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Filling in when memory fails: the use of stories in Portuguese American memoirs*

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Resumo

Completar quando a memória falha: o uso de histórias em livros de memórias luso-americanos

Este artigo analisará o uso de histórias no texto memorialístico de três lusodescendentes nos EUA. Ver-se-á como a inclusão de histórias atua de forma estrutural nos seus textos. Partindo da ideia apresentada por Hirsch sobre a pós-memória (2012), arguir-se-á que o uso de histórias no texto memorialístico destas três lusodescendentes atua como uma ponte de ligação entre a memória individual e a memória adquirida, ou herdada, vinda ela da família ou da cultura. Ver-se-á como o uso de histórias produz textos que coreografam cuidadosamente as memórias herdadas, produzindo camadas de memórias no texto. O artigo concluirá que a presença tanto de memórias coletivas como da memória individual no texto cria uma comunidade narrativa que vai além da nação ou das nações, no sentido lato.

Palavras-chave: memória, luso-descendentes, memória adquirida, comunidade narrativa.

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which stories serve a structuring function in three Portuguese American memoirs. The article also examines the use of stories as a way to weave together the gap between memory and inherited memory (Hirsch, 2012), arguing that the stories produce texts that carefully choreograph between inherited family stories and inherited cultural memories, creating a layering effect. The conclusion demonstrates how the inclusion of collective memories within individual memory present in the text generates a narrative community beyond the nation state(s).

Keywords: Portuguese American memoirs, inherited memory, narrative community.

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Résumé
Parfaire la mémoire incomplète : l'usage des histoires dans le récit de mémoire luso-américain
Cet article analyse la fonction structurelle des histoires dans trois récits de mémoire luso-américains. L'article s'interroge sur l'usage des histoires comme lien entre la mémoire individuelle et la postmémoire (Hirsch, 2012). Notre argument est que l'usage des histoires produit des textes qui agissent comme un pont qui relie mémoire individuelle et mémoire acquise ou héritée, de la famille ou de la culture. Nous verrons comme l'usage méticuleux des histoires donnent origine à des textes qui chorégraphient les mémoires héritées, produisant des couches de mémoire. L'article conclut que la présence des mémoires collectives autant que de la mémoire individuelle dans les textes crée une communauté narrative qui va au-delà de l'État-nation/des États-nations au sens large.

Mots-clés: mémoires, luso-américains, postmémoire, communauté narrative.

> *Note*: Perhaps it is my historian's training, but I am sceptical of memoirs that reconstruct detailed dialogue thirty, forty, or fifty years after it has occurred. My memoir is not a dialogue-driven work. I have included exchanges that I overheard or was party to and that I remember vividly and, I believe, accurately. I have slightly changed only two names to protect person's privacy (Conforti xii).

Unintentionally ironic, Conforti's observation at the end of the acknowledgement section of his memoir is still valid; how do life writers recall dialogue and other details clearly after so many years? Charles Reis Felix's *Through a Portagee Gate* (2004) offers an ideal example of dialogue-led life writing. Felix demonstrates how dialogue that accompanies the narration of a particular episode becomes a structural device within the narrative, and how stories and storytelling become a structural device in a life writing account.[1] The focus of this article is to explore how other people's stories become part of the life narrative in three memoirs by Portuguese American women whose parents were pioneers in California at the beginning of the twentieth century.[2] These memoirs are Pauline Correia Stonehill's *A Barrelful of Memories: Stories*

1 Francisco Cota Fagundes provides a very interesting and sustained analysis of this feature in Felix's text. Fagundes examines how dialogue, orality and typology become self-referential and metafictional in the creation of a polyphonic blending of voices in the narrative (Fagundes 2007). Elsewhere, Fagundes also points to the way that the narrative is a series of stories akin to vignettes (2005 and 2010). In my own examination of Felix's text, I expand on this idea of the vignette and explore the interplay between image and text as a feature of authorial interpretive control (Ramos Villar 2014).

2 Although not the focus of the present article, those interested in finding out more about the presence of the Portuguese in the Wild West are directed to Donald Warrin and Geoffrey Gomes' *Land as Far as the Eye can see: Portuguese in the Old West* (2013), which provides an excellent and comprehensive analysis of Portuguese migration to the United States. Warrin and Gomes examine in depth the hardships and challenges inherent in the lives of Portuguese pioneers, through the examination of the individual stories and experiences of the settlement and expansion of the West.

of my Azorean Family (2005), Rose Peters Emery's *Footprints in the Soil: a Portuguese Californian Remembers* (2003), and Josephine Korth's *Wind Chimes in my Apple Tree* (1978).[3]

The article is particularly concerned with examining how, through the use of stories, the memoirist weaves together the gap between memory and inherited memory, or postmemory, to use Marianne Hirsch's term. For Hirsch,

> Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. […] Postmemory characterises the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that precede their birth, where own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generations shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated. (Hirsch, 2012: 22)

Hirsch is here referring specifically to the children of Holocaust survivors, whose experiences are of course very different to those of Portuguese emigrants in the United States. As the conclusion will argue, however, Hirsch's definition of postmemory as the process through which a person takes on the memory of others and makes it their own provides an interesting way of understanding the tightrope of belonging and not belonging implicit within Portuguese American life writing, and its creation of a discursive community in the three memoirs examined below.

In the first memoir, Pauline Correia Stonehill's *A Barrelful of Memories: Stories of my Azorean Family* (2005), it is clear that some of the stories present in the narrative are not her own, thereby providing a fruitful example of how inherited memory can be woven into an account. Stonehill is a second generation Portuguese American whose grandparents were pioneers in California, and whose parents became successful dairy farmers.[4] This article will concentrate its analysis on the first part of Stonehill's account, which in her own words,

> is largely based on conversations with my mother, whose remarkable memory provided me with most of what I know about my grandparents, her own childhood, and my father's childhood. As we visited, she would tell me some tale from the past, which I would later write, adding detail and conversation as I imagined it might have been. Because I knew how these people spoke, I reconstructed conversations; and since I knew their personalities well, I have tried to recreate settings, feelings and thoughts. (Stonehill, 2005: viii)

3 Although it is not within the scope of this article, readers interested in how some of these memoirs have been examined as a contribution to the US ethnic debate are directed to Fagundes (2005 and 2010), Silva (2011) and Ramos Villar (2012).

4 Stonehill's father became a leader in the dairy farming community in the region, defending farmers' rights within the dairy union, especially in the testing of TB in cattle, leading the way to changes in methods of testing.

By her own admission, then, the first part of Stonehill's story is a second hand account received from her mother, which narrates how her maternal grandparents emigrated from the Azores to New England and then California, the ups and downs of how her family established themselves in a farmstead in California, and how her parents met and married.[5] The story of her paternal grandmother Emília, in particular, shows Stonehill's methods in creating the narrative. Emília's story begins in the following way:

> Most of my paternal grandmother's story is lost with the passage of time and the death of those few remaining persons who actually ever knew her. Until recently, to me, she was just a black-shawled, barefoot woman who obediently peddled her butter and her husband's contraband from door to door in Horta. (Stonehill, 2005: 112)

The portrait of Emília is built up slowly; she was a gentle, overworked woman of very poor health, whose husband often left her alone to care for her children and run the house, and whose children grew up under very difficult circumstances, coming close to neglect after the death of their mother. Although most of the account seems to be based on Stonehill's conjecture, with statements such as "Before she died she had six children who lived enough to be counted. How many other pregnancies had she, I wonder?" (113), it is clear from the four pages that make up the story of Emília's life that Stonehill has conducted a good deal of research into her family. She mentions that she worked out how her paternal grandparents had married after having three children by closely examining the information given in her uncle's birth certificate (112). There are also instances of reported speech, which are presumably passed down through generations as a kind of inherited memory when the story was told and retold – or which perhaps constitute evidence of how Stonehill embellished her account for added dramatic tension, or even for plausibility. For instance, Stonehill reproduces her Aunt Mary's words to Stonehill's father in the following significant way: ""He was mean to her!" she'd tell my father, who had been too young to remember details of family troubles" (114). Later, Stonehill reproduces a dialogue between herself and her aunt Luisa. Her aunt Luisa is describing her feelings when saying goodbye to her brother, Stonehill's father, as he left for the US, which Stonehill records and, in so doing, exonerates her family for past mistakes;

5 There is evidence that the reader might even be acquiring the family's inherited memory in the form of a third-hand account. The story of her maternal grandfather's clandestine emigration to the US in a barrel, and how he almost died of starvation in the process, is a good example of this. Here, Stonehill not only narrates feelings and situations, but also adds bits of dialogue to heighten the dramatic tension of the story.

> Sixty-three years later she wept as she told me, "I should never have gotten married and left him there with no one to care for him. I didn't know my mother-in-law could be so cruel as to not let me feed my own brother. He would never have gone if I hadn't married."
>
> "Tia Luisa," I replied, "he had a much better life in California than he would ever have had here without an education, even though he worked hard". (123)[6]

Emília's story is typical of how Stonehill structures her account. The story told sets the scene for explaining a particular aspect: in this case, the relationship her father had with his family, and especially with his older sisters, Mary and Luisa. This explanation neatly creates a structural link to the next set of stories which, in this particular case, culminate with how and why Stonehill's father joined his sister Mary in the United States. The stories of Stonehill's family, particularly the stories of the family on the paternal side, thus form a patchwork of inherited memories that are woven together to form a cohesive narrative linking the past with the present.

As mentioned above, it is clear that Stonehill conducted research into her family prior to documenting their story. In fact, there is information dotted throughout the stories in which Stonehill acknowledges those who gave her specific bits of information. For example, midway through the story of how her father hunted rabbits in the Azores, Stonehill makes the following aside: "(His cousin, Tony Dutra Machado, who came to the United States at 14, gave me a description of how rabbits were hunted)" (121). Stonehill also acknowledges the process of gathering information in her introduction, which also outlines a research trip to the Azores and the inclusion of her "own observations and recollections of family events and customs, as well as my own experiences and relationships with the various characters" (xi). Here, the layering of memory seamlessly joins together Stonehill's research and the stories passed down to her by her family. In this way, Stonehill engages in a sleight of hand that enhances the authenticity of the account. The line of demarcation between memoir and fiction is effectively blurred, a process that can be deemed intentional if we take into account Stonehill's words in the introduction on the process of creating and editing the final text. As we have seen, Stonehill acknowledges that she reconstructed and embellished conversations, feelings and situations. It is therefore plausible to conclude that Stonehill's text is an account that makes extensive use of stories as pieces of inherited memory, in order to present the reader with a biography of her family, an autobiographical collection of stories about her childhood, and a collection of stories that embellish reality and contain fictional elements.

6 There is an element of triumphalism in these words that echoes some US autobiographic models. Stonehill looks back with pride at her family for the decision to emigrate to a better life, the inference being that the US has enabled them to overcome the limitations and hardships of their country of origin.

Stonehill is not alone in blurring the line between fiction and memoir, or in showcasing the use of stories as a means of exposing the process of layering memory and research. Rose Peters Emery's *Footprints in the Soil: a Portuguese Californian Remembers* (2003), a text mainly concerned with depicting life on a Californian farm during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, is an episodic account made up of interlinked stories. These stories start at the point that Peters' father emigrates from São Jorge, and go on to explain how he survived on a farming homestead on the American frontier, how his first wife died leaving him with eleven children, and then how he met and married Peters Emery's mother, an American-born woman whose parents were also from São Jorge. Peters Emery's account focuses on how the Peters family lived and worked on the farm, how the children went to school, how some of Peters Emery's brothers went to fight in the two world wars, and how the author was able to take advantage of a softening stance toward gender roles within her family.

In a number of places in her account, Peters Emery is very explicit about the limits of her memory, and about how her memory has been supplemented by the inherited memory of her family through the passing down of stories. Of her parents' early life together, she says:

> I wish I knew more about their life in Canyon, especially their first years there. What little I know came to me much later in the form of stories or anecdotes from my older half-brothers and sisters, repeated over and over because they were relished by the family, or more indirectly from my own mother. (Emery, 2003: 28)
>
> Another story had to do with a sleeping cow. Frank [her brother] told it to Gertrude, and Gertrude told it to me. (31)

Nonetheless, Peters Emery's account goes beyond being a simple transcription of inherited memory. In the acknowledgements page, Peters Emery states that her book is the result of "miscellaneous notes and short sketches, jotted down as I remembered them. Several years of expanding, rewriting, and reshaping [which] finally resulted in a book" (ix). Peters Emery's account, therefore, is the result of careful editing of different versions of stories that she has received from members of her family, together with her own memory, which she has then worked and reworked prior to publication. In this way, Peters Emery's account transcends the layering of memory through stories found in Stonehill's account, becoming instead a carefully choreographed text that condenses many versions of the same set of stories.

Peters Emery's account also displays various contradictions. For example, at one point the author describes how the boys in the family could play freely if their chores had been carried out. The girls, on the other hand, could only play at school (63). Much later, however, there is a whole chapter dedicated to

how the family had fun, and here it is clear that Peters Emery played dress up with her little sister at home (118), and that they had enough leisure time to read books from the *Wizard of Oz* series (118). There are also instances where Peters Emery corrects received stories – let's call them inherited memories. One such example is when Peters Emery describes how one of her stepbrothers had a throat injury which resulted in a permanent tracheotomy, and how he died after choking on an apple. Peters Emery goes on to explain that years later she discovered her stepbrother's true cause of death: that he had drowned himself when pouring too much alcohol at once down his damaged throat (146 and 147). Peters Emery then justifies how the former, flawed inherited memory came into being, affirming that the true cause of death had been covered up so as not to cause shame for the family.[7] Thus, the contradictions in Peters Emery's account reflect the limits of family memory. They show that the stories passed down have been altered in the process of telling, and perhaps too in their subsequent documentation and editing by Peters Emery, putting into question whether the stories the reader sees are indeed inherited memory from her family.

On this last point, it is pertinent to examine the description of a woman peddler that came to the Peters Emerys' house. This description is clearly used to highlight Peters Emery's mother's kindness toward people less fortunate than herself. However, it is also evident here that Peters Emery has read stories about other immigrant groups in the US, in that she ends the description of the woman peddler with the following words: "I think now that she may have been one of the itinerant Jewish that I have read were widespread in the early days of Jewish immigration" (136). Later, the author's use of the quintessential American reference, Mark Twain, and his description of the use of the *capote* in *The Innocents Abroad*, when she explains the different ways in which the boys and girls were allowed to play, could be seen as a result of reading so as to acquire background information for her writing (63 and 64). It is plausible to argue that Peters Emery is being guided on what to include, what to emphasise, and how to structure her account by her own reading of autobiographical and biographical narratives. Here, it is useful to consider Jerome Bruner's

7 This feeling of not wanting to cause embarrassment is interesting because it might lie behind the abrupt way in which her book ends. After Peters Emery explains that she dropped out of college to marry, what follows is a very guarded and brief comment that she then got divorced, worked a few jobs and eventually joined her daughter in college to become a qualified teacher. Although Silva suggests that Peters Emery's focus on her parent's married life is due to her own experience of being a divorcee, in that "her parent's married life together was far more rewarding than her own" (2011: 51-52), it should be noted that this slightly skews the overall interpretation of her memoir. Considering the change of pace in the narration, especially the quick way in which her divorce is mentioned, the measured way in which she ends her account could be considered not as inherited memory, but as a transmission of inherited values to the reader. Such an interpretation would build on Silva's observation that, through her memoir, Peters Emery is leaving a legacy of memory for her family and her readers, and that it provides a narrative that uses the American prototype of a rags-to-riches account from an ethnic perspective (2011: 54 and 55).

comments on the inclusion of extra information on history or a historical event in the personal account, a practice he sees as aimed toward "coherence by contemporaneity" (Bruner, 1991: 19), noting that references to a wider historical event give coherence and legitimacy to a life writing account. In Peters Emery's case, the references to history not only provide an aura of engagement with someone possessing a wide cultural knowledge, but also situate her narrative within a historical frame of reference. The historical reference becomes a kind of intertextual shorthand, akin to a cultural postmemory. The reader is prompted to infer the period or historical reference, thereby also making a connection with the memories of others. The references to a historical event could thus additionally be seen as a kind of collective inherited memory, perhaps a culturally-embedded memory, that the life writer calls upon. This framework will be explored further in the conclusion.

The author's literary reference to Twain could furthermore be seen as a shorthand through which to explain Azorean attitudes toward and treatment of women and, by extension, to ascertain the reasons that Peters Emery's father perpetuated these attitudes. In addition, it is plausible to assert that Peters Emery is seeking to redress the negative portrayal of Azoreans provided by Twain. In his analysis of Mark Twain's portrayal of the Azorean people in *The Innocents Abroad*, Silva (2003 and 2012) comments that Twain was interested in the readers' reactions to his writing, deploying humour to enhance a perceived superiority on the part of the American reader. This meant that, as Silva argues, Twain did not take into account the ethical consequences that such a portrayal might entail for those portrayed in such a negative light. Silva goes on to argue that Twain's depiction of the Portuguese would endure and have lasting consequences for this ethnic group in the US. Peters Emery echoes, even perpetuates, a particular stereotype held of the Portuguese as deeply conservative and backward. Significantly, immediately after referencing Twain, Peters Emery makes a comment about how "it took the fall of the Salazar dictatorship, increasing contact with the European community, and the arrival of television to loosen the restrictions on women" (64). By making use of the stereotype, the literary reference, and then the political comment on Portugal's situation, Peters Emery consolidates her position as a reliable cultural informant.[8] Moreover, she is a cultural informant that is seeking to redress a negative image of the Portuguese beyond the legacy of Twain. This framing lends legit-

8 Peters Emery's exploration of customs and behaviours within the Portuguese American community are present in very detailed passages such as the description of the Holy Ghost festival in Hayward, especially of the food and drink consumed within it (Peters Emery, 2003: 125-128). The inclusion of these details may also be a result of receiving feedback on her writing, which may also explain the curious insertion of a letter that Peters Emery's ninety-year-old mother wrote describing how she supplemented the family's economies by selling butter. Although used to emphasise the thriftiness and ingenuity of Peters Emery's mother, the inclusion of this letter jars with the rest of Peters Emery's account, constituting a curious departure from the style of narration in the book as a whole, and a clear inclusion of someone else's memories into the text.

imacy and authenticity to her account and, more importantly, it highlights the way in which others may have shaped that account – whether through her use of inherited memory, or through her implementation of constructive criticism. Here, it is also useful to consider that, in her acknowledgements section, Peters Emery thanks members of her creative writing class for their constructive criticism, and her daughter for her editing and word processing. The use of literary references constitutes what could be described as Peters Emery's incorporation of stories, in the wider sense of the word, which become available cultural models that form and shape her life narrative (Bruner 2004). In other words, the stories Peters Emery uses from outside her family's experience become an inherited cultural memory, or a collective postmemory, at her disposal when constructing the text.

The last text to be analysed, Josephine Korth's *Wind Chimes in my Apple Tree* (1978) represents a curious exercise in how a heavily edited text shapes the account of a life through the use of interlinked stories. Korth's account begins with a description of how her father overcame a hand-to-mouth existence in the Azores by emigrating and marrying a fellow Azorean emigrant, and how he mortgaged and settled land for an asparagus farm, surviving various hardships including a devastating flood that almost claimed the lives of the entire family. Interestingly, part of these stories happen before Korth was born, or detail aspects of Korth's father's life that occurred when the author was living with her mother in town and her father was working away in the farm in the California Deltas, perhaps hinting, as the article will argue below, that Korth has heard stories of these times and is only now committing them to writing. In the prologue, Korth comments that she is writing the story of her life to pass down the younger generations of her family. This feeling is expressed once more in the closing chapter, where Korth describes how the text was written:

> I have been writing this narrative of my memoirs for a year and a half now […] Each morning of the days I have spent writing this I have awakened with a thrill of joy that I would be able to write that day. I have used surnames as little as possible, and some first names I have changed for practical and personal reasons and to observe people's privacy. (Korth, 1978: 302)[9]

If the book is for family consumption, as the prologue and last chapter clearly state, it is odd that Korth has deliberately chosen to disguise some information. Doing so not only casts doubt on the account's reliability, but also raises questions as to how much information has been changed, and by whom. Here, it is noteworthy to consider that Korth dedicates her book to

9 In wishing to observe people's privacy, Korth echoes Conforti's words at the beginning of this article. In so doing, one could argue that Korth, like Peters Emery does in the measured way she ends her account, and like Conforti, is also transmitting inherited values to the reader.

her daughter, whom, she also comments, has acted as editor of the text and may have made further changes and omissions. Before considering the role of Korth's daughter as editor, the article will first examine the place of stories in the construction of Korth's text.

It is interesting to note that there is evidence that Korth's account might have been prompted by conversations with her family, and that the text thereby constitutes a mediated transcription of inherited memories. For instance, as Korth describes how she made up stories to entertain her siblings, she mentions that her sisters later reminded her of the characters within the stories, which she had subsequently forgotten until the point of writing about them (92). A further hint can be found in the following throwaway remark: "I have spoken a lot about my father but not so much about my mother. My impression of her at that early age was that she seemed to be always in the midst of some task" (29). In fact, her mother is remembered vaguely and only insofar as her role as carer and homemaker, a sharp contrast with the very clear memories of Korth's father. It is clear that the stories found in Korth's text form part of the family history, and mainly recount what the father did to make sure his family survived in the American frontier. Although it is difficult to argue precisely, these are stories that have been transmitted down the generations, perhaps by Korth's mother. If that is indeed the case, and Korth is transcribing an inherited memory received from her mother, then the voice telling the stories – i.e., Korth's mother – remains absent from the text, thus assuming the role of bearer or initiator of what becomes the inherited memory of the family. It is not that Korth's mother is silent, or silenced. Rather, Korth's mother is the link between the inherited memory Korth receives, and the final text that Korth produces.

Through the episodic nature of the interlinked stories, Korth's text offers up a wealth of minute details from social history, such as the seasonal migration of Okies, or the role of the Azorean celebration of the Holy Ghost festival in providing an opportunity for the community to meet, and for courtships to develop or be broken off. The image constructed is one of hardworking and single-minded people who had sufficient grit to achieve success in the very trying conditions of the American frontier. Emphasis is given to the ingenuity of Korth and her husband in turning the disaster of buying a waterlogged farmstead not suitable for farming into a successful boat rental business with bed and breakfast accommodation, named the *Pirate's Lair*. At the end of the account, the reader discovers that this venture became a family-run business following the ill health of Korth's husband. The only moment in which Korth's account becomes less exemplary is in the middle of the text, where she describes her courtship years. After a few false starts, she falls into an engagement with a first cousin, with whom she is unable to get permission for marriage from a priest due to the pair's blood relations. During that engagement, Korth meets and falls in love with her future husband. This middle section heightens the

dramatic tension in the text, giving a little bit of spice to the story. It also provides a very innocent, yet compelling portrayal of a teenager caught up between her own emotions and doing the right thing by her family and society. Considering that the text was edited by Korth's daughter, and that Korth wrote the account for her own family, the portrayal of Korth as strong-minded yet dutiful toward her family might have been intentional, or even contrived to an extent. It presents a prototypical whirlwind romance, which in turn frames the marriage of two people that are devoted to each other by the end of the text. This interpretation nuances Silva's analysis of Korth's text. Silva argues that Korth

> yearned for domesticity and a male protecting figure. [...] Korth found in domesticity, male companionship, and her children a purpose in life and her own fulfilment. [...] [W]e are occasionally invited into the world of her intimacy. She lets us peak into her heart and shares with us her feelings and expectations regarding her boyfriends and then, later on, her husband, her views on child rearing, her grandchildren, and domesticity in general. (2011: 54)

Silva's statement is couched in terms of his argument that the narratives in Portuguese American life stories are dependent on the gender of the writer, arguing that the women authors "tend to focus on intimate matters and domesticity" (51). Silva goes on to comment that Peters Emery thrives in her recollections of domesticity, and that in both her own story and in that of Josephine Korth, patriarchy is the central motif (51).[10] Korth's text thus makes use of inherited cultural models in its construction; the overall story makes use of available narrative models that the reader would presumably be aware of, be they narratives of the pioneers in the American West, or the love story of boy-meets-girl-and-marries-her-against-all-odds, deliberately creating a specific impression of the author.

There is, however, another factor that should be considered. Korth's book forms part of the marketing for the *Pirate's Lair*, the aforementioned successful marina business venture that Korth established with her husband in the California Delta. Looking at their website, a condensed version of Korth's life is given, stating the origins of the marina and emphasising that this is a family-owned business. On the website, Korth's book is framed as providing the history of the family's early life in the Delta where the marina is found. The website even indicates that Korth's text can be purchased in the marina shop. It

10 The women present in Korth's text, and Korth herself (indeed, also Peters Emery and Stonehill), have a more active social role beyond the sphere of the domestic setting that Silva suggests in his analysis. In Korth's specific case, it was her initiative that turned the disaster of buying a waterlogged farmland into a profitable business. As will be discussed below, this narrative has been edited by Korth's daughter, who might want to build up a particular image of Josephine Korth and the family business – and who might want to aim at a middle ground between a more traditional image of women as angels of the hearth, and as the motors for social change in the family.

is thus plausible that the stories Korth tells in her account have been edited in such a way as to provide all the ingredients for an interesting, yet wholesome rags-to-riches story that casts the family business in a suitable marketing light, while at the same time remaining a collection of stories about pioneers living in the American West. The marketing angle means that the inherited memory present in the stories that Korth has transcribed, has been mediated and shaped for a particular use. To paraphrase an observation from Julie Rak's examination of the boom in memoirs in recent years, memoirs turn identities into commodities (2013: 7), and it could be argued that Korth's text has become one such commodity.

Going back to the observations made by Conforti and Hirsch earlier in the article, the use of stories in the three texts examined thus far has played a structuring role that shapes the accounts and weaves together the gap between personal memory and inherited memory. In Stonehill's case, the stories create a layering of memory that blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality to produce a more coherent account. In Peters Emery's case, the stories are carefully choreographed and edited to make a coherent whole, and the inherited memory called upon in this construction goes beyond the individual to include collective and cultural inherited memories. In Korth's case, the stories weaved into the account shape the inherited memory in a particular way, and for a particular use. The use of stories in all three memoirs demonstrates the malleable nature of inherited memory. These texts could be seen as embodiments, to recall Hirsch's idea, of how people can take on someone else's memory and make it their own. This taking on of the memory of another can also be seen in the way the stories told reproduce a sense of purpose, of having made it, of triumph against adversity, of survival in the face of difficult circumstances, and of the desire to redress a negative stereotype assigned to one's ethnic group. In other words, by using the inherited memory of the family to structurally shape their memoirs, the three Portuguese American memoirs analysed in this article make use of an inherited cultural model to describe their respective experiences, as will be discussed below.

A branch in autobiographical criticism headed by Jerome Bruner sees autobiographical accounts as narratives that make use of selected episodes, joined together into a coherent story (Bruner, 2004; 1991). Bruner sees these narratives as "culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes" (2004: 694). Katherine Nelson echoes this idea as she traces the current popularity of autobiographical accounts in the US since the 1940s, a phenomenon she attributes to the "personalisation of American culture" (2003: 134). Julie Rak ascribes the current boom in memoir publishing to the appeal of reading a compelling story of a self that is based on real events. The act of reading maps onto the reader's experience, or the reader's understanding, forming an echo of recognition that

> provides the story of others in a way that creates a private self alongside the self of another, and [which] is the means of mobility from the private to the public. […] It becomes a way for readers to think publicly, but from the private sphere. […] Memoir makes people *feel* connected, and it connects individual feelings to group ideas. (Rak, 2013: 33)

The reader thus takes on the memory of others through the act of reading, but also through their recognition that the story being read is similar to their own.

Through their use of stories to construct a narrative of their lives and of the lives of their families, the three Portuguese American memoirs analysed in this article walk the tightrope of recording and preserving their family's inherited memory, of personalising their experience for their families and the wider community, and of being the voice of a collective Portuguese American experience, but they also make use of the life writing boom within the US, and of public interest in the lives of pioneers in the American West. They are both documenting an inherited memory, and partaking in the creation of a cultural inherited memory. At once within and outside of the cultural model of the US as a multicultural society, the tightrope that Portuguese American life writers walk is fraught. The three memoirs examined here tap into the appeal and popularity of memoirs as compelling stories, but also stories that are relatable to a reader who, through the act of reading, uses the memoir to think and reflect on their own situation (Rak, 2013: 11). This interaction, according to Rak, creates a community "that is not – for a variety of reasons – entirely a creation of a state but that gestures to the sense of belonging that a state cannot provide" (212). It is a negotiation of the fragmented self – while at the same time that self writes itself into a coherent whole in the text – and the self that sees itself as being part of many communities and cultures that the text cannot completely contain. Inherited memory, or postmemory, thus weaves a narrative that goes beyond the individual memory to include the experiences of other people, whether from the same ethnic group or not, thereby creating a narrative community beyond the nation state(s).

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