



“Cycle of Debats on Contemporary Brazilian Education”: conflicting positions on education at the Federal University of Paraíba¹

“Ciclo de Debates sobre Educação Brasileira Contemporânea”: posições conflitantes acerca da educação na Universidade Federal da Paraíba (1979)

“Ciclo de Debates sobre la Educación Brasileña Contemporánea”: posiciones en conflicto acerca de la educación en la Universidad Federal de Paraíba (1979)

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical and methodological notions of the New Cultural History, especially the History of the Present Time, the objective was to analyze the main ideas, communications and interventions, presented in the “Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education”, in 1979, in Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). The aim was to rescue the importance of this event, which, in the midst of the military dictatorship, confronted anti-democratic ideals in that period, and to highlight the role played by UFPB and the Education Center (CE), in the context in which in defense of amnesty and political openness were already foreshadowed. The main source of this study was the Annals of memory of the event, in 1981. The debates developed at the time covered since the basic education to higher education, and from a critical perspective they analyzed the obstacles and dilemmas that characterized Brazilian education in all its modalities, but also sought to point out alternatives and perspectives for changes. Therefore, it is understood that the event ensured a leading role for UFPB and the CE at that juncture.

Keywords: Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education. Federal University of Paraíba. History of Education.

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Resumo

A partir das noções teórico-metodológicas da Nova História Cultural, especialmente da História do Tempo Presente, objetivou-se analisar as principais ideias, comunicações e intervenções, apresentadas no “Ciclo de Debates sobre a Educação Brasileira Contemporânea”, realizado em 1979, na Universidade Federal da Paraíba. Almejou-se também resgatar a importância desse evento que, em plena ditadura militar, confrontava os ideais antidemocráticos do período, e destacar o papel exercido pela UFPB e o Centro de Educação, no contexto em que já se prenunciavam a defesa da anistia e abertura política. A fonte principal deste estudo foram os Anais do evento, de 1981. Os debates desenvolvidos contemplaram da educação básica à educação superior, e sob uma ótica crítica analisavam os obstáculos e os dilemas da educação brasileira em todas as suas modalidades, mas também buscavam apontar alternativas e mudanças. Portanto, entende-se que o evento assegurou um lugar de protagonismo à UFPB e ao CE naquela conjuntura.

Palavras-chave: Ciclo de Debates sobre a Educação Contemporânea. Universidade Federal da Paraíba. História da Educação.

Resumen

Basado en las nociones teóricas y metodológicas de la Nueva Historia Cultural, especialmente la Historia de la Actualidad, el objetivo fue analizar las principales ideas, comunicaciones y intervenciones, presentadas en el "Ciclo de debates sobre la educación brasileña contemporánea", celebrado en 1979, en la Universidad Federal de Paraíba. El objetivo también era rescatar la importancia de este evento, que, en medio de la dictadura militar, se enfrentó a los ideales antidemocráticos de la época, y resaltar el papel desempeñado por UFPB y el Centro de Educación, en el contexto en el que ya se presagiaba la defensa de la amnistía y la apertura política. La fuente principal de este estudio fueron los Anales del evento, desde 1981. Los debates desarrollados abarcaron desde la educación básica hasta la educación superior, y desde una perspectiva crítica analizaron los obstáculos y dilemas de la educación brasileña en todas sus modalidades, pero también buscaron señalar alternativas y cambios. Por lo tanto, se entiende que el evento aseguró un papel de liderazgo para UFPB y la CE en esa coyuntura.

Palabras clave: Ciclo de debates sobre la educación contemporánea. Universidade Federal da Paraíba. Historia de la Educación

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Introduction

This article aims to analyze the main ideas, communications and interventions that was presented in the “Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education” event, in 1979, in the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), rescuing its importance faced to military dictatorship, which was vehemently opposed to conservative and anti-democratic ideals experienced in that historical context.

The event was held between January 24th and 26th, in 1979, in the auditorium of Applied Social Sciences Center in the Federal University of Paraíba, municipality of João Pessoa/PB (Brazil), during the Professor Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque's penultimate rectorate year.

The aforementioned event was organized, among other issues, to celebrate the creation of the Education Center (CE) of UFPB and to expand the dialogue of ongoing researches in the “Master's Degree Course in Continuing Education, which had been founded in March 1977”. (RODRIGUES et al., 2007, p. 357 – own translation). Therefore, the purposes and objectives of the event were:

Contribute to the dimension of Brazilian educational reality, identifying its obstacles, impasses and possible ways in order to overcome them.

- a) Identify the obstacles of relevant aspects in Brazilian education;
- b) Analyze the impasses of significant problems in Brazilian educational reality;
- c) Identify viable alternatives for overcoming the current national education dilemmas. (CICLO DE DEBATE SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 1981, p. 07).

During the event, the CE Administration and the UFPB Rectory enabled the participation of renowned names in national education, including Darcy Ribeiro, Newton Lins Buarque Sucupira, Astrogilda Paes de Andrade, Paulo Vicente Guimarães, Nicanor Palhares, Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha and Dermeval Saviani, with the latter one being responsible for the opening conference entitled “Contemporary Brazilian Education: obstacles, impasses, overcoming”. (CICLO DE DEBATE SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 1981).

In the historical context of the event, part of civil society and political class was already planning the first steps towards political opening in Brazil, a fact that would later be consolidated with the Amnesty Law Nr. 6,683 sanctioned by President João Batista Figueiredo on 28th August, in 1979, after a broad popular mobilization at national and international level. (CONGRESSO NACIONAL, 1982).²

The analysis of this material has the New Cultural History as theoretical-methodological contribution, notably from the perspective of reading the History of the Present Time, because, as advocates Roger Chartier, it is about understanding the “[...] historian as contemporary of his object and, therefore, he shares with those ones whose history he narrates in the same fundamental references”. (CHARTIER, 1996, p. 216 – own translation).

Still on this issue, Delgado and Ferreira (2014, p. 08) reinforce that the investigative tools in this field show “[...] the proximity of historians in relation to events, as they are practically contemporaneous of their study objects”. Thus, according to this idea of temporality, Ferreira (2018, p. 86-87 – own translation) points out that:

² The Law Nr. 6,683 was sanctioned by President João Batista Figueiredo on August 28th, in 1979, and it was not fought to be conquered. It was partial and restrictive, with serious historical injustices and discrimination. Even so, it allowed the reincorporation of many Brazilian people into national life after the end of exile imposed by the authoritarian political system.

The deepening of discussions between past and present relations in history, and the break with the idea that identified historical and past object, defined as something totally extinct and incapable of being reinterpreted in present terms, opened new paths for the study of history in the 20th century. [...] the historian himself is also a witness and actor of his time and, many times, he is quite involved in this acceleration movement that makes him overvalue the events of the present time.

Finally, in this theoretical-methodological path pointed out above, the documents analyzed here consists basically in Proceedings of memory, thus allowing us to understand the relevance of the "Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education" and, consequently, the role played by UFPB and CE, in the context where civil society and political sectors movements in favor of amnesty and political opening in the military regime were foreshadowed.

The proceedings as a history recording source

The main source of this study is the Proceedings of memory in "Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education" event. As a historical document, it was resulted from full transcription of intervention speeches, ideas and communications presented at that event. Finally, it was organized by journalist and Professor Alarico Correia Neto, composed and printed at the Graphic Workshops of UFPB Editor, and published in May 1981, more than two years after the aforementioned event.

Initially, we resorted to Samara and Tupy (2007) to think about how to work with this document, as they indicate that contact with the source should immediately raise some essential questions for a first research approach: "[...] which material that it presents; what content it makes available for research; and which objectives or purposes of whom elaborated it" (SAMARA; TUPY, 2007, p. 70 – own translation).

In addition, it should be noted that, right from the start, in the printed document of 333 pages, the aforementioned publisher informed readers: "[...] reasons beyond our control made it impossible for all works transcribed in these proceedings to be reviewed by their respective authors [...]" (CICLO DE DEBATE SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 1981, p.2 – own translation).

This means to say that the transcribed and printed narratives were preserved in order to be published, even the distance from interests of editorial reviews. This information is relevant to understand the originality of Proceedings as an official document published by UFPB that allows us to unveil a certain vision of the time and society in a broader way, permeated by personal and institutional relationships. In this perspective, it is also important to point out that text insertion order is random, since it was not guided by sequence in which the speeches were presented during the event, or by an alphabetical order of the participants' names. Although the detailed event schedule is not included in the document, it is possible to infer it from diluted clues throughout the text. For example: the opening conference was given by Dermeval Saviani, a professor and researcher at University of Campinas (Unicamp), whose text comes right at the beginning of Proceedings, but the debate after the conference does not follow; it is interspersed with five communications from representatives of the organizing institution, UFPB, which do not immediately relate to the theme exposed at the opening conference. Such debate with the aforementioned lecturer only appears on the following pages.

Regarding the Proceedings as a historical research document, Karnal and Tatsch (2009, p. 22 – own translation) reinforce the understanding that every document is “[...] relevant for the analysis carried out in it, not the document itself”. Still emphasizing this issue, Silva (2014) comprehends the documents not as a truth of the past, uncontested proof or objective reality, whose meaning is there ready to be unveiled by the researcher, as advocated by positivist historians, but “[...] as an integral part of a net, where looking for the threads that give them meaning is necessary [...] from the place where they were produced” (SILVA, 2014, p. 24 – own translation).

From this perspective, when examining the Proceedings of memory constructed by many narratives, it is worth considering the historical period of the event, which was later transcribed and published, in a context in which the federal government's political surveillance organizations still resorted to repressive processes against agents of university institutions, aiming to gather any and all forms of manifestation, critical opinion and combative actions in favor of redemocratization in the country. Characterizing this historical moment is essential to understand it under a present gaze from distance, but without losing sight of its meaning according to Ginzburg (2014).

In Proceedings, the formal narratives of UFPB Rectory and Education Center Direction's representatives that composed the opening tables, on January 24th and closing on January 26th, are highlighted from the first pages. The main participants and their names are registered, highlighting the professors from other national institutions (eight external speakers) and from UFPB (21 speakers), as well as civil servants and students from undergraduate and master's degrees.

The publication presents the draft of the event project, and includes: justification, purpose and objectives. Highlighting the main responsible ones for elaborating the event and the themes presented, debated and transcribed by exhibitors, namely: Contemporary Brazilian Education, Teaching of 1st and 2nd degrees, Higher Education in Brazil and Popular Education in Brazil, with all these themes followed by the subtitle: Obstacles, Impasses, Overcoming. Highlighting the methodological pace that should be followed:

The *Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education* was developed as a seminar. The themes had *exhibitors* who were in charge of explaining them in general and *communicators* who were responsible for partial placements and exhibitors' initial debates. The themes also counted with the participation of debaters chosen among the program participants (CICLO DE DEBATE SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CONTEMPORÂNEA, 1981, p.13 – italics in document – own translation).

Despite the methodological definitions for each day in the event, by table conferences with exhibitors, communicators, debaters and for previously defined themes, we realized that such themes fed back the discussions in a broader and permanent way, thus allowing a different dynamic in the heated debates.

Therefore, the Proceedings allow us to glimpse several investigative readings on educational debate at that time, highlighting the main oppositional ideas triggered during the event, and in the academic environment of UFPB.

Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education - 1979

The “Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education”, as already mentioned, was held between January 24th and 26th, in 1979, in the Applied Social Sciences Center auditorium of UFPB, during the administration of rector Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque and Education Center director, Professor Ivanildo Coelho de Holanda.

Professors Luiz Dias Rodrigues, Paulo Ramos Coelho Filho and Severino Elias Sobrinho received opinions and suggestions from the academic community (students, servants, teachers) with a view to organizing the event. These organizers stated in the Proceedings presentation that the Federal University of Paraíba considered:

an opportunity to debate and reflect on national education, within the democratic spirit, and in a critical perspective, focusing on its most significant aspects and proposing alternatives for proper solving of issues - arising, almost always, from the obstacles and impasses in Brazilian educational process nowadays. (CICLO DE DEBATE SOBRE EDUCAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CONTEMPORÂNEA 1981, p.5 – own translation).

In the period of national authoritarianism, the organizers' assertion that the event was proposed “in a critical perspective” calls attention, something indicated, in such a way, that the regime imposed by the 1964 military coup already showed clear signs of political, social and economic saturation.

In addition, public universities resumed their leading role in the debate of oppositional and intellectual struggle in favor of the amnesty process and democratic opening, after persecution of academic frameworks and ideological purges for years. Therefore, the “Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education” organization indicated that in UFPB it would not be different, due to its historical tradition “[...] of providing servile and unrestricted support to official politics”. (RODRIGUES, 1986, p. 358 – own translation).

It is noteworthy to emphasize that the event was taking place a few months after the Education Center (CE) became official, a relevant historical demand for academic expansion in UFPB from the perspective of teacher training in the state of Paraíba:

instituted during the professor Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque's rectorate, based on article 15, item “e”, of the University Statute. The Education Center, in turn, was approved by Law Nr. 6.710/78 of the CFE, and by Minister of Education and Culture (Process Nr. 241.921/78) and published in the Union Official Gazette on November 20th, in 1978. Once its Procedure Rules was approved by the University Council – according to the Resolution Nr. 72/79, on 02.23.79 –, since CONSEPE's favorable pronouncement on 14.02.79, the Education Center's council met for the first time on 03.16.79. (RODRIGUES et al, 2007, p. 535 – own translation).

The CE was created within the context of development, modernization and expansion of UFPB, led by the Professor Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque's rectorate³ from February 1976 to February 1980. According to Rodrigues (1986), the institution experienced an accelerated expansion during this period, in parallel with the diversification of courses (including postgraduate courses) and the implementation of research and service centers. This issue was also reflected in the training of its 2,635 teachers: "[...] between 1976 and 1979, the number of Doctors was multiplied by 3.3 and the number of Masters by 3.9 in UFPB" (RODRIGUES, 1986, p. 359 – own translation).

In Professor Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque's rectorate period, the institutional model triggered by the University Reform, Nr. 5.540/1968, still prevailed, and it is responsible for defining the development and organization pattern of public higher education at undergraduate and graduate levels, under the conservative educational perspective generated in the military regime.

The changes brought about the University Reform impacted the structure of higher education institutions in Brazil. And, following this new legal regulation, according to Ribeiro (2003, p. 193 – own translation): "[...] to produce the necessary expansion with a minimum of costs, which are important to list: a) departmentalization, b) enrollment by discipline, c) basic course, d) institutionalization of graduate studies."

Therefore, the creation of the CE occurred after consolidation of Master's in Education, instituted in March 1977, which had as its initial investigative reference "Permanent Education" and, later, "Education for Youth and Adults – EJA". The aforementioned Master's in Education, in addition to investing in teachers' qualification for higher education in the North/Northeast, laid the foundations of knowledge aimed at popular education "[...] permeated by the political airs of resistance to the dictatorship". (RODRIGUES et al, 2007, p. 535 – own translation).

The Proceedings record that the event was attended by various authorities in its opening ceremony, including the organizers, the CE director, the Pro-Rector of Community Affairs and the Vice-Rector.⁴ The central opening line focused on the theme relevance, expressed by the various subjects involved. From the organizers, Coelho Filho and Elias Sobrinho (1981, p.05 – own translation):

we sought to bring together scholars on educational issues, an undeniably subject that is today, in all respects, of greater interest to society, and we opened an extensive and in-depth debate on the educational reality.

From the CE Director, Ivanildo Coelho de Holanda:

a meeting that brings together such illustrious teachers, thinkers, scholars and education analysts of our time [...] we are sure that one of the greatest beneficiaries of this event will be the Education Center. (HOLANDA, 1981, p. 19 – own translation).

³ Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque graduated in Civil Engineering at the UFPE School of Engineering, on 12/10/1955. He was appointed rector of UFPB on 12/24/1975 and his rectorate occurred from 02/13/76 to 02/13/80. His management was marked by UFPB development, modernization and expansion policy.

⁴ The vice-rector Orlando Gomes Cavalcante made a protocol opening message, and it was up to Professor Iveraldo Lucena da Costa, pro-rector of Community Affairs (PRAC), to speak on behalf in the UFPB institution.

From the Pro-Rector of UFPB, Iveraldo Lucena da Costa:

[The university] is an organism that, necessarily, must be questioned [...] and no theme, of course, is more appropriate to place the University in this questioning position than the education theme itself. (COSTA, 1981, p. 17 – own translation).

In the opening conference, Dermeval Saviani proposed a broad debate to think about the history of Brazilian education from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, then in his point of view:

There is no neutral explanation and therein lies the basic critique of the positivist and neo-positivist perspective of science. In fact, there is no such thing as a neutral point of view. Science develops from concrete social conditions and in this sense it is linked to certain interests. (SAVIANI, 1981, p. 23 – own translation).

This opening speech by Professor Saviani gave the Marxist exponent a critical tone about thinking of education in the country at that time of authoritarianism. In other words, the lecturer insisted on the critical need to cause the glacial territory of “neutrality” that, as a rule, marked the educational ideal and academic reading of period in Brazilian universities.

Thus, Saviani exposed in his conference the need to critically think about education as an intellectual exercise in the dialectical reading of history, and in the formation process of “masters in education who can effectively meet real and concrete needs detected in the region and in the country” (SAVIANI, 1981, p.36 – own translation). In the debate that followed his speech, responding to a provocation, he pointed out:

the ruling class, in the interest of preserving domination and hegemony, effectively recomposes the mechanisms, and the recomposition serves to perpetuate the ruling class. This happens when the story is read from the ruling class perspective. (SAVIANI, 1981, p. 65 – own translation).

On Thursday, January 25th, the cycle of debates was the stage for confrontations based on Darcy Ribeiro’s, Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha’s and Newton Lins Buarque Sucupira’s point of views, the latter one being quite criticized for participating as a member in the Federal Council of Education and as a member of expert committee in the Working Group for University Reform (GTRU), which is responsible for drafting the famous Law Nr. 5540/1968 on November 28th, in 1968, and entered into force during the government of President Costa e Silva, under Tarso Dutra’s management in the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Darcy Ribeiro and his provocative style starts the discussion by pointing out the historical mistakes that led educational system to bankrupt, and takes the opportunity to reflect on important issues in that political moment, and makes clear his position in relation to Geisel government, which would conclude the mandate on March 15th, in 1979: “Of course you know my attitude towards the current government, the military dictatorship, so that I am against the government and what is in there [...]” (RIBEIRO, 1981, p. 233 – own translation). In his presentation, he also points out cultural bankruptcy as a project of elites themselves, aggravated by the military in power:

We are in a country where, according to the numbers we examine in the Ministry of Education, nothing leads serious effort to serious problems. I spent several years abroad and some problems I had to face as Minister of Education continued to have no solution and the worst part is that they are terribly aggravated. (RIBEIRO, 1981, p. 236 – own translation).

When Darcy Ribeiro was provoked about the political situation, even it was not the subject of his discussion, he exposed his vision of what started to gain political content in 1979, redemocratization, often reflected in intellectual and political circles, after the outbreak from the well-known process of slow, gradual and safe transition to democracy, initiated in the government of Ernesto Geisel, under the inspiration of Golbery do Couto e Silva (GASPARI, 2003 – own translation): According to Ribeiro (1981, p.311):

Redemocratization is a process that was triggered in the country quickly. Not by the powerful ones. [...] and the redemocratization that will be the return to the state of national civic normality, of this civil society, this will not happen if we do not act. It is necessary to demand more, and to use every freedom that one has and demand more freedom [...]. There are lots of people afraid of freedom. It is necessary to unmask this, such collusions, and to show what interests are behind this [...].

Based on what can be seen, the education theme was not far from the current issues in Brazil that directly affected the university life, which was marked by strategies of repression. In this critical line, Newton Lins Buarque Sucupira had to answer Darcy Ribeiro and Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha about his role in the Federal Council of Education, and in the elaboration of University Reform guidelines in 1968. For both, the reform was the result of American consultants' influence in the much-vaunted MEC/USAID agreement.

In his presentation and debate, Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha sought to focus his greatest criticism on the military period, especially on the University Reform in 1968, which took place under the Taylorist sense and the command of some GTRU intellectuals he argues, serving the authoritarian State in the alliance institutional MEC/USAID:

At the same time that the State triggered the University Reform in the Taylorist sense, it took short-term measures to reduce the pressure on official universities, since the implementation of the reform would take a long time. These measures consisted in creating conditions for the growth of the private sector, which was already committed to taking advantage of the great profit possibilities in the education sector. [...] the State, through its top notary – the Federal Council of Education – began to facilitate the growth of the private sector, through the attenuation of authorization and accreditation rules for higher education courses. (CUNHA, 1981, p. 89 – own translation).

With the University Reform in 1968, the professorship was extinguished, and the full-time regime and exclusive dedication of the professors were introduced. The departmental structure was consolidated. The undergraduate courses were divided into two parts: basic cycle and professional cycle. Credit systems by disciplines were created, also instituting the semester periodicity. (FRANCISCO FILHO, 2001).

Among the reform issues addressed with scathing criticism by Darcy Ribeiro and Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha at the roundtable, was the introduction of the university credit system. According to them, it was translated into the strategy of class fragmentations, making it difficult for students to work together, as the government representatives wanted. Closely questioned by pairs at the event, Sucupira countered⁵:

these North American professors who were at MEC/USAID, I knew them, I didn't even need them to know what the North American university was. Therefore, the MEC/USAID agreement does not affect me, it had no influence on my conception of University Reform is [...] (SUCUPIRA, 1981, p.300 – own translation).

Further on the debate, and possibly provoked by Darcy Ribeiro's emphasis on American influence in the Reform, Sucupira rebuts:

I really continue to say, believe it or not, that I didn't need any inspiration from these American professors to work, to function in the University Reform group, and I don't regret having worked, because I thought at that moment to give a contribution to instituting a different university from the ones we had until then (SUCUPIRA, 1981, p.302 – own translation).

Morosini (2005), in turn, recognizes that more technical content prevailed and, furthermore, it is still possible to show small advances in the University Reform in 1968:

the expansion of functions for teaching, research and extension is instituted, creating the departments allied to a complex organizational system, characterized, on the one hand, by the administrative system and, on the other, by the academic [...] The military regime abolished the professorship – and the consequent 'enfeudamento'⁶ of knowledge [...] (MOROSINI, 2005, p.315).

In all exhibitions, with few exceptions, there was a critical understanding that higher education in the dictatorial context continued to be an elitist space, supported by a concept of conservative modernization⁷ and disseminated by legislation of authoritarian and bureaucratic content, as the University Reform in 1968 was. According to Darcy Ribeiro, such reforms have not changed at all, because Brazilian higher education continued to be illiterate and conservative: “[...] by mouth, bibliographies and

⁵ For travel reasons, Newton Sucupira asks to leave after this speech and thanks Paulo Coelho for the invitation, and the opportunity to participate in the event at the Education Center.

⁶ A word used to indicate that knowledge was subject to an opinion, idea or political thoughts.

⁷ Regarding the term “conservative modernization”, Pires and Ramos (2009, p. 411 apud SANTOS, 2019, p. 35 – own translation) highlight: “The term conservative modernization was created by Barrington Moore Junior to portray the specific case of capitalist development in Germany and in Japan, which carried out bourgeois revolutions. Thus, the process of modernization of its society was based on an industrialization process conditioned by the political pact established between the bourgeoisie and the landowners. National thinkers use the term conservative modernization without the due historical and critical mediations, but they had a primordial importance, as they showed that there was the penetration of typically capitalist productive forces in national agriculture”. When this expression is used in Brazilian education, it points to a sense this process would meet the demands of urbanization and industrialization without changing the *status quo*.

professors are totally ridiculous, because the [*Sic*] they mention they only have it". (RIBEIRO, 1981, p. 245 – own translation).

Representing the Central Directory of Students (DCE), Sônia Figueiredo understood the event as fundamental opportunity to publicize the recreation of the National Student Union (UNE), and to express the student class' critical view about the university:

[The university] exists to meet the needs of the ruling classes. From 1964 onwards, which represented the institutionalization of the hegemony and domination of national and foreign capital, in Brazil [...] the university is a reflection of the structure and order society in force, and reproduces the dominant ideology. (FIGUEIREDO, 1981, p. 153 – own translation).

Despite the expansions presented to meet capitalist demands, for example, in the city of Paraíba (Brazil), from the mid-1970s onwards, the debate tone was that higher education had to be open to the demands of society as its main challenge in contemporaneity, articulating the teaching, research and social function quality. Thus, in order to meet the new requirements, in 1979: "[...] about 40% of its 2,635 professors held Master's or Doctorate degrees abroad or at other universities in the country or at UFPB itself. (RODRIGUES, 1986, p. 359 – own translation).

Regarding the Popular Education theme, this was mainly under responsibility of Professor Nicanor Palhares Sá. In his speech, the representative drew attention to the role of the State as a control mechanism in favor of the ruling class interests. Through this understanding, he built a critical reading of the educational vision under the ruling class logic and, particularly, in relation to the defense of "public, universal and free education" lemma, which is presented in the intellectual narratives of his time:

while renowned intellectuals such as Florestan Fernandes, Roque Spencer Maciel de Barros, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, along with "pioneers" such as Anísio Teixeira, Fernando Azevedo, among others, fought for a public, universal and free education, civil society launched itself to a wide experimentation of new pedagogical forms promoted and under the control of several of its organisms, such as Church (JUC, JEC, JOC and MEB), unions, CPC, MPC etc. (SÁ, 1981, p. 210 – own translation).

Nicanor Palhares Sá also drew attention to such experiences, as he recognized them as another possible educational perspective, under the social transformation perspective. He advocated an education that would be supported by intellectuals and would express a new conception of man and society, as advocated by Paulo Freire⁸:

It was within this framework that Paulo Freire systematized his education proposals. He founded them on the struggle of northeastern people's experience, such experience that was not just his but popular, collective, and that mobilizes student youth for a transformative social practice. (SÁ, 1981, p. 210 – own translation).

⁸ Paulo Freire would return to Brazil after the Amnesty Law publication in early next year, in 1980.

Regarding the theme of Popular Education and, mainly, the legacy of Paulo Freire, Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha, even recognizing the political and intellectual relevance of his *pernambucano* colleague who was still in exile, exposed a different view of the thought of Nicanor Palhares Sá. For Cunha, from the Freirean Popular Education perspective, it would not be possible to understand the current challenges of the late 1970s and early 1980s:

I think it's very important in this moment we live not to use neither Paulo Freire's thought and practice [...] Overcoming does not mean abandoning [...]. It means incorporating them at a higher stage of thought [...] in my understanding and in others', they must be rethought so that a new pedagogy for new times can be developed. The re-edition of Paulo Freire's thought and practice in times that are being built can only be thought of in an allegorical way. Brazil in 1979/80 is not Brazil in the early 60's and late 50's. It's different. (CUNHA, 1981, p.282 – own translation).

Darcy Ribeiro diverged from this concern sustained by Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha. In Ribeiro's understanding, despite being outlawed by the dictatorial system after the harsh exile, the Paulo Freire's works continued to multiply throughout the world and this occurred due to the current nature of his thinking:

a brilliant thing in Paulo Freire, which is to develop a process of giving back to man the courage of the spirit, of having his spirit. [...] Paulo Freire gives men this back, so that they talk about serious things, such as life, culture, the most elementary things of enormous beauty (RIBEIRO, 1981, p. 253 – own translation).

UFPB Professor Maria Salete Van Der Poel, in turn, looking for explanations in her own experience in the Popular Education Campaign of Paraíba (CEPLAR)⁹, in 1962, in Campina Grande/PB (Brazil), in partnership with Paulo Freire and, later, during the military dictatorship when persecuted and imprisoned, sustained the historical necessity of the Freirean legacy for the challenges in current times that were coming up with the redemocratization of Brazil (late 1970s) and future (early 1980s). Because, according to her understanding, defended at the event:

In this line of liberating education, instead of treating the student as an object, liberating education treats the student as a subject. So, the educator-learner relationship is a relationship of subject to subject, a humility relationship. (POEL, 1981, p. 191 – own translation).

In this regard, the event closed with lectures, communications and debates on the challenges of national basic education, focusing on 1st and 2nd grades and professional training,

⁹ The Popular Education Campaign of Paraíba (CEPLAR) was created in 1962 by a group of young people from the Philosophy, Sciences and Letters College in the University of Paraíba, supported by state government and local diocese. It was one of the Paulo Freire System's laboratories, especially in the cities of Sapé (Brazil) and Mari (Brazil), where violent conflicts between rural workers and landowners and intense mobilization of the Peasant Leagues happened. Local reaction and the military coup of 1964 immediately demobilized it, leaders were arrested and their archives confiscated. Among the leaders, Professor Maria Salete Van Der Poel was arrested.

established by Law 5.692, in 1971, which radically changed the Brazilian educational organization, without breaking the historic exclusion of millions of children and young people, despite the growth in schooling between the 1970s and 1980s, as evidenced by the census data at the time. (CUNHA & GÓES, 2002).

Undoubtedly, this was the biggest challenge of the Education Center organized in the UFPB structure, aiming at training teachers, through the Departments of Education Methodology (DME), Education Foundation (DFE) and Pedagogical Qualifications (DHP), which would come to be constituted by Resolution Nr. 72/1979 of CONSUNI/UFPB, on April 2nd in that year.

Professor Ivonete Anacleto Porto, in her presentation, sought to identify that the aforementioned legislative reforms during Garrastazu Médici's government, particularly Law 5692 in 1971, were nothing more than improving the school apparatus to meet the capitalist demands of that dictatorial historical moment:

Education plays the role of producing, in each generation, a new contingent of professionals with necessary technical differentiation to exercise the various existing occupations in the capitalist economy. Reproduction and simulation of the same social discrimination. (PORTO, 1981, p. 46 – own translation).

Thus, the aforementioned Professor questioned the very concept of school expansion advocated by the government in 1970s, which did not break with the exclusionary and discriminatory character of Brazilian public school:

In Brazil, despite the educational policy proclaiming universal, compulsory and free schooling, the school apparatus itself is quite exclusive. Anyway, the important thing is to note the contradictory character of the two functions. Making everyone stay in school for a long time is necessary for them to assimilate the dominant ideology, while expelling a large part of the individuals so that the discriminatory function can be fulfilled is also necessary. (PORTO, 1981, p. 46 – own translation).

Cunha and Góes (2002) also point to this same critical reading of the concept in sustained school expansion as “success” by those who advocated the dictatorial political system under the auspices of the economic “Miracle”:

In the period of greatest police repression in our history, the dictatorship used and took advantage of the mass media, especially television, in order to instill the mass a belief in the miraculous role of education. (CUNHA; GÓES, 2002, p. 54 – own translation).

Based on this idea, Paulo Ramos Coêlho Filho¹⁰, who presented at the event, sought to place the school in the political scenario of authoritarianism in progress, by emphasizing his hopelessness with “great” changes. Furthermore, he added that, due to the strength of historical circumstances, such changes could emerge from within the

¹⁰ This Professor's name is written in three ways in the Proceedings: Paulo Coelho, Paulo Ramos Coelho and Paulo Ramos Coelho Filho. Then, we chose to use the full name.

archaic Brazilian school structure, which reproduces traditionalist, conservative and hierarchical cultural values. Thus, he stated:

Those who work in the 1st and 2nd grades know that the teacher is only a support, and that all determinations in school life are completely external to the school itself [...]. Therefore, in terms of 1st and 2nd degrees structure, the teacher's participation is like a lecturer. And he acts, accepts and plays that role completely disposed [...] not as a transforming agent, but as someone who reinforces the situation where he will be a instrument of reproduction. (COELHO FILHO, 1981, p. 53 – own translation).

Luiz Antonio Rodrigues da Cunha had a more optimistic view without disregarding the political context. According to his understanding, despite being loaded with contradictions and guided by reproduction models in a dominant ideology, it was necessary to bet on the formation of critical educators, capable of seeing the school space as a scenario of disputes, clashes, resistances and transformations:

At a time when these contradictions increasingly penetrate the school space, critical educators assume special importance, whose function is to impose the dominant ideology that the classes attribute to the school, and to themselves. Undoubtedly, the development of critical thinking at school is possible, but I believe it is not a school initiative; it is the educators' initiative that takes advantage of opportunities when these conflicts begin to penetrate the school system, when circumstances are favorable for this type of thing. (CUNHA, 1981, p. 111 – own translation).

The debate on teaching in the 1st and 2nd grades undeniably attested to the participants' uncertainties and hopes in the Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education about the present and the future, since the dictatorial period did not leave a positive balance in the history of our basic education, as a result of the Brazilian miracle bankruptcy and its promise to develop and modernize Brazil, greatly expanding education, especially professional. However, CE director and Professor Ivanildo Coelho de Holanda, on January 26th, in 1979, stated in his speech that the event was a contribution to (re)think the present and future work:

At a time when our Education Center is emerging, nothing is more opportune than the days when Brazilian educational problems were analyzed, in which education aspects that so closely draw our attention and interest are being rethought, due to the work nature in this Center we intend to accomplish [...] because it depends on the effort, commitment, intelligence [...] as elements to support the commitment of all of us, to fight for the objective achievement we have proposed for our Center. (HOLANDA, 1981, p.333 – own translation).

The speech above, in line with the others analyzed, reveals not only the good quality of the event in theoretical-methodological and ethical-political terms in the broad critical territory of the Human Sciences, but also reflects the importance of creating the UFPB Education Center, which is already emerging fulfilling its social, cultural and political role at

the local, regional and national level. In order to produce the Proceedings as a form of scientific record, the event contributed to the production of knowledge. However, as there was still no record on websites, since the internet was only popularized in the 1990s, it is our responsibility as researchers to revisit this little-remembered document, which is unknown to many people of the UFPB academic community.

Conclusion

The Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education was an event of great historical relevance for the Federal University of Paraíba, considering that we were still slowly returning to the public debate in early 1979, with an academic and intellectual bias in favor of democracy revaluation, individuality, and civil liberties, after 14 to the authoritarian regime. (RIDENT, 2003).

In this context, it must be considered that higher education institutions were still restricted from their capacity for mobilization and political debate, even under the severe and recent effects of the University Reform, Nr. 5.540/1968, but mainly of Decree-Law Nr. 477, on February 26th, in 1969, which punished with expulsion professors, students and university employees accused of subverting the regime.

Despite the restrictive legislative systems, the UFPB and CE institution sought, with the Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education organization to revive the intellectual aspirations that marked the protagonism of the educational debate between 1945 and 1964. Notorious examples of this audacity are the names mobilized by the institution for conferences and debate tables, for the most part, linked to projects of a progressive national agenda.

The New Cultural History favors the look and analysis of contemporary facts by allowing the reading of the present time, provoking in the historian a closer relationship with History, by bringing to light aspects that are known to him/her by his/her own experience or by acquaintances. Therefore, History is not only about the most distant past, but also about situations that are distant from us, sometimes for a few decades. The reading of the Proceedings in the Cycle of Debates on Contemporary Brazilian Education undertaken in this work confirms the prominent place that education occupies in complex and critical moments in society. No wonder, the debates registered took place in political times of curtailing freedoms, questioning the educational potential, and proposing changes in the educational system, which intended to maintain the *status quo*; but also in times of attempts and discussions aimed at making use of education to transform society and give it a democratic character. Furthermore, there is no coincidence that, in the political turmoil experienced by us Brazilians in recent years, education has been the target of debates, attacks and devaluation; which makes us conclude once more about its importance in the creation and maintenance of a democratic society.

Finally, it is worth recognizing in this article that it was not possible to deepen a broader analysis of all the themes and debates held at that event, such as Youth and Adult Education, Professional Education, Graduate Studies and reinvigoration of entities students. These topics can be taken up in later studies and publications.

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