

# Biography and temporalities: historiographical practice and history teaching<sup>1</sup>

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## *Biografia e temporalidades: prática historiográfica e o ensino de história*

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### RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo propor reflexões sobre a escrita biográfica e seus tensionamentos com o campo da pesquisa/ensino de história. Compreendendo que o empreendimento biográfico é resultado de uma escrita fundamentalmente atravessada por temporalidades diversas, percebemos na artificialidade dessa escrita, sua potencialidade para analisarmos os descontínuos da vida humana e suas relações no tempo/espaço. Desse modo, buscamos destacar importantes aspectos do diálogo entre história e biografia, evidenciando novos aportes teóricos e metodológicos que contribuem, ainda, para a revisitação de seu uso e de sua produção para o ensino de história.

*Palavras-chave:* História. Biografia. Ensino de história. Temporalidades.

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to propose reflections on biographical writing and its tension with the field of research / teaching history. Understanding that the biographical work is the result of a writing fundamentally crossed by different temporalities, we see in the artificiality of this writing the potential to analyze the discontinuities of human life and their relations in time / space. In this way, we seek to highlight important aspects of the dialogue between history and biography, emphasizing new theoretical and methodological contributions that also contribute to revisit its use and production for the teaching of history.

*Keywords:* History. Biography. Teaching history. Temporalities.

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Time is the essence of research and writing promoted in the biographical work. It is in the crossing of temporalities which make a mark on the life of the biographee, intertwined by the temporalities of those who dare to narrate life where biographical writing takes place. It is in this perspective that this article intends to base its contributions to the biographical practice produced by historiography, as well as its adoption and production for the teaching of History. We seek to show how new theoretical and methodological contributions can collaborate with the deepening of the dialogue between history and biography, proposing to revisit the trajectory, sometimes troubled, between the two genres.

We can start our reflection from the temporalities expressed in the narrative, especially its connection with a linear and chronological perspective. Biographical writing seems to impel us to reproduce a textual structure that proposes order, rhythm, and chronology to human life. However, the debates about this type of writing in its various fields of production highlighted that the chronological structure was just a path to be followed, just a way of situating life in time/space. Human life narrated from dates that begin from birth, featuring elements such as studies, work, marriage, children, and, finally, culminating in death, evoked debates about a biographical writing that aims to be situated in certain time frames and mobilize a narrative that emphasizes the uniqueness of being.

This uniqueness, cohesion or even predestination presented in many biographical narratives, highlighted the emergence of thinking about how time crosses not only human life, but also the ways of narrating it. Steeped in the intention of making the biography meaningful, making it readable, we obliterate the exposed and overlapping temporal layers that are in the narrative. These temporal layers are present in the lived time; in the registered sources; in the said, in the silenced, in the chosen and in the narrated elements, and they are the ones that keep us away from the idea of the uniqueness of being, always indicating the impossibility of narrating 'the whole' life.

In recent years, with the profusion of biographical publications, several debates have been raised, highlighting issues such as the ethical, methodological, and narrative principles of biographical writing. Its limits and contributions encouraged several areas of knowledge to revisit biographical writing, highlighting the problems between history and biography, tensions that still begin in their place of origin - at least in their western version: ancient Greece. The biographical genre returned to debates as novelty for historiography, as a 'new domain of history'<sup>1</sup>, while presenting itself as an old acquaintance.

1 Reference to the book *Novos Domínios da História*, in which the historian Benito Bisso Schmidt presents an overview between history and biography.

In this scenario, some contributions were produced, stressing three texts, the ones Alexandre Avelar (2017, p. 4) provocatively lists as the most cited and commented among historians: *The biographical challenge*, by François Dosse (2015), and the articles *Biography as a problem* (1998) and *Biography as a historiographical problem* (2010), by Sabina Loriga and Jacques Revel, respectively. The terms “challenge” and “problem” cause an initial discomfort for those who intend to follow the biographical paths, after all, both seem to advise some caution to historians who aim to act as biographers sometimes, placing under suspicion the approach between genders.

The precaution with the limits between history and biography is not new, however, the debate seems to have grown in recent years, with the dizzying increase in biographies and autobiographies spread in different media: books, movies, mini-series etc. The good reception of the consuming public - sometimes attracted by the intimate stories of personalities, which allow us to know the ‘more human’ side of these protagonists - expanded the offer of biographies produced by different professionals, mainly journalists.

The profusion of narratives reasoned out on life stories may have been driven by the failures of the presentist historicity regime, which, analyzed by François Hartog (2014), indicate a moment of nostalgic valorization of characters from another time, in a relationship close to the *historia magistra vitae*, in which, in different trajectories, the exemplarity of their actions was sought. This failure of presentism would denote the discomfort of a hypertrophied present, resulting from this process the search for roots, identities, yearning for memory and for patrimonialization (HARTOG, 1996).

During the failure processes of presentism - started in the 1970s - we can situate the “rediscovery” or “return” of biography to the historiographic field. The resumption of biography came with the crisis of the structuralist paradigm, according to which history should understand the structures that organize economic and social mechanisms, regardless of individual actions. In French historiography, we can situate a change in the role of individuals from the third generation of the *Annales* – that was before dedicated to research on the imaginary and collective mentalities, and started to produce important works on individual personalities. Keeping faithful to the problem-history perspective, historians started to use biography to understand certain social contexts.

Since then, being closer to some historiographical trends, such as Italian microhistory, the biography has been promoting deep debates among historians who seek to clarify theoretical, methodological, and, why not, frontiers with the biographical genre. The caution is based mainly on the association of the genre with models already criticized for making history, linked to the “cult of heroes” and “great figures”.

Many historians began to use other terms in an attempt to evade the word biography, using, for example, terms such as “trajectory” - in reference to Pierre Bourdieu (1996) - or “route”, thus avoiding a possible connection with the genre biographical and its association with the “historicizing history”, denounced by Lucien Febvre (SCHMIDT, 2017, p. 45). The adoption of these strategies indicates that Pierre Bourdieu’s overwhelming criticisms of the “biographical illusion” was still reverberating among history professionals. Criticisms directed to the sense of uniqueness of being are also linked to the use of terms that indicate time/space in the narrative, such as “already”, “since then”, “since childhood”, “always”, which, according to the author, would contribute to the understanding that life is a coherent and oriented set of actions, expressing a subjective and objective project intention (BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 184).

Discussions about the biographical narrative highlighted an old and sensitive issue: the tensions between truth and fiction in historical discipline. However, the specificity of the biographical narrative may lie in the fact that, when narrating a life, the historian needs to take into account psychological and behavioral issues that demonstrate the fragmentary and dynamic character of a life. But, following a biographical tradition established, and the discipline’s own rhetoric, “we are delighted with models that associate an ordered chronology, a coherent and stable personality, actions without inertia and decisions without uncertainty” (LEVI, 2006, p. 169). This narrative model seems to be safer and controllable, since, according to the chronological order of life, the sources would be more intelligible to the reader, emphasizing the veracity of the narrative.

However, the gaps left by historical sources do not escape from this narrative model, or even the impossibility of narrating ‘the whole life’, a fact that fostered an approximation of historians with other fields of knowledge. Its characterization as a “hybrid genre” (DOSSE, 2015) indicates that its practice occurs in many fields of discursive production, such as cinema, anthropology, journalism and literature, which would expand the range of possibilities for biographical narrative ‘models’. Among the dialogues established with other fields of knowledge, the approach to literature was quite attractive, evidencing the search for aesthetic inspiration “without concern for the varied and refined cognitive possibilities that such references offer” (SCHMIDT, 2004, p. 133).

The alert regarding literary inspiration aims to indicate that the biographer needs to be aware of his narrative resources, as they are the ones who configure the character, besides that, these resources are not only related to the shape, but to the author’s epistemological choices (SCHMIDT, 2017). Following this line of reflection, Schmidt exemplifies the use of *flashbacks* and dialogues, which are usual in literary and journalistic biographies, and which could contribute a lot to historical biography, expressing, for example, the time of memory

and the relationships of individuals with contemporary ones, however, “how to do this without breaking with the protocols of historiographical operation? Would the academic place have enough flexibility to allow these boldnesses?” (SCHMIDT, 2017, p. 48).

Sketching an answer to the question, the author mentions the works of Georges Duby (1987) and Natalie Davis (1997), who dialogued, respectively, with Guilherme Marechal, and with 17th century characters, “but would this be possible for young historians who write their dissertations and theses?” (SCHMIDT, 2017, p. 48). Challenging even more young practitioners of the profession, Vavy Pacheco Borges indicates that, for some people, “the writing of one life is an exercise that is best practiced into old age, after having already advanced in this path” (BORGES, 2008, p. 216).

If the boldness in relation to the biographical narrative and the requirements of the biographer present themselves as a challenge to young historians, the situation becomes even more complex when we observe that, when dedicating themselves to biography, these professionals invested years in the business of weaving a life: Jacques Le Goff, 15 years dedicated to São Luís and four decades to São Francisco de Assis; Carlos Herrejón Peredo, 30 years devoted to the life of the Mexican Miguel Hidalgo; besides the counter-example, when, due to the long dedication, there is the refusal of the enterprise, as in the case of Vavy Pacheco Borges, when she refused to write a biography about Getúlio Vargas.

But, after all, would the need for a long dedication be more related to the biographer or the biographee? Would the lives, the ones that crossed times and spaces - with great collective insertion - be more difficult to narrate? The possibilities for answering this question raise another issue of the biographical genre: representativeness.

The question of representativeness is analyzed by Adriana Barreto de Souza as something common in biographies, pointing out that there is a predominance between two uses of this genre: representativeness and case study. In relation to the first model, the singularity of the trajectory would be the main motivation of the biographer, understanding that the narrated life would synthesize other biographies, which would be present in the text itself and represented by means of numbers and statistical tables. In this analysis, the author points out the use of classic social history procedures as a way of legitimizing the study, procedures based on generalization (SOUZA, 2003).

Regarding the case study, the biographers adopt the macro-structural analysis as a starting point, elaborating explanatory tables based on that study. Only after this process, the biographical investigation begins, which makes the function of the biography only illustrative (SOUZA, 2003). In this perspective,

“the work with the idea of a case study places even less value on the biographical as a place of production of a historical discourse” (SOUZA, 2003, p. 96).

When they do not seek to dedicate their pages to show how unique the trajectory of his/her biographee is, many historians produce long narratives about the context in which the character is inscribed. The contextualization, which sometimes occupies one or more chapters of a work, aims to create reality effects, configuring a frame/stage/scenario for the performance of the biographee. However, it is necessary to measure the risk of overvaluing the context as an explanatory instance, blocking the performance of the individual in his/her social environment and in his/her time; “You have to see it in motion” (BORGES, 2008, p. 223).

Observing and narrating this “movement” aims to give the biographical plot a balance, which, even indicating a certain historical determination when placing the character in space/time, still manages to demonstrate how these agents build their networks, produce dynamics and make decisions.

In our daily lives, when making a decision, we are guided by what we know at that moment, by the concrete possibilities that then appear. The decision-making acts take place in the heart and in the mind, at a crossing of the past - present - future times, which are quite interwoven. Unfortunately, most of the times, the hows and the reasons for the biography’s decisions are not documented; seldom can one follow the decision challenges, in times of conflict, hesitations and doubts. But one must always keep in mind that these ones existed (BORGES, 2008, p. 224).

The exclusion of personal experiences can lead to neglect or to the correction of the egotistical elements of the biography, the result of this process being “one of the most melancholic: historical time becomes a surface devoid of fingerprints” (LORIGA, 2011, p. 223). In this sense, focusing the character over time is to realize that his/her movement is not linear and unidirectional, but it is subjected to uncertainties, discontinuities, oscillations and inconsistencies, and these inconsistencies need to dialogue with a larger context, which must be taken into account, but it cannot block life’s own rhythms. Suggesting how to think about this dialogue between individual and society, Schmidt, paraphrasing E. P. Thompson, shows the need to express the character’s “making himself” throughout his/her life, in a vigilant manner, so as not to put an artificial coherence down to the studied life (SCHMIDT, 2004, p. 139).

This artificiality of the biographical work - something inevitable in this type of narrative - is not only present at the time of writing the biography, but it is also present in autobiographical sources, as well as in other memoir sources about the character. Detecting the narrative of life in these memory holders requires more than an exercise of analyzing the sources on the part of the historian, it requires that he/she can indicate the choices adopted by the research, mentioning his/her path, making his/her work evident and let “very clear the presence and the way of being of the subject who built it” (BORGES, 2008, p. 225).

Still thinking about the memory holders, it is essential to understand the temporalities found in these documents, after all, would the biographical and autobiographical documents have “time *strata*”? Could this metaphor instrumentalized by Reinhart Koselleck (2014) help to understand the temporal layers of time lived individually? How to mobilize the time lived, the time of production of the collection and the time of the narrative?

In Michel de Certeau’s statement (*apud* HARTOG, 2014, p. 19), the objectification of the past had made time an unthinkable element of historical discipline, which can be understood as a warning for us historians. From these reflections we can seek assistance in the proposition of Carlos Herrejón Peredo, who, when dedicating himself to the biography of Miguel Hidalgo, ‘the father of the Mexican homeland’, proposes to reflect on a theoretical framework for the biography:

[...] tengo para mí que la clave para entender y organizar una biografía es buscar las decisiones más trascendentes, las que orientan los principales periodos de la vida, las que redefinen las relaciones familiares, amorosas, laborales, profesionales, morales, religiosas, etcétera, de tal manera que las acciones posteriores de la persona generalmente son consecuencia de la resolución primordial. Funcionan como goznes que van armando la estructura biográfica a través del tiempo (PEREDO, 2013, p. 44).

Peredo’s reflections started from Hidalgo’s own biography, who used to repeat that the story “tiene dos ojos: la cronología y la geografía” (PEREDO, 2013, p. 42). For the historian, time and space would not be just coordinated to situate the character, “el tiempo es la oportunidad en la vida y abre la posibilidad de cambios para otorgarle a la biografía un sentido dramático. El espacio no es sólo escenario, sino otro actor de la historia con que en el personaje interactúa” (PEREDO, 2013, p. 42). In addition to the importance of time and space in life and in the biographical narrative, Carlos Herrejón sought to emphasize the

need to understand the subject's so-called "transcendental decisions", because these would guide the main periods of life, being directly related to love, work, friendship and enmities etc. These decisions would cause breaks that would define, break up or condition the trajectory of a life, being these breaks called as jokes, by Peredo.

Si la historia en general es un proceso temporal, la vida de una persona lo es de manera especial. Y a pesar de los hados, el hombre tiene parte y responsabilidad en la conducción de ese proceso. Las decisiones trascendentes son, pues, los goznes de ese proceso (PEREDO, 2013, p. 44).

In a literal translation, *goznes* would be hinges, which would represent the unity of a life marked by its ruptures. However, despite indicating that these breaks may be related to the subjects with whom the biographee interacts, the transcendental dimension of these breaks would occur especially "cuando se trata de asumir actitudes y caminos de vida moral contrarios a los antes transitados. Entonces nos hallamos ante un cambio de decisión trascendente, ante una conversión" (PEREDO, 2013, p. 44). This reflection by Peredo - carried out after 30 years of dedication to Hidalgo's biography, which resulted in dozens of publications on the biographee - is closely linked to the character studied, as the transcendental and conversion aspects, for example, are directly related to the theological studies of Hidalgo; studies carried out throughout his life, since, during a good part of his trajectory, he exercised the function of priest.

We can look for evidence of these *goznes* in the materiality produced during human life; documentary, photographic, and three-dimensional collections, as well as oral narratives, and so many other marks that express a lived trajectory. By consulting documentary archives, for example, we can see the motivations and processes of documentary accumulation performed by the biographee, since the gesture of keeping documents is also the result of processes of choices and discards. After all, when archiving a life "the keeper immortalizes an era and produces representations and marks of oneself" (CUNHA, 2017, p. 191). When composing a personal file, autobiographical objects materialize a proposal for reading associated with the image that one wanted to preserve from oneself (CUNHA, 2017). Evidently, every filing of the *self* has a public function, which will help in spreading a narrative about that person's life, even though it is an intimate practice.



As Artières (1998, p. 31) warns us, this process of archiving one's own life is not neutral; "it is often the only occasion for an individual to make himself seen as he sees himself and as he would like to be seen", that is, there is, in the archiving process, an artificiality that needs to be understood and, as far as possible, unraveled. The documents present there can be understood as a symbolic preparation of their own process, gathering evidence for a defense, or organizing it to refute the representation that others have of us. "Filing one's life is to defy the order of things: the justice of men as well as the work of time" (ARTIÈRES, 1998, p. 31).

Beyond the practical, bureaucratic, and evidential function of the documents that constitute a personal collection, the accumulation and sorting process is marked by a symbolic function. At the confluence of the material and symbolic dimensions configured in a collection, we can glimpse an image that the biographee sought to preserve from himself/herself. In addition, we can also observe the networks formed, their circulation spaces, and more accurately, the autobiographical writings. By having reports from the protagonist himself/herself, we understand that these narratives produce 'projections of the self', and, inevitably, a framework of memory (POLLAK, 1989), carried out by many individuals.

In these autobiographical records there is a desire to perpetuate oneself, to constitute one's own identity for times to come, or, in the words of Renato Janine Ribeiro (1998, p. 35), to forge a glory. In these texts, we can observe, in a more attentive way, their positions, their choices, their goals and their links, even those ones hidden by the narrative. Ângela de Castro Gomes points out that self-writing practices clearly demonstrate how an individual trajectory has a path that changes over time, which runs through succession, and can show how the same period of a person's life can be "decomposed" in times with different rhythms: some time at home, some time at work etc. (GOMES, 2004, p. 13).

## **Temporalities, narratives, and history teaching**

The tensions between history and biography; their fruitful dialogues; their limits and borders; and their methodological processes indicate opportune reflections between genders, as well as changes in discursive operations in both. At the same time that the rapprochement between history and biography in the academic world was being discussed, in other places - where the dialogue between the genders was not so distant - other questions were promoted reigniting

the discussion, in this specific case, we are referring to the debates in the field of history teaching.

In 2009, the historian Kalina Vanderlei Silva asserted that it would not be an exaggeration to affirm that many of the Brazilian teachers would feel chills just thinking about using biographies as a teaching theme (SILVA, 2009, p. 13). Corroborating the author, we think that the statement is still very current and easily justified, because

The biographical perspective in school life found a prominent place in the imperial school curricula and remained unscathed in the republican period. The influence of positivist historiography guided the elements that would be significant in the construction of educational programs that resulted in the formation of citizens with solid patriotic values, and that showed reverence for the great figures of the past, taking them as examples to be followed. The end of the military regime in Brazil opened space for the History curricula to be questioned and revised. Until then, since the establishment of History as a school subject, the most simplistic perspective of the biographical approach has formed generations of students (MONTEIRO; MÉNDEZ, 2012, p. 91).

Present since the emergence of History as a school discipline, biography was mobilized based on the notion of exemplarity, reflecting a perspective of history based on the “great facts” and “great deeds”, which received outlines of personalities considered illustrious, who, in addition to the events they played, should be (re)known as an example to be followed. Biographed individuals should inspire new generations, contributing to the formation of citizens who value the great figures of the past, and who, from the perspective of *magistra vitae* history, perpetuate the same values.

The curricular changes developed after the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil contributed significantly to revisit the presence in biographical narratives in history programs. The discipline has undergone profound transformations, rethinking its purpose, its objectives, its methodology, and also its teaching materials. In this process, biography was not excluded from history classes - and it should not - but it received other meanings and, mainly, other protagonists.

In the most recent textbooks we can find biographical reports in the main texts of the chapters, or even in frames highlighted as “complementary box”, which are usually named with titles that indicate additional training: *to learn more, to know more, other stories etc.* Observing the structure of biographical writing that are present in these texts, we can observe that, regardless of their

positioning in the book layout, most biographies still narrate the individual's trajectory in a linear, continuous and cohesive way, presenting a life without discontinuities or uncertainties, and in some cases, practically a predestined life.

We have already indicated throughout this article the various criticisms directed towards biographical writing based on these principles that conceive the individual in a homogeneous way. Without pretension to repeat our considerations, we highlight only the need to understand that the life of the biographee must be perceived in its multiple facets, emphasizing its contradictions and discontinuities. In this process, moving away from the biographical illusion, we can perceive the multiplicity of actions, doubts, uncertainties, support networks, places of circulation, among many other factors, which are fundamental for decision making and, so important, for human action. The biography based on these principles humanizes the biographees and brings these experiences closer to the students who study their trajectories, a fact that contributes for students to perceive themselves as protagonists and historical agents.

Even though they still present a biographical narrative with classic outlines, the textbooks impose on teachers and on students important exercises of thinking about the human movement in time/space. Deepening the biographical study from what was presented in the book is a unique opportunity to think of biography as a methodological resource as well. The research on the character can start from the analysis of other biographies, perceiving changes in the narratives about the biographed individual over time. These changes will indicate the different intentions for the study of the protagonist, observing which information was evidenced and which one was suppressed, also observing the variety of sources mobilized in its production. Finally, it is essential to search for information about the producer of the biography, thus understanding the artificiality of biographical writing and the intentions of its producer.

The same guidelines are valid for the analysis of other supports in which life stories are narrated: biographical films. Some movies based on life stories have already become classics in the classroom: Carlota Joaquina – Princess of Brazil (1995); Mauá - the Emperor and the King (1999); Olga (2004); Getúlio (2014); Maria Antonieta (2007), and so many others. When showing a biographical film in the classroom, the teacher needs to contextualize the historical period, but also, to propose to the students that they perceive the narrative choices that outline the plot.

Beyond the fundamental methodological guidelines for showing a movie in the classroom (understanding the production as a representation; analyzing the historical context, but also, its production context; understanding the intentions of the director), it is important to discuss with the students regarding

the temporal layers shown in these narratives, trying to situate the protagonist's actions and avoiding framing the biographee in narrative schemes that impel him/her to the role of villain or good guy, for example. This duality is quite common in biographies, and, often, the narrative is already built in such a way that its audience goes through the narrated life observing a series of events that "prove" the protagonist's tendency towards good or evil, limiting relationships between actions in the two poles and previously suggesting the interpretation of the students.

The suggested guidelines are fundamental for analyzing the biographical narratives that are already present in classrooms, but they also indicate the potential of biographical writing as a methodology for teaching history. In addition to the analysis of biographies, the exercise of writing a biography is truly relevant, making the student a protagonist in the research and in the writing processes. To be able to develop the biographical action, the student will need to gather information and sources about his/her biographee, but he/she will also need to dominate important principles of writing history.

The students will be able to perceive the different places of production of the historical discourse, understanding the writing exercise as handling, interpretation and crossing of sources, experiencing the complexity of producing a legible writing for their audience, presenting a coherence regarding the narrated character, but without falling into the traps of biographical illusion. In this process, it is essential to analyze the research gaps with the students, being aware of the impossibility of narrating 'the whole life', demonstrating the multiple processes of choices and temporalities that are present in personal documents and in all sources mobilized. The gaps allow us to reflect on the intentions of previous works and/or the autobiography exercise promoted by the biographer himself/herself or by other agents of memory.

These and many other questions can be raised from the methodological handling of biography in the classroom. Complementing the potential, it is important to highlight that the initiative also allows us to expand the list of biographies, emphasizing individuals who have been invisible for a long time. Even today, most textbooks feature biographies of politicians and military people, with male biographies predominating. Timidly, other protagonists have been gaining space in the teaching materials, however, some remain relegated to the complementary box, with narratives that sometimes aim to point out curiosities and the exceptionality of their trajectories.

By encouraging students to produce biographies in history classes, we can promote research into little-known life stories, including valuing people and episodes that are not part of the 'national official' narratives, highlighting

events and characters close to the students, historically important individuals, but the ones who do not receive visibility as such.

Seeking to encourage didactic production based on invisible life stories, the National Olympics in Brazilian History, in its 11th edition, proposed as a task the theme “The excluded ones from History”. Provocatively, the task encouraged students to observe,

[...] who are the subjects of history that for a long time did not deserve commemorative dates, monuments or prominence in textbooks? Who are the historical subjects that, although studied by historians and social scientists today and often mentioned in the classroom by teachers, are rejected by society, by the dominant narrative of the mass media and even by a portion of scholars who prefers to deny their importance? Why do some protagonists bring discomfort to the established narratives? (MENEGUELLO; PEDRO, 2020).

Motivated by the proposal of the National Olympics in Brazilian History, students from all over Brazil promoted some research on characters with historical relevance in their states, contemplating narratives from north to south of the country. The didactic materials produced sought to highlight personalities unknown to the public, but with recognized performance - or not - in their region. However, regardless of the local / regional / national recognition of the listed personalities, we play up the importance of the activity as a research methodology and as a possibility to produce new narratives that highlight new characters, or even new narratives about already (re)known individuals, but that, by having their lives revisited, they enable us to know other facets of their actions, indicating that research and biographical writing, like all history, can never be considered conclusive about anything, or anyone.

By bringing the example developed by the National Olympics in Brazilian History, which aimed not only to think about the performance of individuals excluded from history, but also to raise questions about the choices and narratives already consolidated in certain places of history, we highlight the potential of both analysis and writing of biographies for teaching history. Widely debated in academic subjects, the tensions between history and biography still need to be deepened when mobilized in the school space. The tension produced by the intense use of biographies in History classes brought consequences which associated the genre to a perspective of history that is already quite contested.

Thus, we need to revisit biographical writing and highlight its potential from methodological supports which have some relationship with its place of production. Being aware of the narrative resources employed, as well as the careful analysis of historical sources that record a life trajectory, students can recognize important foundations of historical research, realizing their role as individuals and producers of history, experiencing different temporalities.

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