflection and memory are both considered therein as a means of self-knowledge. W. Spengemann [13] demonstrates in detail how the work contains what he identifies as the three characteristic dimensions of discourse constructed in the first person: the historical memory of oneself, the philosophical self-research, and the poetic self-expression. The Chronicle that I have chosen as the object of analysis is not – nor was it ever intended to be – an autobiography, but the 'self-consciousness' of its narratives also meets those requirements. Looked at from the angle of counter-memories through which it provides access to data otherwise hidden, or through the route of the ego-research it manages to provide, the Chronicle presents a heuristic potential that is by no means negligible. The analysis carried out illustrates that autobiography is not the opposite of an effective heuristic potential. In the same vein, it also shows how, although some resistances are striking, the Project's researchers did not come up against insuperable obstacles to the exercise of relating to themselves in the context of the research process. Although with remarkable nuances, the limits of subjectivation that each one defined for themselves and accepted to incorporate into the process of knowledge production were not very tight.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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