

Between social memory and archives: an analysis of the educational system of Rio de Contas

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the educational system of Rio de Contas-BA through social memory and archival records. It was possible to analyze the references related to education in the municipality, covering both the positive points and the difficulties encountered during this period. This analysis was based on documentary sources found in the Municipal Public Archive of Rio de Contas (APMRC) and data collected from semi-structured interviews with education professionals who worked at the Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência (CIRCEA). This study adopts Bakhtin's (1998) discourse analysis approach, exploring the construction of meaning in discursive interactions, based on the category of polyphony. The municipal education system in Rio de Contas is based on CIRCEA, which operated between 1959 and 2007. As well as being a reference in education, CIRCEA is recognized for contributing to the economic development of the municipality in question.

Keywords: Documents. Educators. Education. Memory.

Entre a memória social e arquivos: análise do sistema educacional de Rio de Contas

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar, por meio da memória social e arquivos, o sistema educacional de Rio de Contas-BA. Foi possível analisar as referências relacionadas à educação do município, contemplando tanto os pontos positivos quanto as dificuldades encontradas nesse período. Essa análise teve como base as fontes documentais encontradas no Arquivo Público Municipal de Rio de Contas (APMRC) e os dados coletados em entrevistas semiestruturadas com os profissionais da educação que exerceram suas funções no Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência (CIRCEA). Esse trabalho tem como abordagem a análise do discurso, de Bakhtin (1998), e explora a construção do sentido nas interações discursivas, com base na categoria polifonia. A educação municipal de Rio de Contas tem como referência o CIRCEA, que teve seu funcionamento entre os anos de 1959 e 2007. O CIRCEA, para além de referência em educação, é reconhecido por contribuir para o desenvolvimento econômico do município em questão.

Palavras-chave: Docentes. Documentos. Educação. Memória.

1 Introduction

This article aims to analyze, through social memory and archives, the educational system of Rio de Contas-BA. There are aspects of the educational system in Rio de Contas, from 1913 onwards, which highlight the commitment of society to demand improvements in education in the municipality, located in the Chapada Diamantina identity territory. Rio de Contas-BA is one of the first cities to be planned in Brazil. Its historic center has wide streets paved with rocks, historic mansions and tall, wide doors. As far as the town's architecture is concerned, the public buildings, such as the old jail, schools, town hall, health center and religious temples, retain the same architectural pattern, influenced by the Portuguese colonial style, with buildings that have simple, symmetrical façades, with standardized windows and doors, often adorned with wooden or stone frames. In addition to its rich history, the city is surrounded by mountains and hills and a wide variety of trails, rivers and waterfalls.

We can also highlight the festivities that are part of the municipality's tradition, such as Corpus Christi, São João, Carnival and other festivities that take place throughout the year. All this architecture and festivities have made and continue to make Rio de Contas a tourist town that attracts visitors from all over the world.

However, there are still riches to be explored in this region, and education is one of them. Rio de Contas has a Municipal Public Archive (APMRC), where its history is on display and can be told and retold through cataloged documents. Among these documents, when we carried out the field research in 2023, we found records of the municipality's education and the desire of Rio de Contas society to seek improvements for education in their municipality.

Newspapers of the time, such as *O Cinzel*, *A Tarde Municípios* and *O Pequeno*, which record the notable events of the municipality in various periods, are available for consultation, as well as documents on the opening of schools, requests for school materials, class records, teacher records, photographs and books on the municipality of Rio de Contas. These newspapers played an important informative role, functioning as the

main communication vehicles for the population and offering local, national and international news, as well as discussing topics of social, political, economic and cultural interest. During the field research, we also found several memorial records written by local residents about their families.

In addition to document analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with education professionals and teachers who worked at the CIRCEA school between 1959 and 2007, when it was inaugurated and when it was closed down, with the aim of sharing information about the Rio de Contas Municipal Public Archive and their memories of aspects relating to the CIRCEA. These subjects chose their codenames based on a word that summarized their career as a teacher (this technique was suggested by the researcher). The following codenames emerged: Friendship, Longing, Gratitude, Self-realization and Heritage.

To analyze the documents and testimonies, we used Bahktin's (1998) discourse analysis, based on the category of polyphony, understanding how meanings are constituted in discursive interactions and considering the dialogue and multiplicity of voices present in each utterance, because the meaning of a discourse is always relational, open and dependent on interaction with different contexts and interlocutors, in other words, meaning is never completely closed or finalized. Thus, each interpretation is transformed according to new interlocutors and contexts, when they enter into dialog with the initial discourse, resulting in multiple possible understandings.

The CIRCEA school was built in the municipality of Rio de Contas and, even though it was closed down in 2007, it is still present in the social memory of the people of the region, who testify to its importance not only for Rio de Contas, but also for the districts, villages and other surrounding municipalities, where young people went in search of an opportunity and better-quality education.

It was possible to see from the documents how Rio de Contas' municipal education went through difficulties before later becoming a benchmark for other surrounding municipalities and for Bahia. In this process, CIRCEA stood out in this environment, both in the educational process and in relation to the economic aspects of the municipality. In

addition, we must emphasize the importance of the existence of the Municipal Public Archive of Rio de Contas (APMRC), so that the educational history of the municipality is not forgotten or lost over the years.

Preserving social memory

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After the technological advances resulting from the intensification of globalization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, days seem to pass more quickly and the way of life itself has become faster. We try to speed things up at work, at home and even on the streets.

In the rhythm of contemporary society, with so much information surrounding us, remembering experiences often becomes increasingly rare, remembering what happened to us in a short period of time becomes more difficult, because with the speed of events, actions, thoughts and way of life, everything becomes ephemeral. Nunes highlights this:

We are increasingly being forced to review the ways in which we live and the representations we have of ourselves, our society and our education. In a globalized world, human interaction with technology accentuates the tension between oral tradition, material records and computer communication (Nunes, 2003, p. 132).

The relationship between individuals and technology is becoming increasingly prominent, intensifying a “tension” between different forms of communication and information preservation. On the one hand, the oral tradition persists, a means of interaction, building knowledge, sharing memories and culture through speech. On the other hand, we have material records, which consist of physical documents such as books, manuscripts and artifacts, representing a tangible and lasting way of recording and preserving information over time.

However, with the rise of computer communication, which encompasses a wide range of digital technologies such as the internet, social networks and mobile devices, a new dynamic has emerged in this scenario. Digital communication provides an instant,

accessible and global way of interacting and sharing information. In this way, oral communication and documentary records are no longer prioritized over computer communication.

As oral communication and documentary records cease to be prioritized, it becomes easier for social memory to be lost. According to Nunes (2003, p. 132), “the expansion of historical perception with the contribution of the media seems to replace the memory of multiple experiences with the ephemeral images of the present”. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the tradition of everyday conversations, the conversation circles between social groups to recall experiences, the records often deposited in public archives, all of which are lost due to the ephemerality that society imposes on us.

According to Nora (1993, p. 8), “the very mode of historical perception which, with the help of the media, has expanded prodigiously, replacing a memory focused on the inheritance of its own intimacy with the ephemeral film of the present”. Now, instead of looking to the past with a personal connection, we are more inclined to focus on the ephemerality of the present, through the constant flow of information and entertainment provided by the media. This change suggests that history is becoming more superficial and less anchored in cultural and personal roots, which can have significant implications for the preservation of memory, the historical heritage passed down through generations and cultural movements.

On the other hand, there is a motivation in society that still persists. Nunes (2003, p. 133) raises a question and answers it: “What motivation animates human actions when they prioritize memory in the effort to establish and preserve cultural heritage? An ancient motivation: to overcome death.” However, for Nunes, as technology has become part of our daily lives in a more effective way (21st century), there has been a change in sensitivity towards death:

[...] oblivion. We want to be remembered and, if possible, lovingly. This motivation, however, is implicit in the idea that the passage of time erases everything. Hence the deliberate intention to protect the memories of our dead from overwhelming corrosion (Nunes, 2003, p. 133).

Memory can be lost at some point, but if there are recorded documents, memorials in a physical space, about the most diverse contents, be they people, events or daily life, it is possible to preserve the testimonies, and thus history, for future generations.

For this type of deposit, there are Public Archives, which are:

Set of documents produced and accumulated by a collective, public or private entity, person or family in the performance of its activities, regardless of the nature of the media. Institution or service whose purpose is the custody, technical processing, conservation and access to documents (Arquivo Nacional, 2005, p. 1).

In addition to the custody, processing and preservation of documents, the Public Archives, as previously pointed out, also aims to provide freedom of access to these documents. An example of this is the Municipal Public Archive of Rio de Contas (APMRC), through which we were able to access documentary records about Rio de Contas society in its most diverse aspects.

During the semi-structured interviews, the teachers who took part in the research were asked to report on the APMRC, if they had ever had access to the documents; if they had ever given documents, memorials or catalogued reports to the Archive or if any of their relatives had done so. Gratitude (2024) shared that she doesn't usually go to the archive, but added that: *"My sisters were active, and one of them was even principal and secretary. So as well as producing, they left a lot of documents in the archive"*.

Another research participant, called Friendship here, reported that she didn't produce or take any documents to the Archive, however, when talking about it, she said: *"I have so many things that belonged to my grandfather, and I think I'm going to take them to the Archives, because my grandfather was one of Professor Santana's first pupils. There are his notes, his letters. I think I'm going to take it"* (Friendship, 2024). Recognizing the importance of sharing with society documents that can be lost or forgotten at home.

When analyzing the testimonies of Gratitude and Friendship, we refer to Halbwachs (2006) when he points out:

In order to evoke their own past, people generally have to resort to the memories of others, and transport themselves to points of reference that exist outside themselves, determined by society. What's more, the functioning of individual memory is not possible without these instruments – words and ideas – which the individual did not invent, but borrowed from their environment (Halbwachs, 2006, p. 72).

The documents found in archives, which portray the daily life of a society, the educational process and the lives of the subjects of certain places, are archived memories that are lent to subjects who did not experience these realities. For Halbwachs (2006), these are borrowed memories, which the subjects do not experience, but rely on what they read or hear from witnesses who were directly involved. Gratitude and Friendship, by sending documents, images, manuscripts and other materials to the Rio de Contas Archives, are helping to ensure that these borrowed memories are perpetuated in Rio de Contas society.

Regarding the importance of the APMRC, Friendship recalls an experience when she worked as a teacher at CIRCEA:

We were even celebrating the city's birthday on August 28th, and then it was corrected. When one of the teachers discovered the correct date, November 27th. This was only possible because of a search in the Archives: "We're celebrating the wrong date, we thought it was August 28th, then I found out that the real date was November 27th" (Friendship, 2024).

The testimony of Friendship brings us back to the concept of polyphony, worked on by Bakhtin (2015), as it manifests itself in the conflict and interaction between collective memory and historical research. The collective voice, represented by social memory, which believed that the date of the city's anniversary would be August 28th, carries a symbolic value, while the research proposes a correction based on documents. This testimony, therefore, not only informs us about the correct data, but also about how history and social memory are constantly negotiated and reinterpreted in the community at different times.

Bakhtin (2015) argues that this multiplicity of voices, with their different bases and interactions, contributes to a deeper and more complex understanding of what is “true” in a social context, reinforcing the idea that meaning is always dialogically constructed.

In addition, according to Friendship’s testimony, we can see the importance of the Public Archives, not just the one in Rio de Contas, but the Archives as a whole, preserving the history of each municipality and cultural heritage, which, for Rodrigues:

It is the set of assets, both tangible and intangible, that are considered to be of collective interest, sufficiently relevant to be perpetuated over time. Heritage reminds us of the past; it is a manifestation, a testimony, an invocation, or rather, a summoning of the past. It therefore has the function of remembering more important events; hence the relationship with the concept of social memory (Rodrigues, 2012, p. 4).

Both the documents found in the APMRC and the testimonies of the citizens of the municipality constitute cultural heritage, expressing the experiences, customs, history and identity of a society.

According to Indolfo (2007), the documents found in archives, whatever they may be, serve to guide administrative actions and are used by society as a whole, proving rights and a way of recording and preserving memories. As an example of the actions outlined in the archived documents, we found documentary records about education in the municipality of Rio de Contas and, through them, it was possible to trace paths for the (re)construction of education in Rio de Contas.

(Re)construction of Rio de Contas’s education through the archives

The municipality of Rio de Contas is made up of various individual memories and social memories, including those present in social groups, subject to oblivion, and those recorded through documentary sources and provided to the APMRC by residents of the municipality.

The (re)construction of social memory and the (re)memorialization of events in Rio de Contas cannot be dissociated from the municipality’s educational process, since

education plays a central role in shaping this society. Many cultural events are intrinsically linked to the school environment, given the direct participation of students and teachers. In this context, when we examine the educational process in Rio de Contas and its relationship with society, we realize that the CIRCEA school has also become a reference. There's always someone to talk to and mention aspects of CIRCEA, whether they're former students, former teachers or even those who didn't experience the school. In addition, we can highlight the grandeur of CIRCEA's physical space, even for those who haven't been there, provoking nostalgia and a sense of memories to be unveiled.

Many citizens of Rio de Contas who did not experience the CIRCEA have borrowed memories, according to Halbwachs (2006), because there is a reference to the CIRCEA in the testimonies of other social groups who lived in that space. When we evoke memories of the school, we are relying on the "memory of others", because these memories "left a deep trace", according to Halbwachs (2006), among the social groups who had the opportunity to study or work at the school.

The trajectory of education in the municipality of Rio de Contas is made up of periods of reference in the state of Bahia and other periods marked by various demands from citizens to the government in order to implement new schools and improve education, as mentioned in the Rio de Contas newspaper, *O Cinzel* (1926):

It is a comfort for us to witness this movement in favor of instruction, which has been so neglected in these backlands, and we hope to God that illiteracy will always be fought with determination and defeated, even if it takes hundreds of battles (*O Cinzel*, Escolas, 1926, ANNO II, n. 19).

The movement among the citizens of Rio de Contas in search of new schools, for a better quality of education, was motivated by discontent with the current reality, which conceived of "instruction" as important for combating illiteracy and for the better development of society. Through the concept of polyphony based on Bakhtin's discourse analysis (2015), the text reveals a discourse in which various voices (educational, religious, resistance) coexist and dialog, creating an understanding of education as a process of social and cultural overcoming. Polyphonic analysis shows how these discourses not only

inform, but also involve the reader in seeing education as a moral and collective battle that deserves constant support.

When carrying out documentary research, it was possible to find evidence in periodicals and newspapers about the representation that Rio de Contas, the former Vila de Rio de Contas, had for other locations in Brazil, around 100 years after the arrival of the colonizers, such as in the article “Visão de Rio de Contas no Passado” (Vision of Rio de Contas in the Past), written by Waldir Freitas Oliveira in the newspaper *A Tarde Municípios* in 1992. The article highlights testimonies from naturalists who visited Rio de Contas between 1817 and 1820, showing an average of 900 inhabitants and its main economic activities, namely gold mining and trade.

Over the years, this reality has changed, for example, there has been an increase in the number of inhabitants which, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in the year 2022, had an average of 13,184 people, covering the seat, districts and villages. In addition, the municipality's economic activities have diversified, such as mini-markets, hotels, ecotourism, among others.

The article in the newspaper *A Tarde Municípios* then highlights Rio de Contas' distinction among the municipalities of Bahia, also due to its “education and opulence”, emphasizing the competence of a Latin teacher (name not revealed in the document). We also saw a comparison between the education of the municipality of Rio de Contas and the other hinterlands, confirming the educational progress of this municipality.

According to the article “Visão de Rio de Contas no Passado” (Vision of Rio de Contas in the Past) (1992), we can see the importance of Rio de Contas among the other municipalities in Bahia's hinterland, in terms of education and the riches found in the region, as mentioned in the article. However, as time went by, education in the municipality experienced setbacks, highlighted in the newspaper *O Cinzel*:

It's a shame that the public institution, in a city that once had secondary schools, is now all run down; however, until recently it maintained its complementary school with regular attendance, in stark contrast to other more important cities, which never had these elementary schools, not only well located and served by modern

furniture, but also regularly attended by a large part of the school population (*O Cinzel*, 1913, n. 6).

The term “secondary education” refers to the educational phase between elementary school and higher education. In 20th century schools, secondary education generally corresponded to the last years of formal education, attended in institutions such as secondary schools or colleges. In 1971, with the new Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), the concept of secondary education was replaced by high school.

According to Halbwachs (2006, p. 42), “collective memory is a construction of the group that individualizes and particularizes it and that manifests itself in practices and traditions”. In the excerpt from the newspaper *O Cinzel*, there is a comparison between the state of education in the city of Rio de Contas and elsewhere. This difference can be seen as a reflection of a collective memory about the value of education in society, which at a certain point shows a decline.

In 1913, the newspaper *O Cinzel* (n. 7) published the location of the schools in the municipality of Rio de Contas: Vila-Velha (2), Curralinho (1), Casa de Telha (1) and Furna (1), making a total of five schools in the region. In the same article, the author points out that “some other schools should be created, and certainly will be, as soon as state finances allow”, in the area around Taboleiro, Mato Grosso, Crystaes and Santo Antônio. However, *O Cinzel* points out that the number of students in these schools was small and attendance insufficient, which directly affected teachers’ morale and their performance. The newspaper highlights this:

[...] which, being an occasion for the teacher’s carelessness, kills his vocation if he had one, and allows him, if the honorable conscience of duty does not support him to deviate from the honest fulfillment of his obligations, forces him to become a non-teacher and to bring into disrepute the instruction that he is the first to dishonor, by the little importance he attaches to it (*O Cinzel*, 1913, n. 7, p. 1).

According to Bakhtin (2015, p. 24), the “plurality of independent and contradictory voices and consciousnesses [...] do not merge into the unity of a single consciousness”.

The excerpt from the newspaper *O Cinzel* highlights this plurality, as there is a contrast of expectations: on the one hand, the idealized image of the teacher as an honorable figure dedicated to fulfilling his duty; on the other, a critical view, which focuses on “carelessness” and abandonment of the vocation, describing the teacher who fails in his mission as someone who “dishonors” the prestige of instruction. These social voices construct a discourse of disappointment and concern about the state of education, denouncing the negative impact of the negligent attitude.

The municipality of Rio de Contas in this period, according to the newspaper *O Cinzel* (1913), separated schools according to gender. Through the newspapers that circulated in society during this period, we noticed some mishaps regarding education in the municipality, both in terms of student attendance and teacher performance. However, despite going through a period of difficulties, education still played an important role in Rio de Contas’ society. In an article entitled “A Escola” (The School), in the newspaper *O Cinzel* (1917, n. 8), we see an exaltation of teachers, the school, education and young people who are compared to “conquerors of knowledge”, corroborated by the respective article:

School is the sanctuary that hides the ambula of our holiest affections, the temple where the clasp of reason that illustrates burns and where the heart is educated to feel and to love. Illustrating the intellect, educating the heart, opening up new horizons for the human spirit – these are the three great objects of the school. The school is a temple, where all our aspirations are summed up in a single ideal of light, when the essence of our thought is God. To cultivate the spirit, to create in the intellect a new world full of excellence, to free the spirit from darkness – such is the evangelizing mission of education. To this end, all that is needed is a mediocre capacity and a gigantic goodwill. The most difficult thing, however, is the moral formation of the youth, on whose arms the supreme destinies of the shattered homeland must necessarily rest (*O Cinzel*, 1917, n. 8, p. 1).

The school was seen as a sanctuary, a place that primarily formed citizens. These aspects of moral formation were focused on religious guidelines, as mentioned in the article, in which there is greater attention to the “cultivation of the spirit”, since, through education, the school space helped to train students for society, to be citizens capable of “deciding the supreme destinies of the shaken homeland” (*O Cinzel*, 1917, n. 8, p. 1). According to Halbwachs (2006, p. 47), “collective memory does not preserve the past, but

reconstructs it based on the needs and values of the present”. The image of the school as a “temple” and “sanctuary” highlights the symbolic and emotional charge that society attaches to this space. This memory is constructed and (re)constructed by the community, which sees education as a sacred space for social transformation.

In the APMRC’s periodicals, we found articles about the school exams that took place in 1917 at both schools (boys’ and girls’). In these articles, there is a record of the students who took the exams and a highlight of those who performed best, as well as an award for the student with the highest mark.

In addition to the school exams, “in one of the rooms of the building where the girls’ school is located, an exhibition of the work done by the pupils during the school year was organized, with many beautiful and capriciously made gifts” (*O Cinzel*, 1917, n. 11). The article also highlights the exhibition:

The exhibition was open to the public and was visited by many families. Dr. José Basilio addressed the students in a patriotic speech, and the President, closing the event as he had done the day before, advised the girls never to abandon their greatest friend – the book (*O Cinzel*, 1917, n. 11).

The expression “patriotic speech” refers to speeches or addresses designed to inspire a feeling of national unity and solidarity among citizens, which, according to the periodicals, especially in the 20th century, was common. Corroborating this, Nóvoa (2019, p. 2) explains that “states assume responsibility for education and impose compulsory schooling, with the aim of fabricating a civic and national identity” from the 19th century onwards. We can see this reality in the schools located in Rio de Contas.

Another fragment to be highlighted in the aforementioned article refers to the speech made by the president of the board of examiners, who sent a message to the students not to neglect the book which, according to him, should occupy a place in their lives like a friend. Reaffirming the responsibility of teachers as motivators for training practices that go beyond the classroom, but are part of daily practices. Regarding the responsibility and role of teachers, Nóvoa (2019) points out:

At the center of the scene are the teachers. They are responsible for school discipline, in the double sense of the word: they teach the subjects, the subjects of the syllabus, in classes given simultaneously to all the students; and they ensure discipline, the rules of behavior and conduct of the students (Nóvoa, 2019, p. 3).

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Schools and teachers were seen as references for the formation of subjects who could exercise their citizenship with discipline and in an ethical manner. For this reason, teaching was seen as rigid. The article “Exames Escolares” (School Exams) continues with highlights from the event:

After the reading of the term of examinations, a vote of praise was given to the worthy professors. The president, after congratulating the pupils and their mentors on the excellent results of the exams, and congratulating the population of this municipality on having their schools staffed by preceptors and substitutes who know how to do their duty, addressed a short speech to the girls, urging them never to forget the teachings they had received in that temple, to be patriots who would always have the sacred image of the Fatherland engraved in their hearts (*O Cinzel*, 1917, n. 11).

We can see that the newspaper article was not only intended to report on what happened during the school exams, but also to reaffirm the importance of highlighting the masters who instructed their students, who are referred to as “pupils” in the article; the students, for their performance and responsibilities towards their education and the municipality; and the citizens, who entered the school environment to attend these events. There is also an appeal from the president of the board of examiners for the students to keep patriotism “in their hearts”, in other words, to keep their duty and love for their homeland in their hearts.

Despite facing some difficulties in the educational field, the municipality of Rio de Contas developed ways to minimize these obstacles. However, in the 1920s to 1950s, according to Medeiros (2016), the municipality had a precarious educational system. There are reports that several citizens from Rio de Contas have sought better qualifications in the municipality of Caetité-BA. According to the newspaper *O Pequeno* (1923), this reality occurred even after a law was passed in 1921 to create school groups.

The article in the newspaper *O Pequeno* (1923, n. 25) describes the lack of schools not only in the city center, but also in the districts of Rio de Contas. It is also emphasized

how the population of these small towns did not pay attention to this reality where they lived, since the lack of schools and the lack of teachers in these places were commonplace.

With a high illiteracy rate and a lack of schools in 1926 and 1927, the demands persisted, indicating difficulties in the educational area. *O Cinzel* (1925, n. 17) published the article “Ainda a Instrução” (Still the Instruction) about requests and the need to build new schools, emphasizing the need to build new schools in the municipality and also highlighting the importance of training students for the development of the municipality and nearby towns. According to Halbwachs (2006, p. 45), “societies need memory institutions to keep the past alive and pass it on, and education becomes the main one of these institutions”. The indignation at illiteracy and the lack of schools in the Rio de Contas region is not just a one-off criticism, but a reaffirmation of the school’s role as guardian of collective memory and national heritage.

Following these appeals, in 1927 construction began on the school group that would benefit the entire population of the municipality. However, there would need to be a commitment from society for this ideal to be achieved, according to *O Cinzel* (1927, n. 34). By looking at the obstacles faced by Rio de Contas society in relation to education, we can reflect that the educational processes from one place to another are different, they are unique and that going through obstacles, difficulties does not mean that there will be no success later on. An example of this is the society of Rio de Contas, which, even in difficult times, has worked hard to transform education in the municipality.

In field research at the APMRC, we identified a gap in the historical data from the 1926 period onwards. During this period, no documents, newspapers or periodicals were found that portrayed the society and education of Rio de Contas. On this subject, De Benedictis (2016), through testimonies and documents, portrayed this suspension of periodicals and newspapers during the period in which the Coluna Prestes passed through Rio de Contas.

There was no publication in the municipality for five months. Another observation refers to the period when the periodicals were definitively suspended in 1927, according to reports given by the APMRC employee in 2023. The documents found after this gap are

organized in a folder containing information about other schools, such as Barão de Macaúbas and Ana Petronilla Trindade Ramos, among others in the region. However, we will stick to the data on the implementation of CIRCEA (1959).

Creation of the Gymnasium and Normal School: origin of CIRCEA

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In the 1950s, there was an improvement in Rio de Contas' education system, with the Dr. Aloísio de Castro Gymnasium and the Dr. José Basílio Justiniano Normal School. According to a document found at the APMRC, entitled "Histórico do Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência – Rio de Contas" (History of the Rio-contense Integrated Center for Education and Assistance – Rio de Contas) (undated document), the first funding for the construction of the school came in 1950 and it was finished in 1954. However, the school "remained closed for five years and was already the target of depredation." According to the document, there is no mention of the reason why the school remained inoperative.

Because of the difficulties faced in the educational environment of Rio de Contas over the years, as we can see from the documents found in the APMRC from the first records, from 1913 to 1954, with the completion of the construction of the school, but without its inauguration, a movement arose in the municipality. This movement was called the "Manifesto Apelo" (Manifesto Appeal), led by the Rio de Contas society, with the aim of mobilizing all of society for a popular assembly to debate the installation of a Gymnasium (Histórico do Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência – Rio de Contas, [s.d.]).

The assembly was held in May 1957 at the Clube Rio-contense to set up the Gymnasium. In order for the Gymnasium to function, there was a need for a "sponsoring organization, and the Clube Rio-contense took on this mission. [...] The Dr. Aloísio de Castro Gymnasium was opened on March 12, 1959, with 81 students enrolled" (Histórico do Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência – Rio de Contas, [s.d.]).

The results of this school began to emerge, as mentioned in a document found at the APMRC ([Ginásio], 1960): “It completely changed the appearance of the city and the prevailing apathy disappeared at the magic touch of a magic wand, which influenced economic life, making it more prosperous and active.” As well as having an influence on education, the school also helped the town’s economy, as students who had previously sought better study conditions elsewhere stayed in the town. In this regard, we found a document in the APMRC commemorating 25 years of CIRCEA’s operation.

The tribute shows the satisfaction with the operation of CIRCEA, highlighting the care and educational quality, as well as the aspects of economic influence for the municipality. According to Candau (2016, p. 32), memory is fundamental to the construction of collective identity, stating that “collective memory contributes to the production of a sense of continuity and belonging”. In the case of the CIRCEA College, the tribute text highlights the “25 years of existence” and the “profound influence” of the institution, which are elements that strengthen the social memory of Rio de Contas. Celebrating its anniversary as a relevant milestone in the life of the community reinforces the school’s role as part of the “collective memory that unites and strengthens local identity” (Candau, 2016, p. 34).

The first principal of the Dr. Aloísio de Castro Gymnasium was Brasília Cardoso Trindade, who ran the school for six years. During this period, she managed to get the Normal Course created, which, in the educational context of the 19th and 20th centuries, was specific training for teachers, also known as magisterium. Regarding the Normal Schools, Nóvoa (2019) highlights:

The creation of normal schools in the mid-19th century reveals the role that teachers played in producing the school model. It is in these specialized teacher training institutions that the professional corps is born and strengthened and which, at the service of the state, promotes popular education (Nóvoa, 2019, p. 3).

This teaching course prepared students to work as elementary school teachers, covering subjects such as pedagogy, educational psychology, teaching methods, among others. The main aim was to provide the skills and knowledge needed to teach in schools.

With the creation of the Normal Course in the same space, two schools began to operate, the Dr. Aloísio de Castro Gymnasium, instructing children and young people with primary and high school education, and the Dr. José Basílio Rocha Normal School, with continued training in teaching and, later (1967), the accounting course was also added (Histórico do Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência – Rio de Contas, [s.d.]).

After the death of Brasília Cardoso Trindade, the Gymnasium's first principal, the school went through two more different administrations and then, in 1967, the administration of the school passed to a religious order called the Joseleitos de Cristo. The club then ceded the space to this religious order, which renovated the school and ran it until 1996, according to CIRCEA's history ([s.d.]).

When conducting the semi-structured interviews, in addition to the aspects relating to the APMRC, there was a block in which the subjects participating in the research were asked to report something they would like to share about their memories, some curiosities that they may not have mentioned during the interview. Participant Gratitude, the daughter of one of the school's principals, recalled a period spent observing her mother and, later, the changes of some of the other principals:

It was my mother who managed to certify the first class to graduate from the school. The first class, she spent almost two months to sign the diplomas for the teaching and confluence of the eighth grade (now the ninth grade). So, after my mother died, the gym became like this: today one person, tomorrow someone else. It was like that, without an exact, firm, balanced direction. A judge stayed for a while, but she was unable to provide assistance. She put other people in, but without any work experience. And it was very... at random, as we call it, right? (Gratitude, 2024).

Gratitude, the subject of the research who experienced the school as a student, as the daughter of a principal, and later as an educator at the then Gymnasium, mentions the difficulties faced with the changes in the school's management. She also mentions that "*the school belonged to the club, and according to the contract, it could only operate for educational purposes and as a society of the Joseleitos de Cristo*" (Gratitude, 2024). In this context, by analyzing Gratitude's testimony through the polyphonic perspective of the

coexistence of different “voices” in discourse, addressed by Bakhtin (2010), we can first identify the “voice” of stability, represented by Gratitude’s mother, who managed the school competently, according to Gratitude. After the death of CIRCEA’s first principal, the “voice” of uncertainty emerged, reinforced by the expression “at random”, revealing a perception of helplessness, and the “voice” of memory, manifested in the value that the community attributed to Gratitude’s mother, as a figure whose dedication was and is part of the school’s legacy.

During the priests’ administration, the schools Dr. Aloísio de Castro Gymnasium and the Dr. José Basílio Justiniano Normal School were renamed Instituto Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência (IRCEA). The new nomenclature was affected by the use of the word “institute”, which was soon changed to “Centro Integrado Rio-contense de Educação e Assistência”, better known as CIRCEA. This change from “institute” to “integrated center” was required by the State Education Department, as there were criteria for an institute to operate.

CIRCEA initially operated with financial aid from the state, but this aid was not enough to cover all the school’s expenses, as is pointed out in the document addressed to the president of the Chamber of Councilors of Rio de Contas (1960):

We wanted to give students free education, relying on the federal funds we had always received, and we would have succeeded if these funds had reached us regularly to pay the civil service and teachers. Unfortunately, however, the President’s savings plan has disappointed us by delaying the receipt of these funds, but on the other hand, it has shown us a new way forward. We are forced to charge students an annual fee. It’s very modest, but we know that many students can’t meet it. Unfortunately, we hope and trust, however, that this won’t stop them from attending the Gymnasium, because other resources are beckoning us ([Ginásio], 1960).

The textual fragment demonstrates the efforts of the school’s administration to make it democratic and easily accessible to the population of Rio de Contas. The lack of state funding for this space gave rise to the previous document, which was addressed to the president of the Chamber of Councilors of Rio de Contas, with the aim of requesting investment to maintain the school and make scholarships available to the society. Between

1960 and 1992, it was possible to offer public education to the entire society of Rio de Contas and neighboring municipalities, as this school began to receive more attention from the state and the local authority, and the teachers who worked there began to be recruited by the state.

During its time in operation, CIRCEA has experienced various difficulties, mainly budgetary. We identified several tenders for school supplies, cleaning products and funding for new scholarships at the APMRC. In addition to these budgetary difficulties, Gratitude reports on the administration of the priests between 1967 and 1996, noting that “*they were priests, but they had no training in education, they couldn’t be directors*” (Gratitude, 2024). Because they had no training to act as educators, Gratitude mentions the priests’ difficulty in dealing with certain situations that required knowledge of the job. After 1996, CIRCEA went through four administrations.

CIRCEA began operating in 1959 and closed in 2007. According to Friendship, the reasons for its closure ranged from a lack of funding from the state to problems related to the space itself and conflicts between the religious order and the state government. A high school was inaugurated in its own space in Rio de Contas, for which the Bahia state government was responsible, and another space was rented to cater for elementary education, which became the responsibility of the municipality.

The CIRCEA space was deactivated in 2007 and again the target of depredation. Since 2019, this space has been occupied by CIRCEA Barão de Macaúbas. However, even though it was deactivated, it was and is part of Rio de Contas’ educational legacy and remains present in social memory.

Conclusions

By analyzing social memory and the documents available at the APMRC, this study has provided us with an understanding of the educational system in Rio de Contas-Bahia. The first documents found in the APMRC referring to education in the municipality date back to 1913. To (re)construct the educational process in the municipality of Rio de Contas

is also to relate it to society, since schools are directly linked to the social and economic development of the municipality.

We can see the importance of the APMRC for the municipality of Rio de Contas, since it made it possible to carry out a survey of the municipality's educational process, in addition to these documents being open to the public for consultation. In this respect, by opening up the Archives to society, historical aspects, testimonial records, the history of the municipality itself and its uniqueness are passed down through generations, so that they are not lost over time. This scenario reflects how concerned Rio de Contas society is about preserving social history, donating documents to the APMRC for fear of them being lost.

The educational process in Rio de Contas has gone through ups and downs. With the field research, it was possible to get an idea of how society viewed the school environment. For Rio de Contas society, education was seen as something sacred, with a religious focus and for the exaltation of the homeland, with school subjects and activities geared towards this.

In the face of the difficulties faced over the years, there has always been a concern for education among the citizens of Rio de Contas, who have often demanded that the government provide schools, materials and special attention for the children who lived in and around the municipality. The society of Rio de Contas was characterized by a municipality whose education was a pillar of society, even though it faced difficulties.

In 1959, with the opening of the school later known as CIRCEA, we were able to see, after analyzing documents, its importance for education in the municipality. Since its beginnings, this school catered for both sexes and, with the creation of teaching and accountancy courses, it provided the population with the conditions to live in Rio de Contas.

The school not only served the municipality of Rio de Contas, but also neighboring municipalities, gaining visibility for its educational quality and becoming a highlight in the region and in the state of Bahia. According to the documents, CIRCEA was committed to a strict education, so that its students would love their country and become active citizens in society, with ethics and responsibility.

Even though the school has been closed down, the CIRCEA is still present in the social memory of the municipality of Rio de Contas, indicating that the CIRCEA was/is more than an educational site, it was/is a place where subjects lived through experiences that shaped/shape society.

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