



## Sister Maria Montenegro as school manager: from elitist schooling to the education of the poor in Ceará (1969-1987)

Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho<sup>1</sup>, Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho<sup>1\*</sup> and Ana Michele da Silva Lima<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Estadual do Ceará, Av. Dr. Silas Munguba, 1700, 60714-903, Fortaleza, Ceará, Brasil. <sup>2</sup>Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Ceará, Aracati, Ceará, Brasil. \*Author for correspondence. E-mail: lia\_fialho@yahoo.com.br

**ABSTRACT.** The object of this study is the biography of Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro, she became known socially as Sister Maria Montenegro, a nun who dedicated more than 60 years of her life to education, exercising the functions of teacher, educational counselor and director. The objective was to understand the professional performance of Sister Maria Montenegro as a manager in the educational scenario of the second half of the 20th century, in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará (1969-1987). The study is supported theoretically on Cultural History, by developing a research of the biographical type that used Oral History as a methodology. The thematic interviews, conducted with five collaborators, were recorded, transcribed, textualized and validated, then interwoven with documentary sources - books, newspapers, biographical record, curriculum vitae. The results showed that Sister Maria finished primary education in a school group in the city of Quixadá, central hinterland of Ceará and then moved to the capital to take the normal course at Colégio Justiniano de Serpa. At the age of 19, she entered the religious life, becoming a Sister of Charity and dedicating herself to instructing young women of the society's elite, as a teacher and director of the Colégio da Immaculada Conceição. He used his prestige and social recognition to then dedicate himself to the education of the poor in public schools Cristo Redentor and Patronato Sagrada Família, located on the outskirts of the capital. Sister Maria Montenegro won prizes and honors, however, her memory did not win due preservation, even though it crosses the history of Ceará's education, allowing a better understanding of it.

**Keywords:** history of education; biography; Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro; nun; education of women.

## Irmã Maria Montenegro como gestora escolar: da escolarização elitista à educação dos pobres no Ceará (1969-1987)

**RESUMO.** O objeto deste estudo é a biografia de Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro, conhecida socialmente como Irmã Maria Montenegro, uma freira que dedicou mais de 60 anos de sua vida à educação, exercendo as funções de professora, orientadora educacional e diretora. Objetivou-se compreender a atuação profissional de Irmã Maria Montenegro como gestora no cenário educativo da segunda metade do século XX na cidade de Fortaleza, Ceará (1969-1987). O estudo ampara-se teoricamente na História Cultural ao desenvolver uma pesquisa do tipo biográfica que utilizou a História Oral como metodologia. As entrevistas temáticas, realizadas com cinco colaboradoras, foram gravadas, transcritas, textualizadas e validadas, sendo, em seguida, entrecruzadas com fontes documentais - livros, jornais, registro biográfico e *curriculum vitae*. Os resultados apontaram que Irmã Maria finalizou a Educação Primária em um grupo escolar da cidade de Quixadá, sertão central do Ceará, e, em seguida, mudou-se para a capital cearense a fim de fazer o curso normal no Colégio Justiniano de Serpa. Aos 19 anos, ingressou na vida religiosa, tornando-se Irmã de Caridade e dedicando-se a instruir moças da elite da sociedade, como professora e diretora do Colégio da Imaculada Conceição. Utilizou seu prestígio e reconhecimento social para dedicar-se à educação dos pobres nos colégios públicos Cristo Redentor e Patronato Sagrada Família, localizados na periferia da capital. Irmã Maria Montenegro ganhou prêmios e homenagens, no entanto, sua memória não ganhou a devida preservação, ainda que entrecruze a História da Educação do Ceará, permitindo melhor compreendê-la.

**Palavras-chave:** história da educação; biografia; Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro; freira; educação de mulheres.

## Madre María Montenegro como directiva escolar: de la escolarización elitista a la educación de los pobres en el Ceará (1969-1987)

**RESUMEN.** Este estudio tiene como objeto la biografía de María Lucía de Sousa Montenegro, conocida socialmente como Madre María Montenegro, religiosa que dedico más de 60 años de su vida a la educación,

ejerciendo las funciones de profesora, orientadora educacional y directora. Se objetivó comprender la actuación profesional de Madre María Montenegro como directiva en el escenario escolar de la segunda mitad del siglo XX en la ciudad de Fortaleza, Ceará (1969-1987). La investigación se basa teóricamente en la Historia Cultural al desarrollar un estudio de tipo biográfico que recurrió a la Historia Oral como metodología. Se grabaron, transcribieron, textualizaron y validaron las entrevistas temáticas, realizadas con cinco colaboradoras, informaciones que fueron entrecruzadas con las fuentes documentales – libros, periódicos, registro biográfico y *curriculum vitae*. Los resultados señalaron que Madre María concluyó la Educación Primaria en un grupo escolar de la ciudad de Quixadá, ubicada en la región central de Ceará, y posteriormente se trasladó para la capital cearense con el objetivo de ingresar en el curso normal en el Colegio Justiniano de Serpa. A los 19 años, ingresó en la vida religiosa, convirtiéndose en Hermana de Caridad y dedicándose a instruir jóvenes mujeres de la élite de la sociedad, como profesora y directora del Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción. Utilizó su prestigio y reconocimiento social para dedicarse a la educación de los pobres en los colegios públicos Cristo Redentor y Patronato Sagrada Familia, ubicados en la periferia de la capital cearense. Madre María Montenegro conquistó galardones y homenajes, sin embargo, su memoria no tuvo la debida preservación, pese al hecho de entrecruzar la historia de la educación de Ceará, permitiendo una mejor comprensión sobre su historia.

**Palabras clave:** historia de la educación; biografía; Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro; madre; educación de mujeres.

Received on August 24, 2020.  
Accepted on February 5, 2021.

## Introduction

The present work originates from dissertation research<sup>1</sup> that elaborated Sister Maria Montenegro's biographical narrative, from here on referred to as Sister Maria, with emphasis on her pedagogical work in primary education, especially in school management, which helped the educational training of countless students in Fortaleza, Ceará. The study is part of the field of History of Education, more specifically in the history of the present (Avelar, 2007; Ferreira, 2002), as it deals with an education professional who performed important pedagogical work.

It's the life story of a nun who dedicated herself to education for more than 60 years, acting as a teacher, educational advisor and administrator in renowned institutions in Ceará, such as Colégio da Imaculada Conceição (CIC) and Patronato Sagrada Família, and in other states, such as: Instituto Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora, in Cametá, Pará; Patronato, in Maceió, Alagoas; and Colégio Medalha Milagrosa, in Salvador, Bahia. Analyzed in the microsocal scope, her trajectory highlights relevant nuances that have historically strained the macrosocial educational field, such as the duality in the educational system, the feminization of teaching and teacher training.

Irmã Maria's biography, which was hermeneutically written with theoretical support in Cultural History (Burke, 2008) and methodological in Oral History (Alberti, 2013), wasn't intended to recount only her life history, but to problematize in a historical perspective the aspects that interconnect it with the collective, when considering cultural, social, political and pedagogical dimensions, as it understood that the individual is inseparable from its context (Dosse, 2009). Thus, by focusing on the pedagogical work developed by Sister Maria, especially as an administrator, it's possible to broaden the understanding women's importance in the training processes of a generation of teachers in public and private schools in Brazil, in general, and in Ceará, specifically.

By articulating History and Education, which are specific and coexisting areas (Vasconcelos, Fialho, & Machado, 2018), Sister Maria's biography gains relevance as it allows for reflection on the History of Education, making it possible to broaden the understanding and give new meaning, combined with specifics of her life, the specificities and peculiarities of education in Fortaleza in the national context from 1969 to 1987. The time frame was delimited considering the period in which she worked in school administration, considering that in 1969 she took over the CIC's administration, leaving this function in 1987, at Patronato Sagrada Família, the last school she worked for.

Sister Maria's professional trajectory was characterized not only by religiosity but also by her educational contribution as an instructor, not only in elite schools but also in the poorest communities on the outskirts of Fortaleza. Her performance at the CIC as a teacher and head mistress stands out, where she consolidated her career in the educational field working with the local elite; at Colégio Cristo Redentor, working with a

<sup>1</sup> Dissertation entitled 'Sister Maria Montenegro: educational activities undertaken in Fortaleza- Ceará (1945-1987)', defended in the Graduate Program in Education at the State University of Ceará, on September 3, 2018.

poor community on the outskirts of Fortaleza; and in the Patronato Sagrada Família, in which she served as director from 1987 to the year of her death, in 2008.

Sister Maria has not been a well-known personality in Fortaleza, despite having been honored with the name of a school and having won awards, which gave her visibility. However, her life wasn't chosen as the object of this study as an example, since, contrary to the pursuit of affable lives, the biography of this educator makes it possible to know her educational practices, providing a descriptive and reflective outline of the socio-historical educational context of the second half of the 20th century, whose readings are marked by aspects that provided advances and setbacks (Fialho & Braga Júnior, 2015). Sister Maria's life, just as other women's lives, anonymous or public, are relevant to History. After all, not only the stories of famous powerful men matter, since the biographical record isn't a privilege restricted to a few (Cavalcante, 2008).

A question motivated this study: how did the education and professional performance of the educator Sister Maria happen so that she, as an administrator, gained visibility in the socio-historical educational context of Fortaleza in the second half of the 20th century? This scientific biographical research was conducted to answer this research problem and understand the professional performance of Sister Maria as an administrator in the educational scenario of the second half of the 20th century in the city of Fortaleza (1969-1987).

It was assumed that Sister Maria achieved social prominence not only for her professional training and ability to manage teaching institutions but especially for having had differentiated training opportunities and for having worked in an elite school. The educational access obtained by the educator guided her to a praxis based on reflective and dialogical teaching, which gave her visibility in the most traditional and upper-class educational institutions, which later allowed her to use her political influence and cultural capital to commit to the schooling of the economically disadvantaged, helping to minimize inequalities in the educational scenario in the second half of the 20th century in Ceará.

Writing the biography of an educator and religious woman who became a reference is relevant not only for the possibility of making a record and preserving individual history and memory but also for shedding light on the History of Education and starting a reflection on the mechanisms of resistance to historical positivism and the exclusion of female figures in the historiography (Perrot, 2001). Thus, this work detaches itself from a Eurocentric, heroic, sexist, and/or patriarchal narrative, which for centuries caused the female invisibility; actually, contrary to this discourse, women are allowed to tell the story of another woman and value this orality in a narrative organized into the following sections: 1) 'Introduction', which presents the research theme, its temporal and spatial delimitation, the object of study, the problem, the objectives, the presupposition and the social relevance of the study; 2) 'Theoretical-methodological aspects', which places the research in the field of Cultural History and describes how the methodology of Oral History was used and the intersection with other sources; 3) 'Results and discussion: Sister Maria's life', which elaborates and discusses Sister Maria's biographical narrative; and 4) 'Final considerations', which takes up the problem and the main objective of the research to answer them succinctly, mentioning the main findings of the research and its limitations.

## Theoretical-methodological aspects

With theoretical support in Cultural History (Burke, 2008) and methodological support in Oral History (Alberti, 2013), biographical research was conducted (Dosse, 2009), which made it feasible to give visibility to the memories and experiences of Sister Maria, an educator who actively participated in the historic-educational process in Fortaleza, but whose life was outside official historiography (Fialho, 2012), meaning that history recorded in research and academic writings or official documents.

The expression 'Cultural History' took on a new meaning in the late 1980s, when this historiographic approach made it possible to broaden the understanding of historical sources, considering not only official documents but everything that can tell the story of human beings over time – diaries, photos, oral narratives, letters, reports, etc. (Burke, 2008). Thus, biographical studies lose the characteristic of portraying examples to be followed, as was customary in hagiographies and biographies of heroes and ecclesiastics (Levi, 1992), and begin to value the lives of regular people, such as women, workers, prisoners, among other subjects who participated in the history and were silenced (Perrot, 2001).

Contrary to the official positivist history (Pollak, 1989), this research considered the incorporation of “[...] new problems, new approaches, new objects, new names, new institutions” (Reis, 2000, p. 129) to make it

possible to deal with the stories of less prestigious social segments, such as female teachers. Sister Maria's biographical study made possible the investigation of her educational practices as an administrator overlapping with sociocultural issues, using written and oral testimonies, books, reports, etc.

By focusing the analysis on a single individual, it was possible to consider subjectivities and nuances that cannot be apprehended in macro-historical studies (Loriga, 2011). According to Burke (2008), the use of Micro-History, from the perspective of Cultural History, values memory, permeated by recollections and forgetfulness, which can be apprehended through Oral History's methodology. The reports in Oral History of people who lived with Sister Maria provided important pointers about the educational activity undertaken by her, as well as helped in the location of documental sources, so it was the main substrate of analysis.

According to Bosi (2003, p. 53), memories are constituted by the reconstruction of the past through the present, “[...] a work about time, but about the time lived, connoted by the culture and the individual”. Zumthor (1997, p. 15) even asserts that “[...] memory recovers the experience [...]”, that is, it's resorted to to keep the past close to the present through the act of remembering. In this sense, the biography, in this research, would be the result of the analysis of that moment of bringing up memories and/or forgetfulness for the narrative of a life in the inseparable interface with the context in which it is inserted (Silva, 2012).

In the biographical genre, Oral History proved to be adequate for the research, especially because, only through this methodology, it was possible to locate other sources, not physically preserved in public places or digitized, nor previously used in scientific research. It is also important to highlight that the research began with the search for productions in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), in the Theses and Dissertations Catalog of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) and on the Capes Journal Portal, using the descriptors 'Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro' and 'Irmã Maria Montenegro', as the first descriptor is the biography's baptismal name and the second is the name she received after the novitiate when she became a nun. With these descriptors, no work was found referring to her.

Then, a Google search was used, which located a note about the death of Sister Maria in a blog (Melo, 2008) and some news about Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro, the school where she was a pedagogical advisor and was celebrated. Given the insufficiency of available sources for the elaboration of a biographical narrative, searching for oral sources was necessary and of great importance, and thus a research project in Oral History was developed that was part of the study entitled 'Education and educators' ) of the 20th century Ceará: practices, readings and representations', approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) under the number 2.585.705/2018.

When the postal code search was authorized, a mapping of possible sources was carried out, namely: relatives and co-workers still alive and ex-students. Below is the list of oral sources located in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Oral sources.

Oral sources				
Interviewee	Relationship with the Sister Maria	Interview date	Interview duration	Interview location
Laís Montenegro	Sister	15/03/2018	1h30min	Residencial da Terceira Idade Flor de Lótus (retirement home)
Aíla Maria Leite	Friend and coworker	06/03/2018	50min	At her home
Rita de Cássia Vasconcelos (Sister Rita)	Former student of Colégio da Imaculada Conceição and former director of the institution	14/03/2018	25min	Colégio da Imaculada Conceição
Bernadete Alcântara Correia	Former student at Colégio da Imaculada Conceição and co-worker	22/02/2018	1h10min	At her home
Rita Maria Machado	Student and co-worker, who honored Sister Maria with the name of her school	09/04/2018	1h30min	Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro

Source: Authors' own (2018).

Table 1 allows better visualization and understanding for the identification of the interviewees, as well as the relationship they had with the subject, the dates on which the interviews took place, the duration, and the place where they were carried out. In all cases, the date, places, and times for the interviews about Sister

Maria were chosen by the participants. It's noteworthy that, before the beginning of the recordings, all signed an Informed Consent Form, which explained the purpose of the research, the voluntary participation, the possible contributions and research risks, the non-confidence of identities, as well as the possibility of cancellation at any time.

Documentary sources were also sought in several places: in the Public Archives of the State of Ceará, where it was possible to locate the news report of when Sister Maria became Colégio da Imaculada Conceição's headmistress in 1969; at the Governador Menezes Pimentel Public Library, news of the 'Mulher Luz' award ceremony were found<sup>2</sup> and the invitation to her requiem Mass; at the Instituto do Ceará, the book *Colégio da Imaculada Conceição: from Genesis to Revelation* was found; the Colégio da Imaculada Conceição's inventory was deactivated, so it wasn't possible to access any records or documentation; Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro had a recording on Sister Maria's life and family history entitled *Sister Maria: yesterday, today and forever*; at Colégio Cristo Redentor and Patronato Sagrada Família, no documentation was found, as these schools did not even have a collection.

The oral and documental sources described in Tables 1 and 2 allowed a greater understanding of Sister Maria's life. However, although her educational background and the beginning of her professional life are contextualized in this work, the focus of analysis is the role of the educator in school management in Fortaleza, so the emphasis was given to the period from 1969 to 1987 when she served as a school principal in this city.

**Table 2.** Documental sources.

Documental sources	Archive
Book chapter: "Educadora Irmã Maria Montenegro (1923-2008): mulher luz"	Author's personal collection. Chapter published in the book: <i>História, literatura e educação</i>
Book: Colégio da Imaculada Conceição: do Gênese ao Apocalipse	Instituto do Ceará
Report about the award "Mulher Luz"	Newspaper O Povo e Diário do Nordeste – Biblioteca Pública Governador Menezes Pimentel
Curriculum vitae	Aíla Leite's personal collection
New report: 'Imaculada has a new headmistress'	Newspaper O Povo (11/01/1969) – Arquivo Público do Estado do Ceará
Biographical record in honor of Sister Maria titled 'Irmã Maria: ontem, hoje e sempre'	Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro's collection

Source: Author's own (2018).

## Results and discussion: Sister Maria's life in narration

Although the time frame is from 1969 to 1987, it's important to know, even if superficially, the educator's previous trajectory, which made her unique training possible. Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro, later Sister Maria Montenegro, was born in Quixadá, in Ceará's sertão. She was the second daughter of Plutarco de Moura Montenegro and Maria Stella de Sousa. Her parents, a dentist from Paraíba and a teacher from Ceará, had 11 children, two of whom died as children. Her school education began at the age of 7 at the Grupo Escolar de Quixadá, where she learned her first lessons and remained until she was almost ten years old when the family moved to Fortaleza, due to the drought that hit the state in 1932, in search of better living conditions in the capital of Ceará.

Starting school at age 7 was standard practice when there wasn't institutionalized early childhood education (Kuhlmann Junior, 2000). However, achieving education beyond primary education in Ceará's countryside wasn't easy (Farias, 2012). The drought of 1932 forced many people from Ceará to leave the countryside, and it also enabled Sister Maria to study in Fortaleza, Ceará's capital, where the educational structure, although precarious, offered much better conditions than in the sertão (Almeida, 2009). During this period, the illiteracy rate was very high (Pinto, Brant, Sampaio, & Pascom, 2000), since, in the 1920s, 65% of people aged 15 and over were illiterate, a percentage that reduced to 56, 1% in the 1940s.

In the capital, Sister Maria began studying at the prestigious Escola Normal Justiniano de Serpa, in 1934, when that institution was still called Escola Normal Pedro II. In 1941, at the age of 18, she completed the regular course. Laís Montenegro (2018), her sister, told how Sister Maria managed to enroll there:

<sup>2</sup> Award given in celebration of International Women's Day in which only five women were contemplated in an event held at the then Caesar Park Hotel, now the Gran Marquise Hotel, located on Avenida Beira Mar, in Fortaleza, on March 12, 2001.

All the teachers were very qualified and it was very difficult to get a placement. So how did she do it? My mother studied there [...] she was the first in her class. [...] So, when the mother asked Teacher João Hipólito for Sister Maria to come in, he said: 'Your daughter will be admitted right away', because she needed a 'card' [...].

After acquiring her diploma, Sister Maria declared to her parents that she wanted to be a Sister of Charity linked to the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul – today Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul – the first female Catholic congregation in Ceará (Nóbrega-Therrien et al., 2012). At the age of 19, in 1943, she entered the CIC to be a postulant and soon traveled to Matoso, Rio de Janeiro, for her novitiate and became a Sister of Charity.

During this period, Ceará is still systematizing its teaching process, as several reforms took place in the country (Saviani, 2008). From 1942 onwards, Brazil underwent several changes in the educational sector, as a result of the Gustavo Capanema Reform, then Minister of Education and Public Health, which implemented the so-called Organic Laws of Education: Industrial Education, Secondary Education, Commercial Education and, above all, Primary school. However, due to the political shutdown during the dictatorial political regime, educational debates were silenced, characterized by a reduced circulation of ideas (Shiroma, Moraes, & Evangelista, 2011).

According to Sister Maria's curriculum, upon returning to Fortaleza, she remained at the CIC for more than ten years as a teacher, including a course in the Faculty of Neo-Latin Letters at the Catholic Faculty of Philosophy of Ceará, graduating in 1951, at 28 years old. On January 10, 1956, at age 32, Sister Maria was appointed to serve in the city of Cametá, Pará, in the position of the mother superior.

Sister Maria began her first experience in educational administration between 1956 and 1962, as principal of the Instituto Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora, in Cametá. Then, she moved to Maceió, Alagoas, returning to work as a teacher, this time at Colégio Patronato, where she stayed for only one year, as she joined a postgraduate course in Educational Guidance. After completing this course, the educator assumed Colégio Medalha Milagrosa's management, in Salvador, Bahia, also in that city, Sister Maria worked in higher education, in 1966, at the Catholic University of Salvador, teaching the subject of Psychology evolutionary. In 1967, Sister went to Paris to attend training at the Catholic Institute, returning to Fortaleza shortly thereafter.

Sister Maria's formative trajectory, briefly told here, allows us to perceive that she had different opportunities compared to most women from Ceará, who wouldn't even read or write, which makes it possible to better understand the period under analysis (1969-1987).

The dedication with which she took on each of her professional activities and her charisma made Sister Maria respected wherever she went, which is why she was invited to return to the institution where she had started her work as a teacher, the CIC, amid an institutional crisis, to assume the administration of the prestigious school, a reference in women's education in Fortaleza (Girão, 1999), in the year of 1969, the time frame that starts in this research (1969-1987). It should be noted that, as the objective was to understand the professional performance of Sister Maria as a manager in the educational scenario of the second half of the 20th century, in the capital of Ceará, the analytical emphasis falls on the 1970s and 1980s.

The year 1969 marked the beginning of educational reforms proposed by the military regime, such as the University Reform Law (Law nº 5.540, 1968), which only came into force in 1969. During this period, changes were observed in the curriculum Basic Education, such as the inclusion of the subject Moral and Civic Education and the guidelines to be taught in the Social and Political Organization of Brazil (SPOB), which exalted the nationalism characteristic of the military regime (Melo, 2006). These subjects were mandatory, as well as Physical Education, Art Education, Health and Religion Programs, etc. (Lima, 2006).

During this period, illiteracy in Brazil, which reached 40% of the population, was one of the great challenges to be overcome, and the Brazilian Literacy Movement (Mobral) (1968-1978) wasn't effective enough (Pinto et al., 2000) to mitigate it. Concerning Ceará, education didn't improve due to the lack of structure and investments both in the countryside and in the capital (Lima, 2006). Given the state's ineffectiveness in the educational field, the CIC continued to be an alternative for the education of young women from Fortaleza who could afford to pay for their studies.

Practically all of Irmã Maria's management activities in Ceará were during the dictatorship (1964 to 1985), a period that marked a new educational structure in Brazil with political changes in intervention in education to satisfy expectations and economic proposals; conventional education gained a technicist tone, with a professionalizing character (Saviani, 2008). It's important to know this political and economic context because it interfered in Sister Maria's work. She even made adaptations to the CIC because of these changes to meet the wishes of the local elite.

Due to the authoritarian civil-military regime, part of the Catholic Church appropriated the liberation theology to develop a more hands-on role in political and social movements, however, it wasn't possible to verify any ideological alignment of Sister Maria with this idea. This probably stems from the fact that she was working in an elite school, where the families of the students were economically privileged and were satisfied with the fact that their daughters were in a select group of girls with access to prestigious CIC education. So, questioning the political regime was not a well-liked attitude for a nun, on the contrary, it was necessary to adapt to national determinations without problematizing the national situation, as the students shouldn't get involved in politics, a subject reserved for men, but rather to be prepared to secure a good marriage.

Sister Maria was the eighth mother superior<sup>3</sup> of CIC and she was the one who spent more time in the position compared to the other who took over the principal office in the institution. Between 1969 and 1976, Sister Maria left a mark not only on the history of the educational institution but also on the city of Fortaleza, leading to several changes in the general framework of the CIC during the period of the military dictatorship. The interventions idealized by Sister Maria focused on the administrative sphere, as she undertook structural changes, reforming the school structure, those changes went from school uniforms to school subjects, intending to modernize the school, which had lost students to large private institutions that emerged in the educational market (Soares, 1998).

As the educational context was "[...] related to repression, privatization of education, the institutionalization of professional education [...], demobilization of teaching through complex and contradictory educational legislation and pedagogical technicism" (Jacomeli, 2010, p. 77), Sister Maria adapted CIC's operation to meet this new marketing perspective. After all, as Saviani (2008) points out, along with this process, there was a preference for the private education network at all educational levels.

To implement this modernization, Sister Maria seemed like a good name, as she had already studied new pedagogical proposals in her various formations, as well as in the courses for the renovation of schools because of the reforms in Rio de Janeiro (1971) and the update of basic education in Brasilia (1972). It is worth mentioning that it has always been attentive to the implementation of Law No. 4,024 (1961), which reformed Higher Education, establishing its organization and functioning norms, and Law No. 5.692 (1971), known as Reform of Basic Education.

Under Sister Maria's administration, CIC implemented Orientation and Supervision courses and professional training courses, since the latter had gained ground since the execution of decree-laws in the Capanema Reform in the 1940s and even more important after Law no. 5692 (1971). In this way, the CIC asserted the educational dualism, in which the "[...] more favored populations sought secondary and higher education for their training, and workers were left with primary and professional schools for a fast preparation for the labor market" (Shiroma et al., 2011, p. 24). In the case of the CIC, the children of the elite were given primary and secondary education, and for the less well-off, the primary and vocational courses.

All the changes were adopted by Sister Maria's decision, in centralized management, in which she convinced the other professionals to endorse her decisions and make efforts to follow her determinations without questioning them. After all, there was no concept of democratic management and the fact that the sister shared her decisions and the ability to involve CIC's educational body was already considered an advance in terms of participation. Especially because the nun who preceded her in the management was even more centralizing, harsh, and authoritarian.

Sister Maria's administration implemented: the Experimental School, dedicated to the education of the poor, as well as internships for the elite students in the basic regular course; opening of professional courses – Nursing Assistant, Architectural Design, Business Administration and Teaching; and the Supervisory and Guidance Systems. About this, Sister Rita Vasconcelos (2018) reported the following:

She had a great influence at that time [...]. First, she admitted men; second, she implemented several professional courses. I remember there was Nursing Assistant, Accounting, there was Teaching, and she also created an application school. The school was for the poor at night, and the pedagogical students did their internships there. [...] She created this school to provide education to maids, for people to study in the evenings.

The administrative changes implemented were connected to the national market's new political and economic requirements. For the elite students, the CIC offered elementary and high school focused on training educated girls to be gifted wives and able to work 'in the extension of the home' (Almeida, 1998;

<sup>3</sup> 1st mother superior: Sister Bazet (1865-1882); 2nd mother superior: Sister Gagné (1882-1917); 3rd mother superior: Sister Henriot – (1918-1930); 4th mother superior: Sister Mahieu (1931-1935); 5th mother superior: Sister Simas (1936-1953); 6th mother superior: Sister Lima (1953-1966); 7th mother superior: Sister Cola (1966-1968). Source: Colégio da Imaculada Conceição.

Mendes, Fialho, & Machado, 2019), as teachers or in careers where female workers were socially accepted. For the disadvantaged, there was evening school for adult literacy and professional training, using different wards and at different schedules (Freitas & Biccias, 2009). Rita Landim (2018), a former student, explained: “[...] in my time we didn’t have many options, the students took a specialization course when they reached high school. You choose Nursing, Education or Accounting”; this was the reality of the elite students, as the poor were left with early initiation into work in low-skilled positions, such as the job of a maid.

In addition to changes in the structural and functional scope, Sister Maria also innovated in the pedagogical field: she implemented mixed education in an institution historically aimed at women and began to train teachers for more open and dialogic practice with students, including bringing parents closer to school. Regarding the mixed school, Sister Rita Vasconcelos (2018) reported that the first male student – Arturo Celestino Rodriguez – was enrolled in 1974. However, the book *Colégio da Imaculada Conceição: from Genesis to the Apocalypse* records that the school became mixed in 1976. Despite this imprecision in the dates, it was under the management of Sister Maria (1969-1976) that this change occurred, slowly and gradually, as the CIC was recognized in the city as an institution dedicated to female education. Concerning the modernization of pedagogical practices, Sister Maria invested in training that articulated theory and practice and valued dialogue and a closer relationship between teachers, students, families, and the school community.

In the experimental school, the students who were in the 1st year were responsible for the classes from Kindergarten (early childhood education) to 4th grade (5th year); those who were in the 2nd pedagogical year were given tasks such as secretarial bureaucratic activities, extra-class activities teaching crafts, library, recreation, and daily duty; and those in the 3rd year went through the experience of directing, teaching, and planning the course. According to Bernadete Correia (2018), the little school (School of application), which assisted the fishermen’s children who lived nearby, had a double function: to contribute to the education of the poor and to improve the future teachers’ pedagogical training. She added: “Sister Maria was an administrator who was always one step ahead. She was very smart. All this was only possible with her guidance, resolution, and educational vision” (Correia, 2018).

Sister Maria won over the students for being open to dialogue and pleased their parents by bringing them close to the school, giving individual assistance to the families in their educational guidelines. She was recognized as a good educator, this notion was disseminated by the school community, both in the homes of the Ceará elites and in the suburbs, which made her gain social prestige. In this way, she became, in 1974, the president of the Association of Educational Advisors of Fortaleza.

At the height of her educational career, however, she decided to take on a new challenge: to dedicate herself exclusively to educating the poor. At that time, she left the CIC’s administration and took over, in 1977, the management of Colégio Cristo Redentor, in the Pirambu neighborhood, an underprivileged community in the periphery that was marked by high levels of violence and lack of basic public services (Cavalcante, 2001). Her decision was, once again, in line with the socio-political context, a scenario in which the Catholic Church started to help the poorest and act more actively with the more disadvantaged communities (Nunes, 2001). As for the experience in Pirambu, Rita Landim (2018) says:

When she chose to work at the school in Pirambu, she left the community with two other nuns, so the three of them went to live in a little house there in Pirambu, among the poor. She went to work at Colégio Cristo Redentor. The school became the best public school at the time.

Sister Maria remained there until 1987. During her tenure at Colégio Cristo Redentor, she used all her experience to train teachers for a more dialogic and contextualized performance, bringing the community closer to the school and making the school a reference in public education. Sister Maria was also appointed coordinator of religious education in public schools in the state of Ceará, in an agreement made between Cardinal Dom Aluísio Lorscheider and the state governor. However, with total detachment, after structuring the Colégio Cristo Redentor and leaving this legacy to the community, she set out on a new venture, this time in the Antônio Bezerra neighborhood, on the other outskirts of Fortaleza. According to Rita Landim (2018): “She had no attachment to anything. It was like that, with the same dedication that she had at Colégio da Imaculada, she had at Cristo Redentor, and she had at this little school at Antônio Bezerra”.

Sister Maria then took over the Patronato Sagrada Família school, where she ended her role in school management and, consecutively, the time frame of this research. Aíla Leite (2018), her co-worker at the Patronato, gave the following report about Sister Maria’s management:



When I got there, the school was just for girls (there were 87 students at that time), from Kindergarten to 4th grade: all in skirts [laughs], but Sister Maria was the one who changed that. She always had a very fresh vision. When ideas came, and she executed them. The following year, she already implemented mixed education. We had a lot of affinities. She was very demanding, super strict in punctuality, discipline, in everything. Another educator like her doesn't exist.

According to the report by Aíla Leite (2018), Sister Maria, with a firm and demanding posture, set an example of great leadership, on how to be a committed, responsible, professional, with good social relationships and, at the same time, to gain the respect of peers – students, co-workers, and the school community. Aíla Leite (2018) also added: “Our work at the Patronato was very well divided, because Sister Maria really liked being active asking, bringing benefits to the school. She had contact with the authorities [...]”. It's important to highlight that this was the end of the dictatorship (1985) and, since the mid-1970s, “[...] a movement was growing demanding changes in the educational system in defense of the eradication of illiteracy and the universalization of public schools” (Shiroma et al., 2011, p. 40), a cause embraced by Sister Maria.

Sister Maria used her social prestige with elite families and politicians, acquired during the time she had worked in CIC, to raise financial and material resources to equip public schools, as well as to obtain scholarships for the students who stood out. Even at the Patronato, she was honored with the name of the school's library, to which she contributed a lot. She left the management because of poor health but remained to collaborate with the Patronato until September 11, 2008, when she died of intestinal ischemia.

## Final considerations

The micro-historical study of a biographical nature was supported by Cultural History and it was used to answer the driving concern of this article: how the education and professional performance of the educator Irmã Maria happened so that she, as an administrator, gained visibility in the socio-historical and educational context in Fortaleza in the second half of the 20th century? By shedding light on the educational trajectory of a nun and educator, it was possible to understand her professional performance as an administrator and realize that her specialized training made possible an educational activity focused on dialogue and aligned with the political and economic context, which had repercussions in Fortaleza's educational sector (1969-1987).

Maria Lúcia de Sousa Montenegro, daughter of a dentist and a teacher, had a comfortable childhood, and it was precisely the difficulties caused by the drought and forced migration that enabled her to study at the Escola Normal Justiniano de Serpa in Fortaleza.

Maria Lúcia decided to follow a religious life, became a nun, and was renamed, Sister Maria Montenegro. Her link with the Church as well as her interest and commitment to education made specialized educational training possible with her Congregation's assistance, she was able to study at various institutions, pursue higher education, specialization and was even able to study in Paris. Concomitantly with her educational trajectory, she has had several experiences in teaching and school management, with emphasis on CIC's administration, one of the largest and most respected schools in the Vincentian Congregation.

Sister Maria managed to modernize the CIC through structural and pedagogical reforms. The structural ones were related to renovations in the internal space of the building, with the change of floorings, painting, gardening, and construction of an application school. The pedagogical ones, on the other hand, were concerned with didactics and the teachers' training, including the implementation of mixed education and professional courses. These changes were in line with the labor market and the historical educational duality, given that she opened schools for the underprivileged and used them as an experimental field for the rich girls who were studying to be teachers; and, insofar as it created the professional courses, it ensured a female education articulated with the demand of the professional market, in spaces where women were accepted for work in the patriarchal and sexist society of Fortaleza in the 1970s (Teaching, Nursing, Architectural Design, and Business Administration). Furthermore, these changes made the school mixed and competitive with other private schools that were emerging in Fortaleza, increasing its customers, that is, the number of students.

Even during a dictatorial regime in Brazil, Sister Maria, without questioning or confronting the current government, managed to implement the modernization of the CIC. In fact, her role as a manager differed from the previous ones, as, contrary to an austere posture that valued authoritarianism and the distance between religious and students, she adopted a more contextualized teaching, in which theory was articulated with practice. In addition, she trained teachers for an educational practice focused on dialogue. As an administrator, she lived up to her education in Educational Guidance and provided advice to the students' families, getting to know them personally.

Sister Maria developed a unique and committed work. She succeeded in rebuilding and multiplying the number of students at the CIC, which gave her social prestige among the powerful families in Fortaleza. This distinction was used by the nun to invest in the education of the underprivileged in the neighborhoods of Pirambu and Antônio Bezerra, and also in the management of Colégio Cristo Redentor and Patronato Sagrada Família, respectively.

Sister Maria was an educator who collaborated with the formation of several generations in Fortaleza during her more than 60 years of experience. She even received public recognition with the name of a school – Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro – and a library – at Colégio Patronato Sagrada Família; as well as newspaper reports – homage by Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro for her death published in the *Diário do Nordeste* newspaper and an article on the 'Mulher Luz' award; in the book chapter: 'Educator Sister Maria Montenegro (1923-2008): woman light'; biographical record, entitled 'Sister Maria: yesterday, today and forever', by Colégio Irmã Maria Montenegro; and with the 'Mulher Luz' award.

Biographical research cannot cover all aspects of a lifetime, even if it has a specific scope: the role of Sister Maria as a manager. However, this study made it possible to broaden the understanding of the educational context of a time, once the professional performance of Sister Maria in the city of Fortaleza influenced new ways of acting for teachers and thinking about the management of education, promoting articulation with the school community and greater openness to dialogue. It should be noted, however, that the study emanates from other investigative perspectives, as it's interesting to continue biographical studies to analyze how other nuns who educators may or may not have been influenced by liberation theology, including, effecting a more engaged role in political and social movements.

## References

- Alberti, V. (2013). *Manual de história oral*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: FGV.
- Almeida, J. M. F. (2009). *A reforma da instrução pública do Ceará de 1922: as diretrizes da política educacional do governo Justiniano de Serpa* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade Estadual do Ceará, Fortaleza.
- Almeida, J. S. (1998). *Mulher e educação: a paixão pelo possível*. São Paulo, SP: Unesp.
- Avelar, A. S. A. (2007). A retomada da biografia histórica. *Oralidades: Revista de História Oral*, 2, 45-60. Recuperado de [https://diversitas.fflch.usp.br/sites/diversitas.fflch.usp.br/files/2019-09/Oralidades%202\\_0.pdf](https://diversitas.fflch.usp.br/sites/diversitas.fflch.usp.br/files/2019-09/Oralidades%202_0.pdf)
- Bosi, E. (2003). *O tempo vivo da memória: ensaios de Psicologia Social*. São Paulo, SP: Ateliê.
- Burke, P. (2008). *O que é História cultural?* (2a ed.). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Jorge Zahar.
- Cavalcante, L. E. (2001). Os herdeiros da memória: os saberes populares e a educação comunitária. In J. G. Vasconcelos, & A. G. Magalhães Junior (Orgs.), *Memórias no plural* (p. 60-70). Fortaleza: LCR.
- Cavalcante, M. J. M. (2008). Identidade narrativa e autobiografia: elementos teóricos e metodológicos para uma pedagogia da escrita histórica. In J. A. B. Bezerra, & A. M. Rocha (Orgs.), *História da educação: arquivos, documentos, historiografia, narrativas orais e outros rastros* (p. 13-29). Fortaleza: UFC.
- Correia, M. B. A. (2018). *Entrevista concedida a Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho por Maria Bernadete de Alcântara Correia* (22 fev., 1h10min.). Fortaleza.
- Dosse, F. (2009). *O desafio biográfico: escrever uma vida*. São Paulo, SP: USP.
- Farias, A. (2012). *História do Ceará* (6a ed.). Fortaleza, CE: Armazém da Cultura.
- Ferreira, M. M. (2002). História, tempo presente e História Oral. *Topoi*, 3(5), 314-332. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2237-101X003006013>
- Fialho, L. M. F. (2012). *A experiência socioeducativa de internação na vida de jovens em conflito com a lei* (Tese de Doutorado). Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza.
- Fialho, L. M. F., & Braga Júnior, V. R. S. (2015). Educadora Irmã Maria Montenegro (1923/2008): mulher luz. In L. M. F. Fialho, J. G. Vasconcelos, J. R. Santana, R. E. P. Vasconcelos Júnior, & R. Martinho Rodrigues (Orgs.), *História, literatura e educação* (p. 109-128). Fortaleza: UECE.
- Freitas, M. C., & Biccias, M. S. (2009). *História social da educação no Brasil (1926-1996)*. São Paulo, SP: Cortez.
- Girão, B. (1999). "Colégio das órfãs ao Imaculada": um itinerário de amor ao próximo. In M. J. N. Silveira (Org.), *Colégio da Imaculada Conceição: do Gênese ao Apocalipse* (p. 357-362). Fortaleza, CE: Tipogresso.

- Jacomeli, M. R. M. (2010). A Lei 5.692 de 1971 e a presença dos preceitos liberais e escolanovistas: os estudos sociais e a formação da cidadania. *Revista Histedbr*, 10(39), 76-90.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20396/rho.v10i39.8639718>
- Kuhlmann Junior, M. (2000). Histórias da educação infantil brasileira. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 14, 5-18. Recuperado de <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbedu/a/CNXbjFdfdk9DNwWT5JCHVsJ/?format=pdf&lang=pt>
- Landim, R. M. M. (2018). *Entrevista concedida a Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho por Rita Maria Machado Landim* (9 abr., 1h30min.). Fortaleza.
- Lei nº 4.024 de 20 de dezembro de 1961. (1961). Fixa as Diretrizes e as Bases para o Ensino de 1º e 2º graus, e dá outras providências. *Diário Oficial da União*, Poder Executivo, Brasília.
- Lei nº 5.540 de 28 de novembro de 1968. (1968). Fixa normas de organização e funcionamento do ensino superior e sua articulação com a escola média, e dá outras providências. *Diário Oficial da União*, Poder Executivo, Brasília.
- Lei nº 5.692 de 11 de agosto de 1971. (1971). Fixa Diretrizes e Bases para o Ensino de 1º e 2º Graus, e dá outras providências. *Diário Oficial da União*, Poder Executivo, Brasília.
- Leite, A. M. F. (2018). *Entrevista concedida a Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho por Aíla Maria Fernandes Leite* (6 mar., 50 min.). Fortaleza.
- Levi, G. (1992). Sobre a micro-história. In P. Burke (Org.), *A escrita da História: novas perspectivas* (p. 133-162). São Paulo, SP: Unesp.
- Lima, J. M. C. (2006). *A Reforma Lei 5692/71 e seus reflexos na educação cearense* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza.
- Loriga, S. (2011). *O pequeno X: da biografia à história*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Autêntica.
- Melo, F. E. (2006). *A cultura cívica na educação cearense (1963-1973) – na tapeçaria da história, entre o “livro da professora” e os festejos à pátria e ao progresso* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza.
- Melo, J. M. (2008). Nota de Falecimento da Irmã Maria Montenegro. *Blog da Sagrada Família*. Recuperado de <http://blogdasagradafamilia.blogspot.com/2008/09/nota-de-falecimento-da-irm-maria.html>
- Mendes, M. C. F., Fialho, L. M. F., & Machado, C. J. S. (2019). Argentina Pereira Gomes: disseminação de - inovações- didáticas na educação primária na década de 1930. *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, 19(61), 527-550. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.19.061.DS02>
- Montenegro, M. L. S. (2018). *Entrevista concedida a Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho por Maria Laís de Sousa Montenegro* (15 mar., 1h30min.). Fortaleza.
- Nóbrega-Therrien, S. M., Almeida, M. I., Mendes, E. T. B., Paiva, T. N., Rocha, A. V. S., & Ferreira, R. S. (2012). Contribuição das Irmãs de Caridade na assistência à saúde e no desenvolvimento da Enfermagem no Ceará. In *Anais do Encontro Internacional Mahis* (p. 1-18). Fortaleza, CE. Recuperado de <https://bitlybr.com/Wmx8N>
- Nunes, M. J. R. (2001). Freiras no Brasil. In M. Priore (Org.), *História das mulheres no Brasil* (4a ed., p. 482-509). São Paulo, SP: Contexto.
- Perrot, M. (2001). *Os excluídos da história: operários, mulheres e prisioneiros*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Paz e Terra.
- Pinto, J. M. R., Brant, L. L. N. A. O., Sampaio, C. E. M., & Pascom, A. R.P. (2000). Um olhar sobre os indicadores de analfabetismo no Brasil. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos*, 81(199), 511-524.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24109/2176-6681.rbep.81i199.971>
- Pollak, M. (1989). Memória, esquecimento, silêncio. *Estudos Históricos*, 2(3), 3-15. Recuperado de [http://www.uel.br/cch/cdph/arqtxt/Memoria\\_esquecimento\\_silencio.pdf](http://www.uel.br/cch/cdph/arqtxt/Memoria_esquecimento_silencio.pdf)
- Reis, J. C. (2000). *Escola dos Annales: a inovação em história*. São Paulo, SP: Paz e Terra.
- Saviani, D. (2008). O legado educacional do regime militar. *Cadernos Cedes*, 28(76), 291-312.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-32622008000300002>
- Shiroma, O. E., Moraes, M. C., & Evangelista, O. (2011). *Política educacional* (4a ed.). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Lamparina.
- Silva, W. C. L. (2012). Espelho de palavras: escrita de si, autoetnografia e ego-história. In A. S. Avelar, & B. B. Schmidt (Orgs.), *Grafia da vida: reflexões e experiências com a escrita biográfica* (p. 39-62). São Paulo, SP: Letra e Voz.

- Soares, M. N. M. (1998). *Colégio Imaculada Conceição (1997): roteiro para uma nova visita ao passado*. Fortaleza, CE: Expressão Gráfica.
- Vasconcelos, R. C. R. (2018). *Entrevista concedida a Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho por Rita de Cássia Ramos Vasconcelos* (14 mar., 25 min.). Fortaleza.
- Vasconcelos, L. M., Fialho, L. M. F., & Machado, C. J. S. (2018). Facetas da (im)potência viril na Revista Careta: educação e masculinidades no Estado Novo (1937-1945). *Acta Scientiarum. Education*, 40(4), 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4025/actascieduc.v40i4.41145>
- Zumthor, P. (1997). *Tradição e esquecimento*. São Paulo, SP: Hucitec.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Scarlett O'hara Costa Carvalho is a doctoral student and Master in Education by the Postgraduate Program in Education at Universidade Estadual do Ceará. Pedagogue and Specialist in Teaching in Higher Education. Member of the Research Group on Educational Practices, Memories and Oralities - PEMO/UECE. Bolsista CAPES.  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0381-0063>  
E-mail: [scarlettoharacc@gmail.com](mailto:scarlettoharacc@gmail.com)

**Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho** holds a PhD in Brazilian Education from the Universidade Federal do Ceará, Post-doctorate in Education from the Universidade Federal da Paraíba. She is a professor at the Education Center of Universidade Estadual do Ceará, permanent professor of the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE/UECE). Leader of the Memories and Oralities Educational Practices Research Group - PEMO. Editor of *Educação & Formação* magazine. CNPQ Productivity Researcher.  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0393-9892>  
E-mail: [lia\\_fialho@yahoo.com.br](mailto:lia_fialho@yahoo.com.br)

**Ana Michele da Silva Lima** holds a PhD in Education from the Postgraduate Program at the Universidade Estadual do Ceará – UECE and a Master's degree in Education from the Postgraduate Program in Brazilian Education at the Universidade Federal do Ceará. Professor at the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Ceará – IFCE and Coordinator of the Center for Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Studies (NEABI), Aracati campus. Member of the Research Group on Educational Practices, Memories and Oralities - PEMO/UECE.  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6053-3728>  
E-mail: [anamichelesl@gmail.com](mailto:anamichelesl@gmail.com)

#### Note:

Scarlett O'hara was responsible for data collection, analysis, and initial interpretation of data and text writing. Ana Michele da Silva Lima carried out the historical contextualization of the discussion. Lia Fialho conceived the project, guidance, critical review of the manuscript content, and approval of the final version to be published.