

Material inheritances: an affective story in the history of elderly persons

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Abstract

Material inheritance is an important theme in old age, tied up to the life story and with shaping the manner in which one will be remembered. This study adopts the self-confrontation method to explore the meanings and affects that elderly persons attach to the material inheritance, taking into consideration their experiences both as heirs and donors. The sample comprises five participants (80–95 years). Main findings suggest a process of transmitting material inheritance characterized by the creation of a material legacy throughout life and from both positions (donor and heir); resolution related to receiving inheritances (heir position); and transferral as a donor later on in life. This process seems to play an affective role at individual (self-autonomy vs. lost love) and familial (union vs. isolation) levels. The transmission of material inheritance represents a lifelong task that connects past, present, and future and links generations.

Keywords: material inheritances, narratives, valuation theory, self-confrontation method, elderly persons, ageing, families in later life.

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Introduction

Legacy is a major topic in old age, since it represents leaving something behind, intimately tied up to the life story and with shaping the manner in which one will be remembered. Three types of legacy have been described (Hunter & Rowles 2005): biological (passing on genes), values (passing on personal values), and material (passing on possessions). This study focuses on material inheritance, which has been described mostly as a process that involves the giving and receiving of material property from one generation to the next, usually within the family (e.g. Finch & Mason 2000; Goodnow & Lawrence 2013; Rowlingson & McKay 2005). This legacy emerges as a particularly challenging experience (e.g. Schaie & Willis 2002; Sousa et al. 2010): it is crucial to elderly people as it is associated with the desire to prolong life, to give meaning to their life, and to maintain a symbolic presence after death. It is also a potential source for family conflicts (mostly between heirs, and/or among heirs and donors). Generally, the giving and receiving of material inheritances takes place between older parents (donors) and their adult children (heirs) and is completed (both legally and emotionally) after the death of the donor. So, during life, each person typically performs two roles (e.g. Sousa et al. 2010): firstly that of heir (who receives) and later on that of donor (who gives). These roles tend to be assumed at different stages of the life cycle: the role of heir is usually assumed during middle age when an inheritance is received, mostly from parents, while the role of donor normally is assumed late in life when one's own inheritance is passed on, commonly to adult children (e.g. Patrão & Sousa 2009; Prieur 1999). While donors have to decide what to give, to whom, when, and how, heirs are confronted with the donors' choices and decisions. For heirs, receiving a material inheritance represents the loss of parents and symbolizes one's anticipated finitude (as one moves up the generational ladder); the inheritance also involves economic gains (the material possessions) and/or affective gains (such as feeling the parents' love even after their death, feelings of belonging, and continuity of family) (e.g. Patrão & Sousa 2009). Donors seem to assume the role of guardian of the family unity, acting as conciliators, peace-makers, and/or protectors. The giving of a material inheritance seems to convey a set of meanings for older donors: loss of control over their assets, real (death) or symbolic (dependence/frailty); affective loss (frailty or death involving less or no

contact with significant others); and affective gains, such as helping the children, being remembered after death, being recognized by the children and the community, and symbolic continuity (e.g. Patrão & Sousa 2009). Donors seem to consider the construction of their material inheritance a life task, that is, an obligation and a necessity that is intrinsically related to their parental role and function (e.g. Patrão & Sousa 2009).

Therefore, the giving and receiving of a material inheritance constitutes a lifelong process, experienced both at an individual and family level, in which the roles of heir and donor succeed each other over time, governed by the principal of the circulating legacy (Prieur 1999). This topic has been addressed from legal, economic, social, psychological, and developmental perspectives. A number of studies draw attention to the underlying individual and family dynamics of this process: for instance, individual and family attitudes toward inheritance and assets, impact of inheritance in cross-generational relationships, decisions and strategies for inheritance distribution, and family-associated conflicts (e.g. Drake & Lawrence 2000; Finch & Mason 2000; Goodnow & Lawrence 2013; Rowlingson 2006; Rowlingson & McKay 2005; Stum 2000). This study assumes the elderly people perspective and takes into consideration their life experiences both as heirs and donors, to examine meanings and affective patterns they ascribed to the process of giving/receiving material inheritances across their life course. The theme of material inheritances, addressed as a lifelong task, claims for viewing the self as a narrative, or continuously unfolding story, refashioning the construct of self from a traditional focus on proprieties and structure to that of process (Baars 2012; Lyddon & Alford 2002; Lyddon et al. 2006). So, this exploratory study adopts the self-confrontation method (SCM) (Lyddon et al. 2006), which is inspired by the narrative/constructivist approach and based on the valuation theory (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995). The valuation theory is a framework for the study of personal experience, its organization into a narrative structure, and its temporal unfolding over time (Hermans 1992). Within the valuation theory, the self is viewed as an "organized process of valuation" (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995: 14). The concept of valuation is key and is defined as "any unity of meaning that has a positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant), or ambivalent (both pleasant and unpleasant) value in the eyes of the individual" (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995: 248). A valuation is thus anything a person views

as significant when telling his/her life story (such as: a precious memory, a frustrating event); that is, it refers to a process of meaning construction in which the person is telling his or her story about the past, present, and future. The construction of a valuation is both a cognitive and an emotional process; as such, each valuation implies a specific pattern of affect (when people value an experience, they always feel something in regard to that experience) (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995). The SCM over the past two decades has gained influence as a research tool. Researchers have applied SCM in a wide range of topics, including counselling processes (Hermans et al. 1990), self-esteem and psychological well-being (Hermans 1992), midlife crisis (Hermans & Oles 1999), attachment style, and working models of emotion (Alford et al. 2006). The SCM has shown adequate indexes of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) in studies involving clinical ($0.83 < r < 0.91$) and non-clinical ($0.83 < r < 0.90$) samples (Hermans 1992).

In Portugal, where this study was conducted, there is no testamentary freedom. The law stipulates that property should be passed on to heirs in equal shares, and the donors may bequeath one-third of their assets to anyone they wish. However, despite the more or less rigid legal determinants, families across countries tend to develop informal strategies for passing on inheritances, based on personal values and attitudes as well family norms and obligations (e.g. Finch & Mason 2000; Sousa et al. 2010).

This exploratory qualitative study focuses on elderly persons (≥ 80 years) and adapts the SCM to examine the meanings and affective patterns they attribute to the material inheritances, considering their life experiences both as heirs and donors. Results will contribute to a better understanding of how elderly people are dealing with the affective and relational processes associated with the material inheritances process.

Methods

In this study, the Portuguese version of SCM (Pereira 2009) was used. The method was adapted to collect participants' narratives on their experience as heirs and donor of material inheritances.

Participants

The study involves a convenience sample, primarily to assure the ability of respondents to adhere the SCM. So, participants are elderly persons previously involved in another study on the topic of material inheritance, who had previously developed a relation with the third author. The inclusion criteria were: (i) ≥ 80 years old (since the study focuses on elderly persons that have experience both as heirs and donors); (ii) men and women; (iii) without cognitive impairments, and oriented in time and space; and (iv) that have already assumed an active donor position (i.e. having started to pass on their material inheritance). Whether these two final criteria were met was determined by evaluating information collected during a previous project, carried out 3 months earlier. Initially, six potential participants were contacted by telephone by the third author to explain the study and the collaboration needed. All agreed to participate. Following their initial consent, a meeting was arranged to provide further details regarding the study. All agreed to collaborate, and each participant signed an informed consent form after which an interview was scheduled. However, one of the participants was unable to complete the interview, due to lack of understanding of the process. So, the sample comprises five participants, aged between 80 and 95 years, of which three were men (two widowers and one married) and two were women (both widows). Participants had between 4 and 12 years of schooling. Three were living in an older person's home, one was living with the daughter and one was living with the spouse. All reported having children (ages ranging from one to five); and four related grandchildren (ages varying from 1 to 10).

Instrument

The SCM invites participants to construct valuations based on self-selected events and life episodes that are meaningful to them and to identify affective meanings associated with those significant experiences. The interviews start with questions aimed at obtaining socio-demographic data such as age, gender, years of formal education, marital status, number of children and grandchildren, and living arrangement. In this study, the interview protocol was designed in accordance to the procedures detailed in the manual (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995; Portuguese version, Pereira 2009), and

included three stages (Table 1): first, gathering the story (to identify significant life events related to material inheritances); second, valuation elicitation (to construct valuations/statements that summarized the events

Table 1. SCM interview protocol

1 Collecting stories (life events) regarding the material inheritances process	
Introductory statement: these questions are intended to help you to focus on one or more aspects related to the material inheritances process in your family that are of great importance to you. We will start by discussing your experience as an heir of your parents' (or others) inheritance and then focus on your present (and/or future) experience as donor of your own inheritance.	
Stimulus questions	
Heir position	Donor position
Please think about your family material inheritance process and choose one or more episodes that occurred when you received your parents' (or others) inheritance that have been important to you. Please describe it as detailed as possible.	Please think about the material inheritance that you have passed on or will pass on to your heirs and, putting yourself in the position of donor, choose one or more events, circumstance or person/s that are connected with this process and that are important to you. Please describe it as detailed as possible.
2 Constructing valuations (meanings): statements that summarize the events previously identified	
3 Attributing affective terms (feelings) to each valuation: using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (nothing) to 5 (very much)	
P = positive N = negative	Joy, cheer, excitement, and happiness Disappointment, unhappiness, disgust, and impotence
S = affect directed toward self-enhancement	Self-confidence, strength, confidence, and success
O = affect directed toward connectedness and union with others	Caring, love, tenderness, and intimacy

Adapted from Hermans & Hermans-Jensen 1995; Portuguese version: Pereira 2009.

previously identified); and third, affective rating (attributing affective terms to each valuation).

Data Collection

The SCM protocol was administered during a collaborative process between the participant and the researcher/interviewer. For each question, the researcher worked with the participant by reflecting and clarifying his/her responses. In particular, the researcher supported the participants after the recall of life events in order to produce a sentence that captured accurately a particular valuation or set of valuations. Once the participants had verbally formulated the valuations, the researcher wrote these down respecting the participant wording and then asked him/her to read and check for accuracy. Regarding the attribution of affective terms (feelings) to each valuation (meaning), for those participants experiencing difficulties using the Likert scale, the researcher provided a visual aid, a ruler that combined the six levels of the scale with a pictogram of a face – from 0 – no smile to 5 – big smile. Three participants asked to perform this third stage on another day because they were feeling tired. In these cases, the interview continued the following day, and started with the reading of the valuations and checking if the participants would like to make any alteration, which was not the case. All interviews (lasting 120–180 minutes) were voice recorded, performed by the third author, and carried out in a private room at the participants' home or at an office at a community institution.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed in two stages (based on Hermans & Hermans-Jansen 1995; Pereira 2009). The first stage involved the content analysis of the valuations to categorize the main emerging themes. Participants' valuations were categorized into a system created through a process of successive refinement, involving two independent coders (first and third authors). Coders independently read all the participants' valuations and developed a list of sub/categories. Then they met to compare the categorization systems. The two coders discussed the system until full agreement was reached. Then they produced a list of sub/categories, which included definitions. Finally, the valuations were classified into the

categories by the first author and reviewed by the second author (full agreement between coders was obtained).

The second stage included the calculation of four indexes to characterize affective patterns of the valuations (see Table 2). PNOS indexes: (i) P (sum of the points attributed to the positive affective terms), (ii) N (sum of the points attributed to the negative affective terms), (iii) O (sum of the points attributed to the terms expressing connectedness and union with others), (iv) S (sum of the points attributed to the terms expressing self-enhancement). Based on these PNOS indexes, each valuation can be classified on a specific affective pattern and be given a specific affective meaning, according to the typology (Hermans & Hermans-Jensen 1995) (Table 2).

Results

The content analysis revealed three categories of material inheritances valuations (each comprising two subcategories): creation, transferral, and resolution (Table 2). The participants expressed a stronger identification with the donor position, since they formulated a higher number of valuations (19) for that position (their current position), in comparison to the number of valuations (11) for the position of heir (a former position). The number of valuations emerging for each sub/category, considering the heir and donor positions, suggests that some meanings are shared (creation), but others are specifically attached to the heir position (resolution), and to the donor position (transferral).

The category *creation of material inheritances* seems to be a meaningful theme for both heir and donor positions, since valuations emerged for both positions. This category involves two subcategories: *feelings of self-worth* (5 valuations: 3 heir, 2 donor) and *desire to protect the family patrimony* (8 valuations: 3 heir, 5 donor). These valuations are mostly associated with positive affective patterns (11). Only two negative affective terms emerged, both in the heir position: – LL (feelings of self-worth: isolation) and – O (desire to protect the patrimony: lost love).

The category *transferral of material inheritances* only received valuations from the position of donor, indicating that as an heir, transfer is not that meaningful. This category comprises two subcategories: (i) *handover of financial management* (8 valuations as donor: 7 positive, all + HH, strength;

Table 2. Material inheritance: valuations' sub/categories and affective patterns

Sub/categories: valuations (n)	Definitions and examples	Affective patterns					
		+ S	+ O	+ HH	- S	- O	- LL
Creation (includes to create own inheritance and to receive material inheritances) (<i>n</i> = 13)							
Self-worth/ worthlessness (<i>n</i> = 5)	Feelings of self-worth and celebration of the material legacy created and received through life, both for its material and symbolic value (acceptance of having received something and have something to pass on).						
Heir (<i>n</i> = 3)	"My wife received an inheritance from her uncles, because she took care of them. That inheritance organized our life!" [Xavier]; "My father sold all the family properties . . . there was no inheritance left for us!" [Vicente]	1		1			1
Donor (<i>n</i> = 2)	"I still have some good assets to leave to my heirs; particularly my working tools and some furniture I have made!" [Dinis] "I didn't inherit a thing from my parents but I always wished to have a good inheritance to leave to my children: I took all my life to create it!" [Vicente]	1		1			
Desire to protect the family patrimony (<i>n</i> = 8)	Desire to protect the family patrimony (in particular that related to the donor personal and family history); for example: not selling the legacy; valuing the legacy received by assuming the role of guardian or by finding someone to assume it.						
Heir (<i>n</i> = 3)	"I have inherited a watch from my father, but I would like to have also an object from my mother!" [Dinis]			2		1	

Material inheritances

Table 2 (Continued)

Sub/categories: valuations (n)	Definitions and examples	Affective patterns					
		+S	+O	+HH	-S	-O	-LL
Donor (<i>n</i> = 5)	"I didn't spend my inheritance! I have this idea that one should not spoil the inheritance." [Xavier]						
	"I would like that my son preserved and enhance the inheritance to later on pass it on to his children; just as I have done!" [Xavier]			5			
	"My children will take good care of my things, preserve them ... you know ... !" [Amélia]						
Transferral (centered on the passing on of financial responsibilities and the preparation of events associated to death, while the person is alive) (<i>n</i> = 9)							
Handover of financial management (<i>n</i> = 8)	Donors feel the need to transmit financial responsibilities and the control of assets, while assuring both support and autonomy in relation to the heirs; implies emotional detachment from some assets and the desire to transmit them to someone significant.						
Heir (<i>n</i> = 0)	–						
Donor (<i>n</i> = 8)	"When my husband died I distributed the possessions. I didn't want to keep anything beyond my pension; I couldn't manage the things!" [Isabel] "After my wife died I gave all my possessions to my children; only kept some money for my daily expenses." [Vicente]			7			1

Table 2 (Continued)

Sub/categories: valuations (n)	Definitions and examples	Affective patterns					
		+S	+O	+HH	-S	-O	-LL
Preparing death (n = 1)	Necessity of preparing the funeral and other events associated with one's death, to release descendants of burdens and financial expenses (this represents an inheritance).						
Heir (n = 0)							
Donor (n = 1)	"I worried about having money for my own funeral!" [Vicente]			1			
Resolution (includes a positive and a negative pathway in the resolution of inheritance) (n = 11)							
Agreement (positive) (n = 8)	The transmission of material assets and its distribution among heirs was resolved in a positive and fair way; it involved flexibility, support and protection among all those involved; family bonds are maintained, and bring about (reinforce) feelings of protection, support, and union and gratitude among donors and heirs and between heirs.						
Heir (n = 5)	"I never had problems with inheritances: I inherited my parents' house, but I gave it to my nephew; I was his friend!" [Xavier]; "I gave my part of the inheritance to my younger sisters! They needed it most; that's the way it should be done!" [Dinis]		3	2			

Table 2 (Continued)

Sub/categories: valuations (n)	Definitions and examples	Affective patterns					
		+S	+O	+HH	-S	-O	-LL
Donor (<i>n</i> = 3)	"My children achieve a good understanding about the inheritances!" [Vicente]; "I have some money . . . I wish them to use it as they want . . . just want the best for them, no problems!" [Dinis]			3			
Disagreement (negative) (<i>n</i> = 3)	Conflicts during transmission; feelings of disloyalty related to resentments mainly due to the family detachment.						
Heir (<i>n</i> = 3)	"My parents sold all they had; so I didn't inherit anything from them!" [Vicente] "It hurt me so much . . . that my brother in law kept my father's books . . . they didn't belong to him!" [Amélia]						3
Donor (<i>n</i> = 0)	–						
Total		2	3	22	0	1	5

Affective pattern (PNOS indexes) (Hermans & Hermans-Jensen 1995):

+ S (high Self-valuation, and Positive affects) = autonomy and success;

+ O (high Positive affects, and connectedness with Others) = love and union;

+ HH (high Self-enhancement, and connectedness with Others) = strength and union;

- S (high Self-enhancement, with Negative affect) = aggression and rage;

- O (high levels of connection with Others, and Negative affect) = lost or not returned love;

- LL (Negative affect, low Self-enhancement and connectedness with Others) = isolation and impotence

1 negative, $-O$, lost love); (ii) *preparing for death* (one valuation as donor; affective pattern: $+HH$, strength).

In the category *resolution*, more valuations were formulated from the position of heir (8 heir, 3 donor). This category comprises two subcategories: (i) *positive resolution* (5 heir, 3 donor) and (ii) *negative resolution* (3 heir, 0 donor). These valuations are mostly associated to positive affective patterns (8, of which $3+O$, love, and $2+HH$, strength). Three negative emerged in the heir position ($-LL$, isolation).

Altogether, the valuations are characterized (Table 2) mostly by positive affective patterns: 27 positive ($2=+S$, autonomy; $3=+O$, love; $22=+HH$, strength), 7 negative ($2=-O$, lost love; $5=-LL$, isolation), while the $-S$ (aggression) is absent. Valuations from the position of heir reveal five affective patterns ($-S$, aggression, is absent): 9 positive ($5=+HH$, strength; $3=+O$, love; $1=+S$, autonomy) and 5 negative ($4=-LL$, isolation; $1=-O$, lost love). Valuations from the position of donor disclose four affective patterns ($-S$, aggression, and $+O$, love, are absent): 18 positive ($17=+HH$, strength; $1=+S$, autonomy) and 2 negative ($1=-LL$, isolation; $1=-O$, lost love).

Discussion

The results suggest a process of transmission of material inheritances which emerges as a life spanning story in the life histories of elderly persons when they look back over their life. Throughout life and from both positions (donor and heir), by creating a material legacy (includes the inheritances received), it is followed by the emergence of the resolution related to receiving inheritances (heir position), and finally, the transferral as a donor (giving). This process of transmitting material inheritances involves three meanings – *creation*, *transferral*, and *resolution* – in which giving and receiving are components (e.g. Finch & Mason 2000; Goodnow & Lawrence 2013; Rowlingson & McKay 2005).

Creating brings together the two positions (donor and heir) and refers to the process of building a personal material legacy to pass on (donor position), comprising also the material inheritances previously received (heir position). Creating a material inheritance is experienced in the heir position in the past and related to receiving material inheritances expressing

both material and symbolic value (having received something that belonged to a usually significant person). It is associated with the individual's feelings of self-worth (autonomy and success, strength and union) or worthlessness (isolation and impotence), and to the desire to protect the family patrimony (strength and union) or to the inability to do so (lost and unreciprocated love). And creating a material inheritance is experienced in the present in the position of donor by the desire and active engagement in building something valuable and useful to transfer (giving). It is attached to positive affective patterns: self-worth (autonomy and success, strength and union) and desire to protect the family patrimony (strength and union). Creating a material inheritance from the position of donor is mostly perceived in a positive way, while the perception from the position of heir is regarded with ambivalence (both positive and negative). When people assume the position of donors they are probably focusing on what they are passing on (and experiencing positive feelings of satisfaction with what they have built), while when assuming the position of heirs they simultaneously experience gains (material) and losses (of significant relatives) and need to conciliate different perspectives (of the heirs) (e.g. Drake & Lawrence 2000; Sousa et al. 2010; Stum 2000).

Resolution of the material inheritances emerges as meaningful mostly from the heir position. Some participants also reported this meaning as donors because they have discussed their inheritance with their future heirs. In general, resolution (management of what is received) emerges mainly as a task of the heirs (typically after the donors' death). Resolution may take a positive (love, strength, and union) or negative (isolation and impotence) pathway. It has been associated with family conflicts, usually related to differences in perceptions of fairness and justice among heirs (e.g. Drake & Lawrence 2000; Stum 2000).

Transferral of material inheritances only received valuations from the donor position; it reflects the present role of participants in this study and is associated with the handover of the management of their financial issues and with their preparations regarding their death. Typically, this transfer takes place when the elderly feel the need to hand over financial responsibilities and the control of assets, often as a result of increasing feelings of frailty. It implies emotional detachment from certain assets and the desire to transfer these to significant others (e.g. Kohli & Künemund 2003;

Schaie & Willis 2002). This process is mostly attached to feelings of strength and union. Preparing for death refers to the necessity to prepare funeral arrangements and other events associated with their own death, in order to release descendants of burdens and financial expenses. This represents an inheritance attached to strength and union (e.g. Sousa et al. 2010).

Thus, from the older persons' perspective, the process of transmitting material inheritances can be related to different stages in the life span. To the past, primarily characterized by the process of creating and constructing the material legacy, this period also involves the experience of being an heir (receiving). To the present time, during which the donor role is assumed in terms of transferral (giving) mostly in terms of financial responsibilities, and some degree of frailty is usually being experienced. To the future, for which it represents a way of assuring personal care preceding death, and after death when it represents the symbolic presence and contribution to the future of their family (e.g. Schaie & Willis 2002). In terms of the life cycle, it seems that people firstly and throughout their adult lives are involved in creating a material inheritance. Later on, people will have to deal with the resolution, that is, they receive a material inheritance and have to – with other heirs and after the donor's death – resolve the process (in practical, legal, and emotional terms). During old age the main task is to transfer (giving), which will influence the resolution in terms of decisions regarding what to give, to whom, when, and how. This resolution however will not be experienced by the donor as it will be completed only after the donor's death. The donor will aim to avoid conflicts between heirs (protect family relations) and to take care of future generations (Drake & Lawrence 2000; Goodnow & Lawrence 2013). Nonetheless, the donor will die leaving a material inheritance that will need to be resolved by their heirs: the construction of a legacy and the process of transmission start during life but the final resolution (in legal and emotional terms) will occur only after the donor's death. Being a donor seems to create a position that materializes and brings together most challenges (both emotional and practical) associated with old age: care, financial well-being, death, continuity, and life review (Finch 2004; Finch & Mason 2000; Rowlingson & McKay 2005).

Overall, findings suggest that the whole process is experienced emotionally by the elderly person as positive, embedded in a context of positive affective meanings. So it seems that at old age people perceive material

inheritances mostly as a process that brings strength and union to self and family relationships. The literature has shown that even when inheritance presents a conflictive issue, older people tend to omit these problems in an effort to preserve a positive image of the legacy, regulating associated emotions and social interactions in a way that allows them to preserve a positive view of the self (e.g. Carstensen & Charles 1998; Sousa et al. 2010).

Limitations and Research Perspectives

The main limitation of this study is the limited size of the sample. The collection of data from larger samples may reveal additional valuations and affective patterns, but mostly it would allow for comparisons taking into consideration socio-economic and demographic variables (such as gender, socio-economic status, number of children, and grandchildren). There is also a need for research that allows to develop further knowledge about individual's considerations related to particular family structures (for instance, in situations of remarriage, when there are no children or in single parent families), about families with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds (Roma families and bi-cultural families, for instance), and different legal systems (in particular, those with more testation freedom). Further knowledge is also required regarding conflicts on the topic of material inheritances.

Conclusion

This study explores meanings and affects associated to material inheritances by elderly people, considering their life experiences both as heirs and donors. Results suggest a process of transmitting material inheritances involving creation, transferral, and resolution. It represents a lifelong process that impacts both individuals and families. It is a process that connects past, present, and future and that connects members of different generations within a family, including those who have passed away. In narrative terms, it constitutes a story in the history of the individual and his/her family. In a person's life, this story seems to start with the creation of a material legacy, followed by the experiences of receiving and resolving such a legacy, and finally, in old age it is concluded with transferral (giving). It provides new meaning to old age and to death, as it brings about a sense

of symbolic continuity and of continuing influence on the family. The processes of transmitting material inheritances are like a never-ending story, re-experienced from generation to generation.

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