

Images on the teaching profession in the Luso-Brazilian world

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ABSTRACT:

In order to investigate how the teaching profession was perceived by the different parties involved in the educational process (teachers, society, governmental authorities) this article presents research in the field of Compared History related to the history of the teaching profession in the Luso-Brazilian world: Indeed, what does it mean to be a teacher in such context? The period of time between 1759 until 1822 covered the period in which Brazil progressed from Portuguese America, to a United Kingdom and an independent country. Our focus was restricted to the *Royal teachers* and civil servants and examined whether such teachers perceived themselves as being professionals or not and also how they perceived their teaching practice. The geographical focus involved both the teachers from Portuguese America as well as those from the Kingdom in the search to find out whether there were differences in the perception the teachers in the European and American part of the same Empire had of themselves. The *Royal teachers* were seen to have a professional conscience and perceived themselves as practicing a highly important activity that was useful to the State, the King and the country.

KEYWORDS:

Teaching profession, Royal syllabus, History of education.

INTRODUCTION

The *Aulas Régias* [Royal Syllabus] created in 1759, was characterised by a system of random lessons, with different subject and teacher hierarchies, by an ambiguity in relation to private teachers, leading to the assumption that the origin of the teaching profession was responsible for the fragmented image observed in the new category of *state teacher* (Mendonça & Cardoso, 2007).

This idea was examined in our research study, developed within the scope of Comparative History regarding the history of the teaching profession in the Luso-Brazilian world, which examined how the teaching profession was perceived by the different parties involved in the educational process: teachers, society and governmental authorities. So, what, in fact, did it mean to be a teacher in that context?

A number of selected themes are at the root of this piece of work: the first, the subject of time: the period between 1759 to 1822, when Brazil progressed from Portuguese America to a United Kingdom and independent country. The aim is to recover the images that late 18th century and early 19th century teachers produced of themselves.

The second theme focuses on the *Royal teachers*, in other words, the civil servants at the service of the State. The main issues were: whether such *Royal teachers* perceived themselves as teachers or not and how they perceived their teaching practice. On the basis of their own testimonies, aspects such as social depreciation, lack of prestige and demands for better

working conditions emerged, as well as the exaltation of the teacher figure, the teaching practice and its importance for society.

The geographical focus involved teachers from Portuguese America and from the Kingdom, since it is crucial to ascertain whether there were differences in the perception they had of themselves as teachers working in the European and American portion of the same Empire.

THE STATE TEACHER, A NEW PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY

It is commonly heard that the transmission of knowledge within a society is not only handed down through schools. The history of education coincides with the history of humanity and is still an increasingly debated aspect of the human society construction process.

However, while the teaching activity is so old, the same cannot be said of the teacher as a professional and much less so, of state education. There is a point in history where being a state teacher, in terms of exercising a profession, emerges as a novelty. According to Fernandes (1994), studies on this theme have pointed to Portugal as the vanguard.

Indeed, the *Reforma dos Estudos* [Study Reform] implemented by the license of June 28 1759 and by the charter of November 6 1772, established state education throughout the Portuguese kingdom and, also, albeit precariously, across its ultramarine colo-

nies. It became an obligation of the State to guarantee free education, establish its guidelines, select teachers by calls for tender, carry out inspections on them, pay them and keep them under a strongly centralised regime. From that point onwards, education became lay, in other words, conducted by bureaucratic governmental bodies and detached from the management of a religious order, as had been the case with the Jesuits (Cardoso, 2002).

The educational system of the *Aulas Régias*, launched by the *Reforma dos Estudos Menores* [Minor Study Reform] of 1759, was based on the humanity *Lessons* and initially consisted of Latin grammar, Greek language, Hebrew language, rhetoric and poetics but were added over the years to other subjects, and in the primary *Lessons*, acknowledged by the second phase of the reform in 1772, which also dealt with the *Estudos Maiores* [Major Studies], given by the University of Coimbra and to which the student could apply after concluding the *Estudos Menores*.

The call for tender for state teacher was established in 1759. It is worth noting that although there was a contract between the teacher and the State, and the latter was obliged to a periodic evaluation, the teachers were not yet part of a social class. According to Nóvoa (1991, pp. 13-14):

Nowadays, we know that in the early eighteenth century there were already a number of groups that regarded the teaching profession as a main occupation, often exercising it in on a full time basis. State intervention brought about a homogenization, unification and a hierarchy structure of all these groups on a national scale: it is the state framework that holds ups teachers as a professional body, and not a cooperative conception of the profession.

Despite the fact that the government initially displayed the intention to bestow the same wage and privileges upon everyone, according to the *Instructions* of 1759, it ended up reproducing the hierarchised structure of the Absolutist State in force at that time. The group of teachers promoted to civil servant did not possess a unified spirit, were not constituted through a historical process, whereby a space had to be conquered by a particular category, even though they were aware of their

rights, including the privileges that came with their position, or which could be obtained through the king's pardon. This perception is fundamental to explain the fragmented image initially presented by the teaching profession.

With regard to the professional profile, there was no difference in terms of what was required to become a state or private teacher, the latter also dependent on a successful application through a call for tender. In response to a number of applications sent, for instance, to the *Real Mesa Censória* [Royal Censorship Board], by candidates wishing to teach between the late 18th century and early 19th, they were always denied access, based on the high level of demand of the call for tender.

How, then, did these pioneers of the profession perceive themselves or how were they perceived by others?

If one consults available documentation, one will find that, in general, it provides both favourable arguments regarding the image the teacher or related administrative entities had of their profession, as well as highlighting the fact that there tension was extremely high.

TESTIMONIES

Teachers' personal testimonies regarding their profession from different sources may be consulted, namely letters, publications, applications sent to the *Real Mesa Censória*, to the king, among others which are crucial to responding to the challenge of the main issue of this text: how, indeed, did such protagonists perceive themselves?

According to Nóvoa (1992, p. 14), "identity is not acquired", but is rather, "a site for struggles and conflicts, a space for constructing attitudes and outlooks in the profession". Therefore, he suggests "talking about an identity process, while stressing the dynamic mixture that characterises the way each one feels and calls oneself a teacher".

Indeed, it is within this dynamic that we find examples of such identity process construction. In other words, while teachers display dissatisfaction towards the precarious life conditions their profession offers them, they still perform their professional duties and take pride in them.

In the case of Portuguese America, an important record was left by the teacher Luís dos Santos Vilhena, who landed in Salvador at the end of 1787, having come from the Court to take on the subject of Greek and to provide information on how the Syllabus was functioning in his *Cartas Soteropolitanas e Brasíliaicas* (Vilhena, n. d.), of 1802, particularly in the eighth Letter.

In a critical and pessimistic tone, the image he conveyed of teachers, particularly those working in Bahia, was dramatic, to say the least: “My dear friend, the aversion in this city towards the cooperation of teachers is unspeakable, people belonging to no entity in Bahia, members of society regarded with the utmost indifference and insipidness”. Vilhena complains of the lack of authority of the *Royal teachers*, showing indignation towards the arbitrariness of those responsible for military recruitment, who have no respect for teachers or for the school in particular, since:

They block and invade the classes and, without any regard whatsoever for anything at all, drag away the most skilled and diligent students to become soldiers, while displaying abominable treatment towards the respective teachers, who, in service to the sovereign and the country, have devoted themselves to teaching them, moulding them...

One understands that Vilhena believes his work to be an important service to the sovereign and country, and is profoundly indignant about such recruitment. The teacher displays discomfort, recalling, melancholically, the time when teachers were better acknowledged:

When I arrived in this city at the end of 1787 there was no general feeling of relaxation, for when the teacher disclosed that the student had shown little appreciation, the latter was sent to the Forte do Mar, and if, as a result of public enquiry it was deemed certain that the student had been unduly slothful, or had been idle and truant, then he was sent to the army so as to learn the art of obedience.

Furthermore, he indirectly criticises the local governor when he praises the actions of his predecessor, “who from time to time would honour the classes with his presence, particularly the state education

establishment he set up”, indicating that the social prestige of teachers benefited from the attention they received from the authorities, or rather, from a state policy geared more favourably towards education.

In addition to such lack of acknowledgement and support from the local political leader, he also regrets the prejudice towards the teachers exercising their profession in Brazilian lands, “they all came, mixing together the good and bad teachers, known, without distinction, by the abject term of Teachers from America, upon whom, with the exception of none, falls the infamous slander worthy of some”.

We were unable to find the term, *Teachers from America*, in any other document, in the sense in which it is used, as a synonym of despicable. In this case, it might refer to a situation restricted to Bahia, but still confirmed by other studies. It does, however, stress the tension felt within this new professional category, among the teachers of the Kingdom and those of Brazil, as mentioned in a previous study (Mendonça & Cardoso, 2007).

On the other hand, it also highlights a type of behaviour that is not uncommon in such documentation, namely the disqualification of other teachers, the claim that some are paid to do nothing, that they do not work as hard as they should, or that they accept students from other teachers without permission. The list is, indeed, quite extensive.

The author of *Cartas* complains about a number of other matters, for many other reasons, but perhaps the one most supported by his professional colleagues is related to salaries, due to the fact that they are insufficient, not paid on time or because the teacher has to present a certificate to receive them.

Rogério Fernandes (1994, p. 510) has already pointed out that in the early nineteenth century in Portugal, in relation to Minor Studies, “the teaching profession could not show off any socially prestigious title”. By examining the primary school teachers in particular, he mentions that there is a relative abundance of documents requesting a raise in salary, and that between 1812 and 1820 they came from all over the country, thus, portraying a general feeling. It is worth mentioning that it was no different in Portuguese America, according to a large number of documents bearing the same content.

So, the salary itself was at the root of constant dissatisfaction throughout the entire period under

research, on both sides of the Portuguese Empire, according to vast documentation showing isolated attempts on the part of such teachers at improving their living and working conditions. In some cases, the letters of request sent to the King were signed by up to three teachers at a time; however, there was no movement to represent the members of this new professional post in their demands. Only in 1816 was there an initial attempt at bringing teachers together in a kind of association, namely the *Montepio Literário* case, in Lisbon, which had more of a precautionary nature, based on mutual aid rather than demand, which is not surprising, given that this took place during the period of the Former Regime (Fernandes, 1994, p. 522).

Such knowledge serves to highlight the fact that the salary issue was one of the most important aspects for the construction of a social distinction of professional teachers, while it was also a fundamental component of division among them. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, some teachers were receiving between 30 to 460 *reis* [Brazilian currency] per annum, depending on their location, the subject they were teaching and the financial situation of permanent or supply teachers.

This was the case of José Theodózio da Cunha, from the town of Seia, who, in 1814, became the supply teacher for the primary school of that very place and term and set out to improve his living and working conditions. He attached a document provided by the City Hall, attesting “that due to the exaggerated expense of lodgings, and of villas in this town, and given such a low income received by the aforementioned teacher, he is worthy of his Majesty’s favour as so deemed”¹.

This episode is particularly interesting for two reasons: the first confirms the internal separation among teachers. José Theodózio shared a salary of 60\$*r* with the permanent teacher of the subject, who was ill and unable to fulfil his duties. In other words, after deductions he claimed were illegal, he received 30\$*r* per annum, or 6\$500*r* living expenses over a period of three months. There were two teachers, sharing a low income with no conditions for a respectable standard of living: the former teacher, with no guarantee of retirement and the supply teacher who awaited a vacancy in order to be promoted.

The second reason, which draws attention to the administrative order of the *Junta da Diretoria Geral dos Estudos*, the entity responsible for assessing facts, begins by crushing the argument presented by the teacher with regard to the size of the town, which “is only inferior in size and population, yet equal to many others with the same salary”, which, according to the Board, “further proved the need to create another School rather than to increase the salary”. Consequently, the Board concluded that the second request regarding a salary raise was fair, and suggested the teacher be paid 90,000 *reis*, the same amount received by the teachers from *Cabeça da Comarca*, and quoted several previous cases that had been drawn to the attention of the king, to justify his agreement. It also took advantage of the occasion to re-assert its defence of a salary increase for all, as the teachers were experiencing a number of hardships in maintaining a dignified lifestyle within the profession, and also since, as quoted, “it is not possible (...) for such a Salary to attract skilled people to expose themselves to this sufferable education system”.

It was officially acknowledged that low salaries were directly responsible not just for a lack of teachers for many of the subjects, but also for the failure to attract good candidates for the position.

In Portuguese America, including the capital Rio de Janeiro, which after 1808 became the headquarters of the Portuguese Court, the same problem may be encountered. Documentation points to how salaries, which were meant to have been paid in advance every four months, were delayed by up to two years, but this was not a situation that affected everyone at the same time. Some were paid on time, others were not, which was another source that gave rise to differences (Cardoso, 2002, pp. 252-264).

The reduced number of good candidates applying to the profession was, undoubtedly, one of the reasons which led Vilhena to denounce the poor quality of the teachers who were arriving in Brazil:

There can be no doubt that among these individuals, who were not selected but sent to America for some years bearing the gown of a Master, when some of them were not even worthy of being called students and should have been sent back, either to similar, private posts, or ones requiring no knowledge or moderation . However, such is the misfortune, that both

the good and bad are all judged as one, they are the abomination of all those who may have some authority over them, denying them of all immunity, privilege or exemption which His Royal Highness may bestow upon them, so that they may rightly be called the corporation of favourites.

Vilhena exposes his feeling of rebellion towards the authorities for failing to select candidates on the basis of pre-defined criteria and for judging them all equally. He also clearly demonstrates his abhorrence of many of his colleagues. However, he does see himself as a member of a cooperation, even if it is called *the favourites*.

Obviously, if the teachers did not change their profession, it was because there were other reasons to be taken into consideration. One of them was, undoubtedly, the right to an active retirement, granted by decree-law of December 3 1753 to the humanity teachers, who could request a house, so long as there were no legal impediments, so as to establish their home and teaching premises.

In the meantime, new subjects were created, thus, increasing the universe of teachers who had no access to such right, creating a feeling of dissatisfaction that did not go amiss, as made clear in a document, dated 1788 from the *Real Mesa Censória*, which acknowledges that this privilege should also be extended to all the other teachers, including those of the new subjects, created after the 1772 reform².

There was still the privilege of nobility, granted from the beginning of the reform, with the 1759 licence, when the king established that teachers “would have the privilege of nobles, incorporated into their common rights, and especially in the Code, they would have the title of ... professoribus et medicis”³.

This meant gaining a title of political and social distinction, which brought advantages to social ascension, as well as guaranteeing certain privileges, such as the exemption of some taxes, the possibility of occupying positions reserved for nobility, the exclusion of notorious penalties and even the privilege of not being sent to jail. In relation to the honours granted to the subservient, the scholars, composed of PhD graduates and undergraduates were given the lowest category of common nobility. The Decree of 14 July 1775 reinforced this distinction on

establishing that the *royal teachers* were entitled to the right of Privilege of Man in their employment, given their mobility (Cardoso, 2002).

There are no doubts that the teachers made use of their right whenever necessary. The example of Adrião dos Santos, the Rhetoric teacher in Lisbon, who strongly protested against a criminal judge who sentenced him to prison for the alleged crimes of defloration and mistrust is illustrative, “which was indecorously carried out, without the slightest regard, aimed at those who enjoy the privilege of Nobility, as is the case of the Teachers”⁴.

The case was rapidly passed on to His Majesty by the *Real Mesa Censória*, who agreed with the teacher in his complaint and the fact that the situation had been dragged out over a month. He appealed to “public utility, resulting from the freedom of the teacher to perform his educational functions”, which should be above the interest of the complainant who, nevertheless, was within his right to do so.

He went on to remind the Board that there had been a similar case dating back to January 1774, when the Latin Grammar teacher from Pernambuco, Manoel da Silva Coelho, had been pardoned, receiving the royal grace of a prison release, showing that even in Portuguese America such privilege was demanded⁵. Indeed, the text is a copy of the case of the Pernambucan teacher, indicating that it had been the first of its kind.

Since such privileges and honours were not widespread or granted to all, those who were not entitled to them were left to go in search of them. Such content is what was sent by the Lisbon teachers Joaquim Manuel de Sequeira and José dos Santos Patto to the King, where they raised the issue of education, suggesting methods for its improvement and using the opportunity to ask His Majesty “to grant them the very nobility and privileges that were bestowed upon the teachers of Latin Grammar, so that they could also be called the Teachers of Primary Education”. The plight of these two teachers was taken into consideration the following year, when the 1772 Reform affected the primary education syllabus⁶.

It is also important to observe how those occupying administrative posts in bodies directly related to teachers regarded themselves. In the first example, we have notice 3/8/1770, when His Majesty consulted the *Real Mesa Censória*, requesting

a report on the book *A Nova Gramática da Língua Portuguesa* [A New Grammar of the Portuguese Language], written for young learners by the graduate Antonio Joseph dos Reis Lobatto. In his report, the M.P. friar Joaquim de Santa Anna praised the teacher's initiative, but observed that its use could not be generalized, since:

The Board does not deem such to be rightfully taught to the Reading and Writing School Children, not only due to the inability of the teachers who are, in their vast majority, unskilled in their understanding of the anatomy of language, no matter how clearly it is exposed to them, and to understand the parts related to the Grammar, based on the Latin, so that they may scientifically persist in educating their pupils⁷.

The author of the report looked upon primary school teachers as being intellectually limited, not prepared to teach the afore mentioned Grammar. Furthermore, we are reminded that nowadays, at least in Brazil, it is impossible to be oblivious to the prejudice attached to the primary school teacher within the body of teaching staff.

However, there was certainly solidarity among them, since this tendency was pointed out as being negative in the Order sent out on 6 February 1821, when the Board stated it had more faith in the qualifications of its Commissioner "who, with his vast experience, is so precise, fair, intelligent and devoid of subservient contemplations that the teachers have towards their respective learners and their patrons"⁸.

What the author of this text is insinuating is that there was a kind of corporatism among them, almost insipient, or perhaps only sporadic, and especially among those who carried out the profession in private, due to relations with their patrons. One may also conclude that such an attitude was related to attempts at forgoing teachers, such as in the afore mentioned case of the *Montepio Literário*.

In another order of 29 May 1821, The General Study Board set out to prevent "any kind of impediment that might hinder the constant activity State teachers were to invest in Education", so as not to jeopardise the normal functioning of the Kingdom's teaching syllabus. Thus, it reported to the sovereign "the serious inconvenience, proved by experience, of the same teachers being elected

to act as Judge Officials, Councillors, Municipal Officers and Council proxies who were generally chosen to govern"⁹.

Indubitably, the selection of *royal teachers* for important administrative posts was a sign of social acknowledgement towards the profession. In the opinion of the Board, however, this deficiency was a sign of social acknowledgement towards the profession and the choice of *royal teachers* for important posts in public administration. However, the Board regarded this deference as a problem not only for the progress of the syllabus, but for the teachers themselves. They

can barely conciliate this assiduous and laborious exercise with the obligations of the Governing Appointments in which they are subject to Sessions for the selection of Receivers of the Royal Treasury and Corrections, Hearings, and Inspections, consulting Advisers, performing inspections and other Acts both in and outside the Court, which require personal assistance".

The posts the teachers were summoned to fill were forced upon them, since according to §10 of the aforementioned by-law, "no one is exempt of serving such Government Posts, with the exception of an expressed Privilege, which Teachers do not hold", consequently,

which leads them all to fail in Education, to the detriment of State Education; or to undergo the abatement of defendants and guilty parties; or to acquire hatred and animosity which disturbs them; and, or finally, to go through all these inconveniences which degrade the reputation and dignity required of the teaching profession.

In addition to such inconvenience that the General Study Board was urged to resolve, there was another motive for concern: the fact that inspection of teacher duties was under the responsibility of the City Hall and if "they are part of the Board, such inspection will become null and void during their period of service, neither will it be precise in the following years, since their dealings with those who are generally involved in governing will allow them to request false, rather than true certificates".

This justification practically acknowledges that there was a scheme based on advantages and favours between those who were “governing”, which could be used to the advantage of the teachers, and the reason behind why the Board recommended “on deep reflection”, that royal teachers should be excluded from the Election lists, “not by prerogative, but rather due to an incompatibility of duties”, and, attention was drawn to “all the Authorities that habitually attend the Elections of Municipality Officials, or to monitor them”, to proceed in such manner.

CONCLUSION

The hierarchy at the root of the *royal teacher’s* profession structured by the Absolutist State was laden with inequality, on all levels, acknowledged to such a degree by teachers that they set out to change their situation by appealing to the sovereign. Such requests were common, namely appealing for equal salaries with other teachers or with locations where higher incomes were received. However, they were not always granted.

Although attitudes towards the profession were varied, ranging from the pessimism and disappointment of Vilhena to the pride in participating and contribution of Reys Lobatto, in all the consulted documents, it was possible to observe that all the *royal teachers* had a professional conscience and perceived themselves as carrying out a highly important activity, useful to the State, to the King and to the country. Amongst all their discourses,

we were able to observe the desire to overcome the obstacles presented by their profession in a dignified manner, which implied being paid on time and receiving a reasonable salary for their upkeep and school maintenance.

Another point worth mentioning is that in general, there were no differences between Kingdom teachers and those from Portuguese America in terms of their rights or the problems they faced in the performance of their duties, although they seemed to be unaware of this. However, given the vastness of Brazil, it was very easy to deceive the strict determinations from Lisbon or Coimbra, particularly in relation to private teachers.

On a final note, 250 years after the creation of the *royal teachers*, and given the different historical periods in question, the report presented by the newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo*, on June 9th 2008, entitled “Teaching Career attracts Less Prepared” cannot be ignored or fail to be considered elucidatory. The report presents a survey commissioned by the Lemann Foundation and by the *Instituto Futuro Brasil* [Future Brazil Institute], based on questionnaires related to the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE), where only 5% of the best upper secondary school students wish to become primary school teachers. Poor financial compensation and social undervaluation of the teaching profession were referred to as being among the main factors for such rejection. Also, in line with this study is the fact that Brazil attracts professionals with more academic and social difficulties to its teaching profession.

ENDNOTES

1. A.N.T.T., Consultation of the General Board of Studies: batch 1001.
2. A.G.A.L., quote 177, p. 6.
3. A.G.C.R.J., code. 10-4-3, f.147.
4. A.N.T.T., Kingdom Ministry, book 362, p. 178.
5. A.N.T.T., book 417 of the Kingdom Ministry p.71v.
6. A.N.T.T., batch no.288, Kingdom Ministry
7. A.N.T.T., Book 362 of the Kindom Ministry, p. 67.
8. A.N.T.T., Consultations of the General Study Board: batch 1001.
9. A.N.T.T., Consultations of the General Study Board: batch 1001.

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