

# Evidences of North American cultural diffusion in Brazil: collections of binational centers as spaces of social memory of Brazil-United States relations

Espectros de la difusión cultural norteamericana en Brasil: las colecciones de los centros binacionales como espacios de memoria social de las relaciones entre Brasil y Estados Unidos / Espectros da difusão cultural norte-americana no Brasil: os acervos dos centros binacionais como espaços da memória social das relações entre Brasil e Estados Unidos

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## Rodrigo Vieira Pinnow

Master in History from the Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPel). PhD student in the Postgraduate Program in Social Memory and Cultural Goods at Universidade LaSalle, Brazil.  
rodrigo.202121047@unilasalle.edu.br

## Patricia Kayser Vargas Mangan

PhD in Systems and Computer Engineering from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Social Memory and Cultural Goods at Universidade LaSalle, Brazil.  
patricia.mangan@unilasalle.edu.br

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the partial results of a research about North American binational centers in Brazil. The sources about the foundation of 33 centers, the formation of a coalition, the similarities in its processes of creation and expansion, and the role of North American and Brazilian actors are preserved in the collections spread across different federative units. Such institutions, as public and memory spaces, preserve collections that can help understand the relations between Brazil and the United States.

*Keywords:* social memory; binational centers; cultural diffusion.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta resultados parciales de investigaciones sobre los centros binacionales norteamericanos en Brasil. Fuentes sobre la fundación de 33 centros, la creación de una coalición, las similitudes en los procesos de creación y expansión y el papel de los actores norteamericanos y brasileños se conservan en las colecciones repartidas en diferentes unidades federativas. Tales instituciones, como espacios públicos y de memoria, preservan colecciones que pueden ayudar en la comprensión de las relaciones entre Brasil y Estados Unidos.

*Palabras clave:* memoria social; centros binacionales; difusión cultural.

## RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados parciais de uma pesquisa relativa aos centros binacionais norteamericanos no Brasil. As fontes sobre a fundação de 33 centros, a criação de uma coligação, as semelhanças nos processos de criação e expansão, e o papel dos atores norte-americanos e brasileiros estão preservadas nos acervos espalhados por diferentes unidades federativas. Tais instituições, como espaços públicos e de memória, preservam acervos que podem ajudar na compreensão das relações entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos.

*Palavras-chaves:* memória social; centros binacionais; difusão cultural.

## Introduction

This article aims to list evidence for the presence of a North American collaboration network formed by different profiles of regional elites in the first decades of the twentieth century. Therefore, this study presents some characteristics of the foundation process of the first binational centers and their respective protagonists, with focus on the history of the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute (ICBNA).

In mid-2008, a famous English course in Porto Alegre, known as “Cultural”, was about to celebrate its seventieth anniversary acting as a diffuser of American culture. Considered a reference institution in English teaching, it offered proficiency tests, a bilingual library, a consular agency and exchange programs. The “course”, as it is usually called locally, was located in the privileged historic center of the capital city of the Brazilian State of Rio Grande do Sul, near the Main Church Square, the Metropolitan Cathedral, Piratini Palace – the headquarter of the State Executive Power –, and the Legislative Assembly. In other words, a privileged place with great visibility and impressiveness.

As a result of the competition in the field of English language teaching, the direction of the ICBNA saw the date as an opportunity for business marketing and advertising. Therefore, they developed an institutional project that would result in the creation of a digital book to celebrate the anniversary of the ICBNA. Entitled Digital Book, it celebrated the 70th Anniversary of the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute and resulted from information gathering about collections, research, selection and documentary analysis, in partnership between a historian and a local writer, both responsible for the project, under the support of the Executive Board and the deliberative council of the institution:

The project had budget constraints and its mission was to combine several areas like communication, culture and history. It was necessary to strengthen and promote the brand, turning it into a kind of “marketing tool”. Finally, for this purpose, a different layout from what was commonly sold in the Porto-Alegrense market would be applied. However, without the historical content, such a “tool” would not find support and, perhaps, for this reason alone, the history of the ICBNA had its due appreciation for seven decades with a commemorative publication. Yet, the top management team did not find it interesting to actually present the work as a book or a journal, making it clear that upcoming volumes would be definitively discarded. The core issue of this stage of the project was to undoubtedly locate pertinent information to the focus of interest of the ICBNA at the time, choosing sources that

would be used in a collection that was still disorganized, without any care, especially without a support team. (Pinnow, 2014, p. 16)

As the project progressed, many research opportunities were identified, as a result of both the volume and diversity of the ICBNA's documentary collection and its collection of works of art. Since the historian of the project had a formal employment contract with the institution, the access to documentation made it possible to know important aspects of the Porto-Alegrense social memory and cultural evolution.

The ICBNA's collection of documents and works of art took seven decades, but, unfortunately, there was never an effective organization of the material. The collections were spread throughout the institution, without any kind of accurate inventory of the number of existing documents. Although the management team knew there were materials of several types, including foundation documents such as minutes, ledgers and journals, as well as student files, VHS tapes, photographs and advertising material, there was not a deep understanding of the exact size and content of the collection.

Discovering the ICBNA collection was essential to raise evidence about the connections between Porto Alegre's Social Memory and a possible North American collaboration network spread throughout Brazil (Pinnow, 2014), with binational centers located in the main Brazilian states. Scanning about 600 items, including documents, photos, journals, cataloging of works of art and other materials, allowed for valuable connections with the past of the city's intellectual elites and expanded analytical possibilities of the relations between Brazil and the United States.

In contrast, the collection made it possible to understand the role of North American binational centers as spaces of social memory and cultural diffusion. However, it is important to highlight that at the time of writing this study, no academic productions were found about the collections of the other centers throughout Brazil. Considering the complex relation between Brazil and the United States, rich in cultural, political and historical aspects, it is necessary to give birth to the existence of such collections, so that the memory of the influence of North-American culture in Brazil as well as the strategic partnership between the two countries and the presence of North-American institutions in Brazil can be related to the regional context of the intellectual elites. As a result, the analysis of social memory preserved in collections, such as the ICBNA's, allows for a better understanding of those relations and their impact on Brazilianness.

## The discovery of binational centers in Republican Brazil: ICBNA and Erico Verissimo as hosts

Erico Verissimo was, and still is, one of the most important exponents of Brazilian literature, known and praised both for his literary production and for his performance in the country's cultural life. Although he was an important figure in the institutional memory of the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute (ICBNA), his works do not directly mention his participation in the foundation and development of the institution. As to the narrative of ICBNA Digital Book, at the time of the production of the book, the institution decided for a romanticized and contemplative interpretation of the foundation minutes, highlighting Erico Verissimo as the great mentor of the whole creation process, promoting an idea/discourse that a group of intellectuals would have been led by the author. However, the transcription of the minutes is otherwise:

At 8 pm on July 14, 1938, at the house of the U.S. Consul, Mr. Guy W. Ray, people gathered to translate into action the idea of creating a cultural institute, which had come up in a lecture between Mr. Guy W. Ray and the Law graduates<sup>1</sup> João Kessler Coelho de Souza, Dante Sfoggia and Paulo Augusto Simões Pires. After a brief discussion about the usefulness and high significance of such an institute, to promote cultural exchange between the two friendly nations, Dr. Renato Barbosa proposed the election of the first board of the institute to which he decided to name I.C.B.N.A., initials that stand for Brazilian-North American Cultural Institute. The 1st board of I.C.B.N.A was thus constituted by a President, Dr. Renato Barbosa; a Vice-President, the writer Erico Verissimo; a 1st Secretary, the writer Limeira Tejo; a 2nd Secretary, the Law graduate Paulo Augusto Simões Pires; a 1st Treasurer, the Law graduate Dante Sfoggia; a 2nd Treasurer, the Bachelor Student Bruno Schuetz and an archivist, the Law graduate João Kessler Coelho de Souza. (Chagas; Pinnow 2008, p. 38)

Erico Verissimo had a close relation with the United States and he visited the country several times in his lifetime. Besides, he stayed in touch with American writers and intellectuals, which allowed him to know the US cultural trends. Verissimo always emphasized the importance of cultural exchange for the development of Brazilian literature, and although his work at the ICBNA still raises doubts, it inspired several interpretations of his actual role in the institution's foundation and expansion processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Medicine, Engineering, and Law Graduates were considered "imperial professions" in Brazil in the past (Coelho, 1999).

Although in his works Verissimo does not directly mention his participation in the ICBNA, the writer's influence on the memory of the institution is undeniable. His presence is highlighted as the leadership that gave rise to the Institute, and his role in the cultural life of Porto Alegre and Brazil is remembered as an important milestone in the history of Brazilian literature (Bordini, 2020). Yet, as well as other intellectuals who participated in the foundation and expansion processes of the other binational centers of Brazil, only the exploration of the collections of the above mentioned institutions can show more evidence of social memory and international relations in the cultural field of the time:

As one would expect, it is clear that the historical events are often interpreted in more than one way. However, I would like to make two comments about this undeniable fact concerning the historian's life. Interpretations can complement rather than contradict each other, just as different maps of the same territory can be equally correct, not showing any points of conflict. In conclusion, the coexistence of such interpretations is possible and even likely, even though such interpretations are partial, in the best sense of the term. (Gay, 1990, p. 190)

Taking those different interpretations into consideration, and crossing the institutional narrative with the documentary sources, it is necessary to understand the association of Erico Verissimo to the ICBNA. The foundation minutes were written in the evening of July 14, 1938, but the writer's association did indeed occur on October 8 of the same year, being the seventh associate and not the first, as it would naturally be if he had been the great mastermind of the project.

N.º de Matrícula 7

**Instituto Cultural Brasileiro-Norte-Americano**

**PROPOSTA PARA SOCIO** CATEGORIA

Nome por extenso *Erico Verissimo*  
(BEM LEGIVEL)

Residência *Livramento do Globo* Telefone *7369*

Profissão *escritor* Onde exerce. *Liv. do Globo*

Nacionalidade *Brasileiro* Naturalidade *Ouraltes*

Estado civil *Casado*

Onde pagará as contribuições? *Liv. do Globo*

Proponho para socio ativo do INSTITUTO CULTURAL  
BRASILEIRO - NORTE-AMERICANO

O Sr. \_\_\_\_\_

Porto Alegre, *8* de *outubro* de 193*8*

\_\_\_\_\_ SOCIO PROPONENTE.

DE ACORDO.

*Erico Verissimo*  
\_\_\_\_\_ PROPOSTO.

Accito em \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ de 193\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ PRESIDENTE. SECRETARIO.

Figure 1 – Associate Proposal for Erico Verissimo in 1938. Source: ICBNA, 1938

Given the public recognition of the seventh member of the ICBNA, Erico Verissimo, and the other Brazilian intellectuals registered in the institutional memories of the investigated centers, as founders or participants of these foundation processes, it is important to reflect on how such personalities engaged in the binational centers. Were they randomly chosen by North American actors or was the process repeated by the local/regional interest of the elites of the time? How was it possible to link the Good Neighbor Policy with the Brazilian regional elites and the intellectual leaders of the time?



The coexisting interpretations regarding the Good Neighbor<sup>2</sup> Policy and Brazil-US relations are diverse and subject to a historiographical balance, as the Brazilian foreign policy led intensive bilateral negotiations with both the United States and Germany between the 1930s and 1940s. The extensive diplomatic documentation among the countries mentioned, the political strategies adopted by the players of the international system of the time in search of global hegemony and the contradictions of a Brazil under dictatorial rule, with its controversial president, Getúlio Vargas, are relevant themes with constant production to this day:

Not by chance, the relations between the two countries in the 1930s and 1940s have been the focus of analysis of dozens of Brazilian and American historians over the twentieth century. It is possible to find a huge production, with studies that discuss political, economic, military, cultural and scientific aspects. For this study, I selected some classical texts, often referenced by historiography, and more recent productions that are characterized by the focus on new issues, characters and approaches. Since the late 1960s, American and Brazilian historians have focused on Brazilian foreign policy. Some authors stand out, like Frank McCann (1974), Stanley Hilton (1975), Moniz Bandeira (1973), Gerson Moura (1982), Mônica Hirst (1982) and Ricardo Seitenfus (1985), pioneers in the studies of Brazil-US relations. (Cunha, 2023, p. 2)

In the recent historiographical balance prepared by Cunha (2023), besides classical productions such as Bandeira (1973), Bueno and Cervo (2012), Hirst (2009), Moura (1980), Moura (1984), Munhoz (2011), Pecequilo (2011) and Pinheiro (2010), which were the basis for more recent research, thesis and dissertation database, journal platforms, there was no mention of binational centers or the possibility of creation/expansion of North American collaboration networks in Brazil.

Although binational centers are not cited in the historiographical production about the process of North American cultural diffusion, there are some references in the field of language teaching in Brazil as in the journal *História do Ensino de Línguas do Brasil* [History of Language Teaching in Brazil] of the Postgraduate Program in Applied Linguistics of the Universidade of Brasília.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Implemented in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's governments in the United States (1933-1945), the so-called Good Neighbor Policy became the relationship strategy with Latin America at the time. Its main characteristic was the discontinuation of the interventionist practice that had ruled the US relations with Latin America since the end of the nineteenth century. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mny5c3wn>. Accessed on January 10, 2023.

3 Available at: <http://www.helb.org.br/>. Accessed on Jan 16, 2023.

Nogueira (2010) described the existence of binational centers in her article entitled “Os centros binacionais Brasil-Estados Unidos: sua importância no ensino de línguas no Brasil” [The binational centers Brazil-United States: their importance in language teaching in Brazil]. In her article, the author highlighted the chronological order the centers were founded, starting with the Binational Center Brazil-United States Ibeu,<sup>4</sup> opened in Rio de Janeiro, capital of Brazil back then, on January 13, 1937, a year before the foundation of the ICBNA. According to Nogueira (2010), the process of creation of the binational cultural institution would have begun in 1931, by Professor Stephen Duggan, of the Institute of International Education of New York,<sup>5</sup> on a visit to Brazil:

Back to 1931. The world was still feeling the effects of the 1929 economic crisis, while technological advances and changes in cultural paradigms proved to be uncontrollable in a world whose distance was gradually shortened. In this context, Steven Duggan, the director of the Institute of International Education (IIE) in New York, traveled to Latin America to found a cultural institution affiliated with IIE and to promote educational exchange beyond the borders of the United States. The idea was not implemented immediately, but developed for five years. Cultural relations between Brazil and the United States were discussed by intellectuals from both countries, until the subject was addressed at the 1936 Inter-American Conference by the Protestant missionary Guy Inman, an important collaborator in the historic good neighbor policy promoted by the North American nation. On January 13, 1937, at the Conference Hall of the Itamaraty Palace, headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Assembly that originated the Brazil-United States Institute was finally called. More than a hundred people witnessed the solemnity. Among them, famous people like Austregésilo de Athayde, Francisco Campos, Pedro Calmon, the chancellor Oswaldo Aranha and Afrânio Peixoto, whose name would be given to the future Ibeu Library. Elected as the first president, the diplomat Hélio Lobo strengthened the importance of the Institute because of its close relation with Itamaraty. The audience, aware of the speech, listened to him emphasize the relevance of exchanges, to welcome “representative personalities of the American culture and, at the same time, to send Brazilian teachers and students to the United States”. Mr. Hélio Lobo predicted the large amount of scholarships that Ibeu would grant to students of both nationalities – a practice that remains to this day. (Ibeu, 2022, p. 10)<sup>6</sup>

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4 For further information, access: <http://www.ibeu.org.br/por-que-ibeu/historia/>.

5 For further information: <https://www.iie.org/>.

6 Publication in tribute to Ibeu 85th anniversary. Free distribution.



On the one hand, there are ICBNA foundation minutes, with Erico Verissimo, a North American consul and other Gaucho intellectuals; on the other hand, the sources of Brazil-United States Institute (Ibeu) have records of a group of intellectuals and politicians responsible for the creation of the institution, in partnership with foreign intellectuals. Personalities like Osvaldo Aranha, Assis Chateaubriand, Vital Brazil, Gilberto Freyre, Afrânio Peixoto and Austregésilo de Athayde participated in the foundation meeting of the institution at Itamaraty Palace. According to Ibeu 85th anniversary book, the first headquarters of the Institute were in the Brazilian Association of Education and, two years later, the institution rented its own headquarters, thanks to financial contributions:

At first, there were three teachers and 18 students at Ibeu classes in a space provided by the Brazilian Association of Education. Donations from the American colony and the contribution of the US embassy made it possible to rent their first own headquarters, on Mexico Street. Private lessons soon evolved into the Department of Language Teaching, which became the basis of the current structure. At the end of World War II, the Institute had an exponential growth, reaching 173 students taught by 8 teachers, a number that would soon multiply. By the end of the decade, Ibeu had 3,125 students distributed in 98 classes. (Ibeu, 2022, p. 11)

Considering Nogueira's reflections (2010) on the importance of binational centers for language teaching, based on the information consulted in ICBNA 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Digital Book, the author expresses a romanticized interpretation of the Gaucho intellectuals' participation:

There was a major European political and cultural influence in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century, especially in the south of the country. The state of Rio Grande do Sul was a province with Castilhism's characteristics,<sup>7</sup> but in the 1930s, there was already a national leader, Getúlio Vargas. To oppose the advance of German nationalist ideas, a group of Gaucho intellectuals, among them the writer Erico Verissimo, decided to create the Brazilian-American Cultural Institute. The year was 1938 and the

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7 The followers of Castilhism predominated in the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930) and became disseminators of an anti-democratic proposal, based on the Positivist Apostolate in Brazil at the time. Castilhism was an adaptation of Auguste Comte doctrine whose central idea was anchored in Authoritarian Republicanism. The group was named Castilhos for supporting Júlio de Castilhos, known as the "patriarch of [the state of] Rio Grande do Sul". He was president of the state twice and main author of the 1891 State Constitution. ABRANCHES, J. Governos. (v.1, 2); ABREU, A. Dicionário histórico biográfico brasileiro pós-1930. Partido Republicano Rio-Grandense (entry adapted by the author). Available at: <http://www.fgv.br/CPDOC/BUSCA/Busca/BuscaConsultar.aspx>. Accessed on 16 Feb, 2024.

decision received full support from the American Embassy. For almost five years the Institute dedicated itself to cultural activities above all, but the lack of English language proficiency by the Gaucho community prevented greater integration between the countries. Therefore, from 1943 on, the first English course was opened in Rio Grande do Sul, becoming a pioneer in English teaching for decades. (Nogueira, 2010, p. 14)

The author's analysis provides inference about the foundation of the Brazilian- American Cultural Institute (ICBNA). According to the documentary sources available in the ICBNA collection, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis presented by Nogueira (2010) that the creation of the institute aimed to object to German nationalism. Even though the article aims to praise the creation of binational centers, the interpretation of foundation processes did not follow a rigorous historiographical methodology, but a descriptive approach.

It is important to point out that the article emphasizes the ambition and the pioneer spirit of the intellectuals of the time, yet there is no specific explanation about the true motivation for the foundation of the institute. Therefore, further research is needed to bring more evidence so as to have a more precise idea about the subject. Besides, Nogueira's (2010) main objective is to report the importance of binational centers for language teaching, which suggests that the interpretation of foundation processes was not subject to a thorough and comparative analysis.

Two centers have been mentioned so far, both founded in the late 1930s, with nationally and internationally renowned personalities. Also, two important Brazilian states with political influence in the country: Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil at the time; and Rio Grande do Sul was the state of origin of the then President Getúlio Vargas.

Considering all the characteristics mentioned, among others, there are memory books, to celebrate the institutional anniversaries, and a master's thesis about the ICBNA, written by the main author of this article. As previously argued, in the archival repositories, dissertations and academic theses we find no reference to the importance of the collections of binational centers to understand the Social Memory of the process and the complexity of relations Brazil-United States.

Therefore, such a historiographical gap helps us understand the silencing/forgetting of these connections between American actors and regional elites, which allows us to infer that the likelihood between the processes and the establishment of 33 binational centers (active in 2023) characterize the organization of a sophisticated North American support network that expanded over the decades in the twentieth century.

## The expansion of North American collaboration networks in Brazil in the twentieth century: the liberating nature of collections in face of frameworks of memory

When comparing sources of the collections of binational centers and diplomatic sources, the presence of American actors in Brazil becomes clear. There are connections between the most important names of the intellectual/regional elites spread in the country in the creation of around 33 binational<sup>8</sup> centers, endorsed by the American government and set up in important Brazilian cities. According to the Coalition of Binational<sup>9</sup> Centers, the Binational Centers (BNCs) have consolidated as spaces for English teaching, with large libraries, art galleries, spaces for concerts, cultural programs, promotion of exchange programs, proficiency tests and advice services for Brazilians to study in the United States.



Figure 2 – Map of the Association of Binational Centers of Latin America. Source: Abila, 2023<sup>10</sup>

8 For further information, access: <https://br.usembassy.gov/pt/education-culture-pt/espacos-americanos/centros-binacionais/>.

9 For further information, access: <http://coligacaobnc.com.br/>.

10 Available at: <http://www.ablaonline.org/bnc>. Accessed on Jan 20, 2023.

After a detailed analysis in the portals of the corresponding centers, it is possible to see that the institutional descriptions depict the BNCs as non-profit and autonomous institutions, for the promotion of a social, mutual understanding Brazil-United States, developing a number of educational, cultural and informative programs.

In addition to offering English teaching, information about the United States, and opportunities to participate in cultural programs, binational centers also offer advice to people interested in studying in the US and support in enrolling for exchange programs sponsored by the American State Department, including the Young Ambassadors, YLAI, STEAM Tech Girls and *Power4Girls*<sup>11</sup> programs.

As we analyze the creation and expansion process of binational centers, along with other institutions linked to the United States embassy, and considering the amount of collections to be explored, given the scarcity of work, we find that Halbwachs's conception (2006) about memory and his analyses about the social frameworks that constitute it can provide relevant contributions for the study of collective memory "framed" on the subject, consolidated within the Brazilian historiography:

For our memory to benefit from the memory of others, it is not enough to have their testimonies; it is also necessary that it has not ceased to agree with its memories and that there are enough contact points between it and the others, so that the memory that others bring us can be rebuilt on a common basis. (Halbwachs, 2006, p. 12)

Based on the researched sources, the proposed argument elicits some procedural questions, confronting some historiographical productions cited in this study. In these terms, the narratives about the past of Brazil-US relations, in addition to the interpretations about South America social memory, can be placed in a gray area, whose horizons are not always recognizable in the historical culture, problematized by Gontijo (2014), the framed memory, discussed by Pollak (1989) and the new perspectives that encompass the uses of the past and the uses of memory in new areas:

With regard to historical culture, it should be remembered that the concept has been thought since the 1980s and 1990s systematically by authors such as Jörn Rüsen, Aleida and Jan Assmann, Bernard Guenée and Jacques Le Goff, in dialogue with experts of the relationship between history and collective memory, like Pierre Nora,

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11 For further information, access: <https://bityli.com/A9duD>

Paul Ricoeur etc. On the whole, one starts from the understanding that the view a given society has of its past is not an exclusive result, or even predominant, of the production of academic historians. Images, ideas, names and values that make up the view of the past arise from a series of factors that act in a dynamic process of discussion about past experience and the construction of meaning. Historical culture, therefore, encompasses multiple approaches and narratives where what is at stake is not academic knowledge about history, but the community's self-comprehension in a given present and its projection possibilities in the future. (Gontijo, 2014, p. 45)

The result of the historical culture and the view that a society has of its past is not the exclusive result of the historiographical production, or even of the memorial dynamics, but of a *sui generis* process, related to individual memories, to collective memory and to the meaning attributed to them when interpreting the past. Knowledge production and academic research can also be "framed" by presenteeism, in a systemic theoretical-methodological process of direction and circulation. In this regard, the liberating element still corresponds to the collections and their primary sources, not because of the positivist thought of "veracity" of sources, but by the interpretative subjectivity of the fragments of a whole, of a web and its dimensions not yet explored.

With regard to the relations Brazil-United States, the analysis of the articulations of the different memories, established in historical culture, can show that the historical process on the subject has undergone a framework of collective memory especially considering the historical events after the second half of the twentieth century, with bipolarity consolidated by the Cold War.

Once this possibility of analysis of collective memory is identified, or problematized in this case, we resort to Pollak's contribution (1989), an author who questions the nature of processes and social facts to be understood, established and propagated as things, instead of questioning "how social facts become things, how and by whom they are solidified and provided with duration and stability" (Pollak, 1989, p. 3-15), thus building on the idea of a memory framed instead of a collective memory.

Pollak's perspective (1989) prompts us to think about the idea built on the relations Brazil-United States, with issues that focus on political, economic, diplomatic and socio-cultural matters, but that do not objectively problematize the collective memory, from the perspective of the interests of Latin American elites towards the United States. How did the expansion of American collaboration networks, initially through the binational centers, remain hidden, silenced or forgotten in historical narratives?

As to the field of social and institutional memory, binational centers and their collections, with circulation of renowned historical personalities, have remained overshadowed, inaccessible and conditioned to the celebration of the regional elites that make up the social fabric of those centers. How did this process impact the building of a national identity and its perception of the United States? What really boosted the building of the social imaginary of the American Way of Life in Brazil? In that regard, to work with the imaginary as anchor, like in the case of the North American cultural diffusion in Brazil, Baczko (1984) points out that, either political or intellectual, elites quickly realize which symbolic device, represented by culture, constitutes an effective tool to influence and redirect collective sensitivity and, thus, influence it. In conclusion, these questions will be investigated in future studies, as further research is carried out about the collections of collaboration networks, in particular, North American binational centers.

### Final considerations

The social function of institutional collections for researchers of the past is crucial to interpret the contemporary world, and to reinterpret the present time. Fragments of memory uncovered from the discoveries of new collections can give new meaning to concepts, contexts, narratives and problematize different perspectives about complex issues that permeate society:

Archival documents are not representations of collective memory, and archival institutions are not deposits of collective memory. Instead, those files are sources to potentially recover memories that had been lost. A particular advantage they have as vehicles of collective memory (besides their persistence) is that they can remain unsuspected and undisturbed while individual memories fade, and collective memory is reconfigured, or even when there are conscious efforts to erase memory. (Hedstrom, 2016, p. 255)

The established historical awareness, contextualized by Rösen (2009), and the aforementioned memory framed around the transformations of a complex process such as the expansion of binational centers are very challenging. The dynamics of the ICBNA, on its own, with almost ninety years of history, and the social groups that participated there contributed to create a social imaginary, full of symbolism and the genesis of an idea about the United States that is embedded in the Gaucho society to date.



In times of internationalization of educational processes, as pointed out by João (2008), with the emergence and popularization of bilingualism, international<sup>12</sup> schools, opportunities in higher education, post graduation and exchange programs in North American institutions, we need to understand how the North American collaboration networks shaped Brazilian society's social imaginary in the twentieth century. Given that binational centers were pioneers in the process of cultural exchange and diffusion, fulfilling the wishes of several elites that constitute Brazilian society, the final considerations in this article aim to reflect on the relationship between the collections of the binational centers and national identity in the face of the process exposed so far:

In an agency, government effort is required to articulate the interests concerning educational, scientific and cultural development in the Western Hemisphere. It's a matter of homogenization of ways of thinking. A campaign must be started to capture the Ibero-American intellectual elite through radio, television, books, articles and leaflets, more donations, scholarships and awards. What interests intellectuals most is consideration and recognition and a program with those characteristics may attract them. (Pinsky, 2007, p. 139)

There are multiple factors to be analyzed in the successful journey of our "neighbors", which will not all be addressed here as they require a wider range of interdisciplinary intersections for a better understanding of the process. However, there is a social group that is highlighted in institutional memories and narratives, either because of the articulation with North American actors or because of the power of cultural diffusion and social conviction: Brazilian elites, consumers of the American Way of Life, with representation and symbolic power in relation to different social dimensions.

Therefore, in the current context of studies about social memory, some concepts find variables according to their applicability, since the effect of "presentism" plays a significant role in some reinterpretations of the combinations employed, such as in the specific case of the connections between the concepts of social memory and identity.

As a result, it may be worth remembering that the action of time needs to be taken into account as the fields of study on social memory develop, with many cross-sectional studies related to the concept. Social Memory and Identity are concepts that dialogue and complement each other, but, in many cases, they

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12 For further information, access: <https://educacaobilingue.com/escolas/escolas-internacionais/>.

have meanings and theoretical-methodological paths that are potentially influenced by the “presentism” of the social imaginary and of the political situation, driven by the transformations of the international system.

The path presented so far serves as the basis to understand the process of expansion of binational centers, the formation of their collections and the impact on Brazilian identity. James Fearon’s article entitled ‘What is Identity (as we now use the word)?’, published in November 1999, on the eve of what people agreed to call “the millennium turning point”, and Stuart Hall’s influential work entitled “Cultural identity in post-modernity”, also published in the 1990s, can bring important contributions to understand how Brazil’s cultural identity was directly influenced by the United States.

Fearon (1999) begins his analysis problematizing the meaning of “identity”, in which he states the complexity and centrality of the concept in the countless discussions involving political science, all anchored in national, ethnic, gender and identity issues. However, the author understands that the uses, interpretations and applicability of the concept of “identity”, as we know it today, were achieved thanks to the advances of research in the field of psychology, and he cites the researcher and psychologist Erik Erikson and his studies in the 1950s as essential to understand the concept.

In this perspective, considering Fearon’s proposal (1999), there are some possible interpretations and approximations of the concept in the social imaginary analyzed by Baczko (1984), whether in everyday contexts and/or in the field of social sciences. Therefore, considering the number of binational centers consolidated in Brazil in the 1990s, it is important to remember that the author’s production period was connected to the problematizations of the end of the millennium, in the emptiness of the impacts of the new world order caused by the end of the Cold War. There was, then, a rearrangement of hegemonies in the international system, with many epistemological “fractures” to elucidate, considering the expansion of postcolonial studies and the memories framed in the field of analysis of Brazil-United States relations.

Nevertheless, considering our national identity, North American culture remained gathering followers/consumers, since the memory framed on English teaching, exchange program opportunities and the “dream” of living the North American lifestyle were enhanced with the perspectives of the turn of the millennium. It is noteworthy that in this period the binational centers increased their branches, hoping that the turn of the millennium would be promising, as the example of the ICBNA:

Between the 1980s and 1990s, the ICBNA built branches in traditional districts of Porto Alegre, like Petrópolis, Moinhos de Vento and Tristeza, trying to increase its operation area and mainly trying to establish English language teaching throughout the capital city. In the following decades, the embassy's investments seem to have declined, English language teaching has spread through other private institutions and the ICBNA, trapped in the glamor of its foundation, failed to keep up with new market demands. For five years, the institution transferred its brand to a multinational group for English teaching activities. Without English teaching activities, the institution tried, without success, to project itself again in the cultural scenario as it had done in the beginning of its activities in the 1930s, which inevitably coincided with renting some floors of its headquarters, the sale of its branches and library. The only activities the institution carries out are social projects in partnership with the US embassy. Nowadays, the collection is improperly packed in a place kept by the institution in the north district of Porto Alegre. (Pinnow, 2014, p. 125)

On the one hand, Fearon (1999) analyzes the uses of “identity” as a social category, defined by association rules, based on expected behaviors and also with socially distinctive characteristics; on the other hand, Hall (2005) analyzes the cultural identity issue more precisely. This author refers to a late modernity, trying to define the existence or not of an identity “crisis”, taking into account the countless processes related to the world-systems theory by Wallerstein (2000) and the likelihood of identity decentralization, as a result of the consequences of globalization and of the consequences of a game of identities. In general, if we consider the authors' reflections, focusing on the history of binational centers, we can consider the identity crisis in Brazil as historically rooted due to the colonization process and to our late independence.

However, according to Fearon's (1999) proposal, the process of cultural diffusion by North American actors can be analyzed with the uses of “identity” as a social and association category, while from the perspective of Hall (2005) it can be analyzed with the likelihood of an identity crisis, mainly in the social imagery of Brazilian intellectual elites.

Consequently, it is not so simple to problematize a historical culture, an identity and an established/framed social memory. It is a long process of building historical awareness, rearranging the uses of memory and expanding discussions about new possibilities of analysis. Therefore, Paul Ricoeur's contributions (2007) also become relevant and important to conclude this study about Brazil-United States relations, as the author looks into the excesses and errors in the uses of memory, as well as into the variations in forgetting policies which, in Ricoeur's view (2007), makes it hard to build a fair memory and, as a consequence, in the case of this study, a historical culture:

Public concern: it disturbs me the unsettling spectacle that shows excess of memory here, excess of forgetfulness there, not to mention the influence of celebrations and errors of memory - and of forgetfulness. The idea of a policy of fair memory is, in this regard, one of my declared civic themes. (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 17)

Complementing Ricoeur's observations (2007), but with a more pessimistic perspective, Rüsen (2009) points out that there was a structural crisis in the twentieth century, which he calls "catastrophic", and that undoubtedly interfered with historical awareness and the ability to carry and promote meaning in the established narratives. Rüsen categorically states that:

A "catastrophic crisis" destroys the capacity of the historical awareness to process the possibility in a narrative that carries and provides meaning. In this case, the basic principles of generation of meaning in themselves, which allow for the coherence of the historical narrative, are challenged or even destroyed. They need to go beyond the cultural here and now or be abandoned. That is why it is impossible to give this crisis a place in the memory of those who need to suffer it. When that happens, the language of historical sense is silenced. It becomes traumatic. It takes time, sometimes even generations, to find the language in which it is possible to articulate it. (Rüsen, 2009, p. 8)

The authors here analyzed contribute to the development of this study given the uses of memory and with contributions to historical culture. The crisis Rüsen (2009) mentions and Ricoeur's (2007) public concern emphasize that the researchers of the past must recognize the relationship between history and memory, the problematization of forgetting, the identification of silencing and the urgent correction of anachronisms that shape historical knowledge. Speaking of anachronisms, the collections of binational centers and their respective primary sources are *in limbo*, forgotten and with countless possibilities of analysis of a still ongoing process.

This research study aimed to articulate different author contributions and their connections with research on the expansion of US collaboration networks formed by binational centers all over Brazil. It must be emphasized that the collections of the institutions presented here can incorporate new analytical perspectives about the subject Brazil-United States, not disqualifying the existing productions, but "unframing" historical culture and social memory on narratives that exempt Brazilian elites from the results of the executed process.

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