

USE OF THE LIFE HISTORY APPROACH WITHIN THE PETROBRAS *MEMORY PROGRAM*


O RECURSO À HISTÓRIA DE VIDA NO PROGRAMA *MEMÓRIA PETROBRAS*

EL USO DE LA HISTORIA DE LA VIDA EN EL PROGRAMA *MEMORIA PETROBRAS*

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ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes the treatment of history and memory at Petrobras examined through the use of the life history approach based on workers' testimonials as primary historical sources as a permanent methodology within the *Petrobras Memory Program*. To this end, we carry out an exploratory research informed by a critical and reflexive approach, founded on bibliographic and documentary research specifically focused on research and official company documents. Open-ended interviews (MINAYO, 1993) with historians of the Petrobras Memory Program were conducted, as well as an analysis of its website according to the French perspective of editorial enunciation (SOUCHIER, 1998) and the creation of an organizational ethos (AMOSSY, 2010) derived from historical-narrative resources.

KEYWORDS: History; Communication; Petrobras; Memory.

Introduction

The focus of this paper does not lie in the analysis of one or various life histories, as would be the case with a study premised on biographies, but on the mobilization of life history as part of a communications strategy at Petrobras¹ through the collection of workers' life histories in order to reconstruct the trajectory of the organization based on the multiple and parceled narratives from the workers' perspectives.

This is part of a larger doctoral research that studied the use of narratives in legitimation processes within organizational history, that looks at Petrobras as a case study and at the "Petrobras Workers Memory Project", (subsequently named the "Petrobras Memory Program"), as the corpus for analysis.

The various accounts and testimonials that constitute the "Petrobras Memory" – namely, workers' narratives from diverse areas, managers, etc. – were available until the completion of the thesis in 2015, on a website specially dedicated to the Program. But, as of 2016, at the height of the Lava Jato [car wash] corruption investigation, the site was redacted and all videos, audio files, and testimonials were removed. The alteration to the program's website was explained as "a reconditioning phase"² (PETROBRAS, 2020), thereby making it impossible at present to access and analyze the testimonials.

First, it is worthwhile to foreground in this context the acceptance and relevance of the life history approach within the scope of Communication Sciences. This interdisciplinary field has been borrowing from historiographical and sociological sources since its very beginnings and has greatly benefited from the use of the Life History in the study of and with subjects, while recognizing the richness of their experiences and stories. For Dhunpath (2000), we would be facing a new paradigm focused on recovering life paths narratively, or in other words, through narrative processes. Dhunpath suggests naming this outlook a narrative paradigm – a "narradigm" – focused on experiences and life histories.

Second, and as main focus of this article, we analyze the treatment of history and memory at Petrobras, articulated through the use of an oral history approach as a permanent methodology within the purview of the Petrobras Memory Program, with employees' testimonials and life histories as historical sources.

¹ Petrobras is the semi-public Brazilian multinational petroleum corporation founded in 1953. Trans. note.

² The message currently in place since mid-2016 states: "The Program's website is undergoing a reconditioning phase. Until then, you can contact us via email: memoriapetrobras@petrobras.com.br". The page can be accessed at: www.memoria.petrobras.com.br

To this end, we carry out an exploratory research informed by a critical and reflective approach towards the phenomenon being investigated. The methodology is founded on bibliographical and documentary research (LAKATOS and MARCONI, 2003), specifically focused on research and official documents regarding Petrobras, available on the Memory Program webpage until 2016 under the heading "Articles and Publications". Open-ended interviews were also conducted (MINAYO, 1993) with two historians associated with both the Memory Project and the Memory Program at Petrobras. Additionally, we analyze the Program's website, relying on the French methodological practice of editorial enunciation (SOUCHIER, 1998), as well as examine the creation of the oil company's organizational *ethos* through Amossy's (2010) discursive and rhetorical optics. Although necessary and adequate to conduct the critical analysis of the use of life histories to legitimize Petrobras's organizational trajectory, these initiatives do not exhaust the potential for research focusing on this subject. Nevertheless, we hope that they can contribute to future studies that wish to look into life histories at Petrobras from a communications perspective.

Life History and Communication Sciences: possible approximations?

The life history approach, widely used in anthropological studies (MORIN, 1980), is now recognized and employed by different disciplines within the human and social sciences. As Silva indicates (2002), its socio-historical origins has occasioned its extensive acceptance and use by researchers from these two areas.

According to Silva, there is conflation and frequent overlap between theories and concepts such as "life history", "oral history" and "biography". This is mainly due to the characteristic interdisciplinarity of studies of biographical accounts, which gives rise to two aspects relative to its object of study and center of interest, i.e. the life history of individuals, but with different approaches: the historical biography, linked to the field of history, and the biographical method, linked to sociology.

Some distinctions can already be noted between *historical biography* and the *biographical method* of Sociology: while the former focuses on the individual, the latter tries to reveal the group; while the former does not favor the source, the latter privileges the life story and the autobiography. Still, one can discern another feature: the historical biography is treated as a genre, whereas the sociological prefers to label itself method (SILVA, 2002, pp.29-30).

As Coulon (1992) points out, life history is a technique that enables the emergence and the understanding of an actor's inner life. It originates in the early years of the 20th century within the context of the sociological studies of the first Chicago School, where the study by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) is prototypal in its use of the life history as a historical document representative of the life of an immigrant Polish peasant. As such, the studies conducted in Chicago were pioneering in the use of the biographical research approach.

According to Bessin, the biographical perspective – or life trajectories, as he calls them – is based on a procedural logic, or more precisely, on a temporal dynamic where “it is necessary to reject the different temporalities used in a life path, and to highlight specifically the fold between the individual's temporalities and the historical time within which they are inscribed”³ (BESSIN, 2009, p. 13).

In the biographical method, the life history plays a central role: it focuses on the individual and the reconstruction of his life path from narratives and autobiographies, always from the comprehension of the subject under study. From this perspective, it is important to understand the groups' history and social functioning in accordance with the collected narratives, which means that “it is no longer the life story of an individual, or that an autobiography would suffice as research, but that an adequate number of life stories would manage to provide an explanatory account of the group” (SILVA, 2002, p. 28).

In Minayo's (1993) conception, there are two methodological modalities to life history as a data collection technique: the complete life history, which contemplates the “total” account of the individual, and the so-called topical life history, which focuses only on key aspects or moments of the given experiential narrative which we are looking to foreground.

In the research presented here, the collection of individual testimonials – of life histories – is useful in composing the trajectory of Petrobras's workers and, consequently, of the company's history “through its workforce” (PETROBRAS, 2015). In this context, we take recourse to the topical life history method (MINAYO, 1993), being that in the case of the Memory Program developed by Petrobras, the center of the investigation does not reside in the personal and individual narrative, pivoting solely around one biography,

³ In the original French: “Il faut toutefois décliner les différentes temporalités à l'œuvre dans le parcours de vie, et notamment souligner l'articulation entre les temporalités de l'individu et le temps historique au sein duquel elles s'inscrivent”.

but is composed by the intertwining of various life stories to reconstruct a broader history: that of the organization.

We wish to note that the use of life stories is at the heart of a communications strategy that seeks to legitimize the company by rendering visible its historical-organizational narratives (SANTOS, 2016). The Petrobras case study demonstrates the validity of the biographical method, exemplified by the collection of statements from workers, as a relevant and appropriate resource for communications, both internal and external, and which can still be considered by corporate management as context for decision-making.

Within the purview of academia, some researchers in Communication Sciences have addressed these issues and presented productive results from the use of the biographical perspective, life history, testimonials and oral history; viz: within communications research in general (PERAZZO, 2006; MAIA, 2006; MARTINEZ, 2015), in journalism specifically (MARTINEZ, 2016, RIBEIRO, 2015), and within the scope of organizational communication (D'ALMEIDA, 2005; SANTOS, 2016).

The Petrobras Memory Program

According to historian Miriam Collares Figueiredo (2009), the history of activity related to the preservation of the past at Petrobras begins as an initiative by two employees from Petrobras's Communications Service (Sercom), Geny Peres and Ruth G. Malheiros, when they propose in 1979 the creation of a sector dedicated to surveying and preserving the company's history. The project was undertaken by these two women who began to collect assets in the form of data, records, information, and files to create the company's archive; the initiative was interrupted in 1980, but resumed in 1982. In 1983, fearing the loss of the company's historical heritage, Peres donated the collected documentation to the Center for Research and Documentation of Contemporary History of Brazil (CPDOC-FGV)⁴ at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. In view of her imminent retirement, Geny Peres came to an agreement with CPDOC-FGV in 1986 to safeguard the historical record of Petrobras, and her initiative materializes into a project launched in 1987.

But to understand the company's current circumstances and the place history occupies within it, one must look back to the first decades of the company. Figueiredo

⁴ Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (CPDOC-FGV).

(2009) posits that the evolution of the historical approach at Petrobras is marked by three main moments: a first phase concerns the private initiative of Geny Peres, a company employee, who decides to collect and safeguard information detailing the company's history by creating a collection of photos and documents. The second phase of valorizing the organizational history of Petrobras spans the period in which the CPDOC-FGV manages Petrobras's historical collection and, at the company's request, conducts research so as to reconstruct the history of the Brazilian oil sector and of the corporation. Based on a historiographic overview and on the collection of testimonials from corporate representatives (mainly Petrobras engineers and managers), the book *A questão do petróleo no Brasil – Uma história da Petrobrás* [The Question of Oil in Brazil – A history of Petrobras] was published in 1993 to commemorate Petrobras's 40th anniversary. It was authored by José Luciano de Mattos Dias and Maria Ana Quaglino and edited jointly by Petrobras and the CPDOC-FGV. The third phase in the management of the history of, and at, Petrobras refers to the creation of the Petrobras Workers Memory Project in mid-2001, and, since then, to the permanent development of activities associated with the preservation of memory and organizational history.

The participation and attribution of responsibility for the historical recovery project under the aegis of the CPDOC-FGV is therefore decisive in terms of the activities that would unfold from then on at the oil company and, specially, for the adoption of the life history and oral history approaches characteristic of the study center at the Foundation as indicated by Alberti (1998; 2003) and Motta (1995)⁵.

In the words of Verena Alberti:

The close relationship between the process of building up the collection of oral sources and CPDOC history goes beyond thematic identity. From the start, the creation of the interview collection was coupled to the documentation and research activities already developed by the Center. On the one hand, the need for the creation of an oral history program came from the work with personal archives; on the other, the new potential of the oral history methodology diversified and enriched the research. (1998, p. 2)

The Petrobras Workers Memory Project comprised the inventorying of documents from various Petrobras units that could constitute a representative archive of

⁵ In accordance with information collected in an interview in August 2014 with Miriam Figueiredo and Sérgio Retroz, the work carried on since 2000 on the collection of life histories and oral histories at the CPDOC-PFV will continue at the Museu da Pessoa [People's Museum] (<https://museudapessoa.org>) under Figueiredo's guidance, who has been employed by Petrobras since 2004.

the company's history, as well as the collection of testimonials from the representatives of the several labor unions associated with it. In total, 260 interviews were conducted, which resulted in the publishing of the *Almanaque Memória dos Trabalhadores Petrobras* [Petrobras Workers Memory Almanac] and the *memoria.petrobras.com.br* website, both launched in 2003, in celebration of the company's 50th anniversary. According to Figueiredo, the purpose of the almanac was to "tell a part of Petrobras's history through the use of testimonials" (2009, p. 68).

After the conclusion of the project and the transfer of its coordinator, Simone Porto, to the communications department, there was uncertainty as to the continuity of initiatives towards the rescue and preservation of corporate memory. This culminated in the creation of a program within the company's internal communications department, called *Memória Petrobras* [Petrobras Memory], as reported by Figueiredo.

A new format was thought up to provide continuity for the project, starting with a name change: from **Petrobras Workers Memory** to **Petrobras Memory**. Now treated as a program, it was no longer a temporary project but a on-going pursuit. New lines of research were created: *Memory of Knowledge*, *Sponsorship Memory*, *Community Memory* and *Family Memory* – now considered institutional demands [...] (2009, p. 70, emphasis added).

By creating a permanent program, the company expanded its horizons. Using as source the life history records (testimonials) collected throughout the project, it sought not only to recover and safeguard its history, but also to use it towards relations management and the valorization of the Petrobras brand before its various audiences (FIGUEIREDO, 2009).

Despite the expansion and institutionalization of the Petrobras Memory Program that currently has more than 700 interviews in its collection and involves local and regional officials from various units of the company, according to historian Miriam Collares Figueiredo, the program still has not been given its due recognition in terms of constituting its own department or of being appointed to handle all activity regarding Petrobras's history and memory⁶.

In summary, the course of the Petrobras Memory project is rather unusual: it comes to being as a workers' initiative organized by the Union of Oil Workers of São Paulo, and it is then appropriated by the company and assigned to the Institutional Communications

⁶ In an interview conducted in August 2014, the historian states that Petrobras units, sectors and departments can autonomously conduct historical research, and this activity is neither centralized nor assigned exclusively to the Memory Program.

department. Even if it resided there for almost seven years with a considerable collection of testimonials and documents and products generated, it has not yet managed to establish itself as an area of reference in relation to memory within the Company. (FIGUEIREDO, 2009, p. 84)

The mission of the Petrobras Workers' Memory Program is to recount the company's history based on reports from people who were once associated, are currently associated, or have some connection with the organization (FIGUEIREDO, 2009, p. 46). Until 2016, the Memory Program's website displayed the following announcement: "We are an Institutional Communications program at Petrobras aimed at preserving, incorporating, and disseminating the company's history, mainly from the perspective of its workers and partners" (PETROBRAS, 2015).

The Program has its own budget and annual plan through which research directions and activities to be developed are established. It also has a collection of testimonials, documents, newspapers, and photos gathered from individuals interviewed during the Petrobras Workers' Memory Project.

In this sense, one of the principal undertakings that guarantees the ongoing documentation of the company and the practice of oral history is the collection of worker testimonials which can be used in the future as a source for the understanding and recovery of the company's history.

Miriam Collares Figueiredo (2014) affirms that the Petrobras Memory Program sought to highlight the importance of the collection and its historical documents in order to recover the company's values, identity, and, most importantly, to show that the workers are a valuable asset in this process and constitutive of the company's trajectory.

In addition to the influence of the CPDOC already mentioned, the technique used by Petrobras to recover the company's memory through workers' testimonials is attributable to the ongoing tradition at the Museu da Pessoa [People's Museum] of using Life History and Oral History techniques to give voice to people usually muted from history. The Almanac produced by the oil company is an example of this. Unlike corporate publications which bank on statements from presidents and former directors, the Petrobras Workers Almanac (PETROBRAS, 2003), published by Petrobras in partnership with the Museu da Pessoa, privileges the accounts provided by workers from different levels, geographical regions and sectors.

According to the historians interviewed, the experiences divulged by the Petrobras Memory Project clearly illustrate this approach. In 2002-2003, the company collected testimonials from employees from the most diverse sectors and regions, asking them to recount their lives inside and outside of Petrobras. The result was 217 interviews amounting to hours of recorded testimonials which constitute the collection of the Memory Program, and represent one of the main sources of memorial documentation for the company which, time and again, have provided content for its main publications (both internal and external).

The identity of the worker is very much linked to Brazilian identity, which, according to Retroz (2014) and Collares (2014), is discernible in the testimonials because during their communications the employees would mention that they were there not only to help the company, but also to help the country. As such, a connection can be said to exist between the organizational *ethos* and the national *ethos*.

According to Sérgio Retroz (2014), it is possible to observe in some statements that the workers understood their work at Petrobras as a contribution to national development, as a "mission to do something for national sovereignty" because "building Petrobras is helping to make the country independent", making it the owner of its own wealth.

These ideals were linked to the founding of the company itself, which sought financial independence, upheld the presence of oil on Brazilian soil and defended its exploitation solely by Brazilians (and no longer by foreigners).

Regarding the methodology used in the collection of testimonials, the company excels in life histories, real stories, recovery and valoration of the life path of the employee within the company's.

From the viewpoint of the historians at Petrobras, the Memory Program was very well received by workers, particularly because of the documentary format of recording the history of employees and former employees through testimonials. Employees believed themselves to be part of the construction of the history of Petrobras. By virtue of being called upon to provide testimonials for the Memory Program, and seeing that their contribution had become part of the company's official history, they felt as if they were effectively being recognized as participants.

Petrobras has a library where important company documents and files are kept, however this material is considered confidential and as a result difficult to access. Thus, the surveys, interviews, and assets available through the Memory Program (through

websites and books) are rendered legitimate references relative to the company's history and accessible to the general public.

Virtualized memory and focus on the life history of Petrobras's workers

As mentioned above, the research presented here refers to an analysis of the Petrobras Memory Program conducted between 2012 and 2016, and comprises interviews with company historians and analysis of their publications and web sites. However, since 2016, coinciding with the most intense period of the Lava Jato corruption investigation, the Memory Program's web site has been unavailable due to permanent "updating". These historical records, documents and hours of employee testimonials from the most diverse sectors are now targets of a deliberate removal.

Although the information was removed (temporarily?), it does not devalue the fact that for almost two decades Petrobras had developed projects and programs focused on recording life histories, stories, and statements from its workers. From this perspective, we proffer an analysis of the information collected during the period 2012-2016 which provides us with a snapshot of the memory practices of life history and oral history that have been carried out so far.

Access to the Memory Program's website was promulgated through the company's home page through a hyperlinked dialogue box that served as gateway and invited the reader to become familiar with the history of the company from the outlook of its "workforce". By mediating access to the Petrobras Memory Program through its website, the published story narratives become institutionalized.

To analyze the editorial content and discourse of the Memory Program's page, we have resorted to an analysis of editorial enunciation (SOUCHIER, 1998). We examine the graphic, typographic, authorial, and editorial choices involved in the design of the Petrobras Memory website as well as the organizational *ethos* it sought to construct by mobilizing life histories so as to build a meta-narrative of Petrobras's organizational history.

Our editorial analysis is informed by the editorial enunciation approach (SOUCHIER, 1998) that analyzes the formatting, structuring and support strategies towards the visualization and reading of a text. As an initial presupposition, it assumes the existence of a material support upon which the text becomes available to the reader and proffers for analysis the modality of the writing, as well as the graphic and editorial

choices operative in the production of the text's image (SOUCHIER, 1998). The analysis of these elements within the website chosen as *corpus* for this research makes it possible to study how Petrobras organizes and arranges the collected life histories graphically, textually, and visually in order to build a logical and coherent narrative that serves its interests in communicating the different aspects and moments of its organizational history in order to legitimize its existence and its social vocation to the community.

The notion of *ethos* is a term from Greek rhetoric that refers to the character of the speaker as conferring credibility to his speech. The analysis of discursive *ethos* (AMOSSY, 2010) allows us to foreground the self-image a speaker projects throughout their enunciation. Nevertheless, even if the subject tries to efface his textual self, he always leaves traces – through intonation, expression, or choices – that denote his identity, as well as by his rhetorical recourse to authority, scientific arguments, testimonials, etc.

For this reason, by using developmentalist arguments that highlight the value added to society, organizations seek to connect with the most varied audiences by appealing to their receptiveness (a priori) towards an institution that helps promote national growth. In terms of the corporate websites studied, this would be a company's mode of presentation (as an "I" / subject that projects its image through its discourse) even if diluted through impersonal terms or by donning the guise of an indefinite subject (as in the "*on*" in French) as constitutive of a mediatized *ethos* (SODRÉ, 2002).

As such, when Sodr e's (2002) concept of a mediatized *ethos* is transported to the organizational context, we can understand it as the resultant of interactions between organizations and society permeated by communication from the most varied of media. So that within the scope of the present work, we can comprehend the media and digital communication mechanisms (websites) as means through which organizations crystallize an identity and a self-image that can be virtualized and mediatized through the World Wide Web.

The editorial enunciation analysis shows that the Petrobras Memory Project website adopts a simple look that is in-sync with that of the parent oil company, all the while exalting the green, yellow, and blue colors alluding to the Brazilian flag. Apart from the name of the project revealing the identity of the institution, the website does not call attention to the company's brand. There is only a small Petrobras logo at the top right of the page that discretely institutionalizes the site.

The logo, as a navigation button underlying a representative icon of the corporation – what Davallon and Jeanneret (2004) call a *signe-passeur* – links to the company's main page: it is a sign that mediates a user's transit to the Petrobras institutional website.

Likewise, in the upper left, in a reduced font, the name “Petrobras” presents a similar logic. Hardly noticeable at first, it is necessary to mouseover the word to realize that it is a hyperlink linked to the company's main website.

Such editorial strategies express sobriety and discretion as an allusion to the main intent of the site. The white background, with no margin or upper or lateral borders, can resemble a blank sheet of paper, ready and available for creation. The Petrobras Memorial website is presented visually as an informational site, a kind of repository, a virtual archive of the history of Petrobras.

The purpose of the website or of the project in question is not foregrounded on the site's homepage. The site must be explored until one finds within the “Who we are” tab a brief presentation⁷ of the website as well as a history of the Petrobras Memory Program that links to the company's Institutional Communications division.

The content is organized in two ways: according to *sections* or *item headings*, that create a horizontally-divided strip serving as a thematic menu providing access to individual items through hyperlinks; or according to *blocks*, subdivisions of the main page, where the fore-mentioned item headings are briefly described and identified by their respective titles.

Figure 1: Screen-grab of the Petrobras Memory Program website

⁷ “We are an Institutional Communications program at Petrobras aimed at preserving, incorporating, and disseminating the company's history, mainly from the perspective of its workers and partners” (Memória Petrobras website, May 2015).



Source: memoria.petrobras.com.br website

The sections are arranged as a bar – horizontally aligned, side-by-side, symmetrically – and together fulfill the function of a list. Not in the traditional way, as graphically we could imagine it as a column of names or words, but in the sense evoked by Goody (1979) of a hierarchical mental arrangement. The list at the top of the page facilitates the thematic visualization of the contents and, thus, enables access to the editorially pre-defined information, segmented and organized according to sections.

One can readily glean that, essentially, the content of the site is organized around the timeline. It creates a graphic display of a linear temporality, which serves, in the case of Petrobras, to separate or divide the company's history into periods (decades). Each decade is illustrated or narrated through workers' testimonials relative to their experiences during that period.

Figure 2: The timeline on the Petrobras Memory Program website

NOSSA HISTÓRIA PARA O FUTURO



Source: memoria.petrobras.com.br website

Content on the website pertaining to the decades of Petrobras history is accessed by mousing-over the timeline. Within the site, the historical trajectory can be reconstructed at random from the available files – snippets of the institution's memory –that constitute the collection of the Memory Program. These include photos, official documents, and company publications, as well as testimonials collected over the years which now serve as the spokespersons for a memory that is both "official" and "collective", and therefore singular. The timeline is chronological and dynamic and is semiotically punctuated by the presence of images serving as icons indicative of the company's decades of existence, of arrows that suggest the movement of the line (right or left), as well as numerous hyperlinks.

Communicating organizational history and memory through digital platforms (websites, social networks, etc.) allows the adaptation of content, information and organizational narrative to different communication media.

In this context, we need to examine not only the narratives put forward and the organizational strategies that legitimize the history, but also the underlying materiality of the production and transmission of messages, and how these affect this process.

On the Petrobras Memory website, history and memory are promulgated by various means, where almost all rely on the life histories collected by the Petrobras Workers Memory Project and the Petrobras Memory Program. Thus, the narratives are arranged, organized and mobilized in light of the company's interests, whether to portray the different decades (chronologically), or to curate a virtual exhibition.

The historical narrative strategies identified through the analysis of the site are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Modes of representing the past on the Petrobras Memory website

FORMAT	EXAMPLES	DESCRIPTION
Chronological	Time line	Narrates history retrospectively, according to period.
Testimonial	Life history accounts – oral, visual, or written	Reconstructs memory through subjects' memories.
Imagistic	Images, drawings, photographs, portraits	Depicts the narrated history symbolically through images.
Audiovisual	Clips, videos, audiovisual recordings	Uses audiovisual resources to concretize narratives.
Scientific	Articles, dissertations and theses	Draws attention to the relevance of organizational history through academic / scientific publications.
Thematic-Expository	Virtual exhibits	Reports by theme or projects, disseminated in the form of "exhibitions".
Informal	Curiosities / anecdotes, "petroleum-culture" dictionaries	Relates the historical account of the quotidian to common knowledge and the irreverent.

Source: Created by the author.

In other words, if on the Petrobras Memory page the company diversifies its historical legitimization strategies – i.e. the forms and resources used on its site – in order to grant visibility to its organizational history and memory, in terms of the sources used towards the recovery of the past, it relies in great part on the life histories of the subjects that integrate it (or integrated it) as constitutive elements.

Gardère (2003) classifies this as an "experience collecting" technique when referring to the recovery of the workers' memory within a company. For her, the objective of this practice is to recover and record a person's knowledge, which in turn can be transferred to others or serve as knowledge, or as a source of knowledge, for the organization. The approach adopted by this author focuses on valorizing workers'

intellectual capital and how it can serve organizational learning, as well as on the creation of a knowledge management database within organizations.

However, the memorial record based on life stories, or on so-called oral histories, is not always intended to transmit and preserve a specific *savoir-faire* [know-how]. There are situations where testimonials focus on the narrative of the lives of individuals, on their victories and mishaps, sometimes directly related to the company's history, but oftentimes only related to the private and external experiences of the organization. The interest, in this case, lies in the *recognition* of the individual and his path, in order to make him part of a larger story – that of the organization, and, for that matter, of the country as well.

Resources resembling the personal testimonial are widely used and promulgated through the Petrobras Memory Program website. Thus, personal and organizational narratives are mixed: when telling a (worker's) life history, the organization's memory is also evoked. In other words, the narrative of the organizational history, as conveyed by the website, is composed of micro-narratives of personal histories from individual participants in Petrobras's trajectory. It is through memory recovery that these fragments of history can be recuperated, evincing the polyphony, the multiplicity of voices and visions that tell one same story, but from different positions of enunciation.

Conversely, the life narrative of these worker-narrators is also affected by the organizational history, so that an account would be incomplete if the place and role occupied by the narrating subject (worker) is not sited within the organization's temporal trajectory.

These are choices made by the organization regarding its organizational history narrative and the preservation of its memory. By applying the methodology of oral history to the collection of testimonials that constitutes one of the main reference sources of the Memory Program, Petrobras opts to reconstruct its history through the recovery of the memory of its workers, that is, it uses memory as substrate for the recomposition of its history.

Based on the study of the strategies used by the Petrobras Memory Program towards the conservation and reporting of the oil company's trajectory, we come to identify the adoption of a specific narrative modality that we have named "testimonial narrative of organizational history" (SANTOS, 2016).

We define testimonial narrative of organizational history as the reconstruction and narration of a company's history based on the accounts of those who are part of it

(or were part of it). Its main source are life histories, interviews, testimonials or accounts from organizational actors. With respect to the enunciators of the accounts, it is possible to discern two variants to the testimonial narrative: a) Autobiographical narrative of the organizational history – narrative conceived from the testimonial of an employee or administrator of the company, usually a manager or (ex)president; b) Collective or plural narrative of the organizational history: an explicitly and deliberately polyphonic account, composed of the testimonials of various individuals.

In the testimonial narrative, the characters are placed at the center of the story so that their perceptions and outlooks are the main element in the reconstitution of the organizational trajectory. This narrative form is predominant on the Petrobras Memory Program website where the testimonials of workers and former workers of the company constitute the main assets towards the recomposition of its history and organizational memory. This strategy can also be found, albeit sporadically, in the book *Petrobras 50 anos* [Petrobras – 50 Years], through the use and promulgation of testimonials from different organizational actors.

The adoption of the testimonial form can be part of an integrative strategy, one that strengthens the employees' sense of belonging, worth and recognition of their participation in the creation of corporate history. To that effect, testimonial narratives serve mainly the internal communicational interests.

From the analyses undertaken, we can see how Bourdieu's (1986) postulate on the reconstruction of life history by using individual narratives, at times, resembles an organization's communicational approach when it decides to tell its "life story". The author points out that in the dynamics of recomposing individual histories a selectivity is involved relative to the choice of what are considered the most significant facts. By the same token, selected events are examined in relation to one another and logically organized in order to produce a coherent narrative.

The autobiographical narrative is always inspired, at least in part, by the concern for imparting sense, of being rational, of revealing a logic both retrospective and prospective, of consistency and constancy, by establishing intelligible connections, such as those between the effect and its efficient or final cause, between successive states, thus constituted as *phases* of a necessary development⁸. (BOURDIEU, 1986, p. 69).

⁸ In the French original: "le récit autobiographique s'inspire toujours, au moins pour une part, du souci de donner sens, de rendre raison, de dégager une logique à la fois rétrospective et prospective, une consistance et une constance, en établissant des relations intelligibles, comme celle de l'effet à la cause efficiente ou finale, entre les états successifs, ainsi constitués en étapes d'un développement nécessaire".

Now, when narrating its history, the organization also conducts a selection of facts and events considered relevant to the restoration of the organizational trajectory, which are normally ordered and systematized according to chronologies or timelines, beyond the various modes of promulgation that aim to legitimize the existence of the organization.

Such an approach symbolizes for Bourdieu (1986) a rhetorical choice that favors the artificial creation of meaning to the detriment of reality (unclear, non-linear and problematic). As a result, its uniqueness and originality, although problematic, furnishes a totalizing and unifying narrative to the organizational trajectory.

In the website under analysis, the historical-organizational narrative serves to build up a positive image of the organization and to create an organizational *ethos* based on the exaltation of achievements, successes and victories. But in presenting only a positive and glorified version of the corporate trajectory, one succumbs to hagiographic temptation by creating the illusion of an ideal(ized) company. As such, this would suggest indifference to the needs of society and a disregard for transparency regarding practices and consequences. Against the exaggerations of the mythification of history, a realistic narrative should be defended, one that aims at clarifying past actions in view of present questions. This would call for an integrative account where different voices are heard and individual and collective memory can be placed at the service of the ceaseless updating of organizational history.

The manner by which the creation of companies is related is also dependent on a communicational choice: the characteristics praised are markers of an organizational posture, of an image, of an *ethos* (AMOSSY, 2010) that seeks consolidation.

At the same time, one must acknowledge the selectivity intrinsic to the construction of historical-organizational narratives. It is not possible to recount everything, to totally restore and systematize a history, because, when narrativizing a history, choices are made based on the available information and records, favoring one concern or another, according to a specific narrative perspective (that of the CEO/president, employees, etc.).

Likewise, we take into account the judgments and interpretations that can influence the production of organizational memory when we use testimonials and life histories as information sources, such as, for example, in the author's analysis and

interpretation of the data based on the available facts and elements towards the reconstitution of the organizational history. Accordingly, one can speak of a process of narrative construction of organizational history (SANTOS, 2018).

Final considerations

The selection of events and the account of only the positive aspects of the company's trajectory are revealing of an organizational communication strategy that privileges its achievements and systematically omits its flaws. In the case studied here, of Petrobras and its organizational memory preservation Program, the corporate use of life history and oral history has been examined, specifically through the collection of testimonials from workers. These assets were produced in order to fill gaps in documentation, or stand in for missing accounts portraying the company's uniqueness, but also because of the interest elicited by the different perceptions of the workers who collaborated in composing the memorial mosaic of Petrobras's trajectory.

In the case of the Petrobras Memory Program, based on the life history methodology, there is a juxtaposition of identities (AMOSSY, 2010) inasmuch as the individual *ethos* (of the author/narrator) and the collective *ethos* (of the group, or institution that it refers to or serves as spokesperson) dwell in the same discourse. In this way, the narrative of Petrobras's history is deeply marked by the life narratives of its workers, or by the personification of the company through the figure of the workers. The company dons an individual or humanized *ethos*, as if the deeds, identity and values could be transposed to the organizational.

The uses and appropriations of life histories by the Petrobras Memory Program lead us to reflect on social memory and how it can be influenced by a history (or histories and stories) disseminated in society. Because of the manner in which history is inserted in social life, it is able to inflect and contaminate the memorial record and its narrative (individual or collective), in order to adapt it to the dominant discourse, previously acquired and socially accepted.

Within the scope of communications, we question the influence of corporate publications and narratives (oral and written), such as life stories that reconstruct the trajectory of organizations, modulating a re-signification process through the circulation, reading, appropriation and reproduction of such "histories" (notably within the digital realm).

They are a form of narrative-organizational communication that demonstrates how a narrative approach is inserted into the organizational quotidian by configuring the communicational. And so, in this sense, narratives should not be examined only pragmatically or instrumentally, as products of organizational communications (internal narratives, journalistic or advertising narratives) that are used to achieve certain ends (to raise awareness, convince, sell, etc.).

However, they also need to be understood: a) as a process through which organizations communicate, transforming information into understandable accounts; b) as a means by which experience and organizational memory are organized coherently and systematically; c) as a mode of knowing, underlying organizational learning, through the lessons that emerge from its narration.

As shown in this study, the role of narratives in communication and, specifically, of life stories, is evident in terms of reconstituting organizational history. These serve as sources for the updating and reframing of organizational memory and, by extension, of social memory – as product of the circulation of these narratives in society, that is, of the trivialization (JEANNERET, 2008)⁹ of organizational narratives.

It is in this way that public memory, which circulates in media and in political and governmental settings, reflects a dominant ideology and influences individual memory. But the implications of social narratives, whether individual or institutional, go further: they also affect the forming and writing of history. This is because the reports, the narratives that are sources of memory, serve to feed back and, often, question some versions of the so-called “official” history.

The case study of Petrobras and its Memory Program is unique within the current context of the deactivation and reconfiguration of the website, where all the records and documents from years of interviews with workers were located. These are life stories, testimonials from persons who have been strategically silenced, even if they had been part of the organization and contributed to the creation of the polyphony of voices and versions of a given history of Petrobras.

As a suggestion toward future research, the accounts of life history within organizations, conceived through different voices or organizational actors, could be studied. The experience of the Petrobras Memory Program, from which testimonials were collected and different products developed – such as books, websites and exhibitions –

⁹ The term triviality (*trivialité*), according to Jeanneret, applies to “the circulation of ideas and objects as a kind of procession of cultural beings through the crossroads of social life” (2008, p.14).

constitutes an interesting object of research. How are these “plural”, collective and polyphonic narratives produced? Do they represent the authentic version of history, or can they be considered alternative, unofficial, or even controversial versions of the organizational past? Do the writings and subsequent communications of the collective narratives of organizational history go through some sort of selection, censorship or negotiation with the organization that they portray? What are the consequences of erasing or silencing the plurality of organizational voices, traces and records, as was the case in the Memory Program?

The perspective adopted in the research, whether in terms of methodological choices or in relation to the selection of the analytical corpus, is a response to a particular scientific line of questioning. It does not exhaust the possibilities of research on the production of narratives in organizations, nor, more specifically, on the use of life histories as elements in the constitution of organizational narratives. We hope that it contributes to the debate on the biographical approach – of life history, oral and biographical history – as methods within Communication Sciences pertinent to communicational and organizational studies as herein described.

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RESUMO:

O trabalho analisa o tratamento da história e da memória na Petrobras, observado pelo emprego da abordagem da história de vida como metodologia permanente no âmbito do Programa *Memória Petrobras*, tendo os depoimentos dos trabalhadores como fontes históricas fundamentais. Para tanto, realiza-se uma pesquisa de natureza exploratória, mas com abordagem crítica e reflexiva, apoiada em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental focadas, especialmente, em pesquisas e documentos oficiais sobre a companhia. Também foram realizadas entrevistas abertas (MINAYO, 1993) com historiadores do Programa Memória Petrobras, além de análise de seu site web a partir da perspectiva francesa da enunciação editorial (SOUCHIER, 1998), bem como da formação do *ethos* (AMOSSY, 2010) organizacional a partir de tais recursos histórico-narrativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: História; Comunicação; Petrobras; Memória.

RESUMEN:

El trabajo analiza el tratamiento de la historia y la memoria en Petrobras, observado por el uso del enfoque de la historia de vida como una metodología permanente en el *Programa de Memoria Petrobras*, donde las declaraciones de los trabajadores son fuentes históricas fundamentales. Para ello, se lleva a cabo una investigación exploratoria, pero con un enfoque crítico y reflexivo, apoyado en la investigación bibliográfica y documental centrada, especialmente, en la investigación y documentos oficiales sobre la empresa. También se realizaron entrevistas abiertas (MINAYO, 1993) con historiadores del Programa Memoria Petrobras, así como el análisis de su sitio web bajo la perspectiva francesa de la enunciación editorial (SOUCHIER, 1998), así como la formación del ethos (AMOSSY, 2010) organizacional basado en dichos recursos histórico-narrativos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Historia; Comunicación; Petrobras; Memoria.