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A MICROSCOPIC CASE:
THE BUTANTAN RURAL GRADED SCHOOL AND RURAL EDUCATION
IN BRAZIL IN THE 1930s¹

UN CASO MICROSCOPICO:
LA BUTANTAN GRADED SCHOOL E L'EDUCAZIONE RURALE
IN BRASILE NEGLI ANNI '30

*The article takes as its point of departure a localized experience, with the aim of illustrating how rural education was constituted as a battlefield involving social and economic dimensions in Brazil and abroad. We begin by investigating the pedagogic practice of educator Noêmia Saraiva de Mattos Cruz developed at the Butantan Rural Graded School in 1933, through which we intend to clarify representations of a country undergoing an agricultural expansion that demanded citizens wholesome in body and mind. That educator associated the official contents of teaching to rural activities such as silk culture, beekeeping, poultry farming, rabbit keeping, horticulture, silviculture, gardening and pomiculture, and gave visibility to her actions through a series of actions including the publication of the 1936 book *Educação Rural* (Rural Education), as well as talks and presentations in Conferences, articles to newspapers and pedagogic journals, and, above all, through the photographs she took of the activities of the Agricultural Club. Noêmia Cruz described her practice as a “pedagogy of action”, a reference to the Active School, a growing trend in Europe since the 1920s. In the few citations identified in her texts, we found reference to Spanish educator José Mallart y Cutó, who wrote about the relation between work and education. The books by Mallart y Cutó had large repercussion in Brazil, and were part of pedagogical libraries, apart from serving as inspiration to reflections about the rural world. Under a wider lens, we noticed that several countries associated to the New Education Fellowship made considerations about rural education strengthening the circulation of intercontinental pedagogical ideas, and connecting the localised experienced of Noêmia Cruz to discussions about rural education conducted at an international level.*

L'articolo prende spunto da un'esperienza localizzata, con l'obiettivo di illustrare come l'educazione rurale sia stata un campo di battaglia che coinvolge dimensioni sociali ed economiche in Brasile e all'estero. Iniziamo con lo studio della pratica pedagogica dell'educatrice Noêmia Saraiva de Mattos Cruz sviluppata nel 1933 alla Scuola Elementare Rurale de Butantan, attraverso la quale intendiamo chiarire le rappresentazioni di un paese sottoposto a un'espansione agricola che richiedeva ai cittadini un sano benessere per il corpo e per la mente. Questa educatrice associava i contenuti ufficiali dell'insegnamento alle attività rurali come la cultura della seta, l'apicoltura, l'allevamento di polli, la cura del coniglio, l'orticoltura, la silvicoltura, il giardinaggio e la pomicoltura, e diede visibilità alla sua attività attraverso una serie di azioni inclusa la pubblicazione del libro del 1936 *Educação Rural* (Educazione Rurale), oltre a conferenze e presentazioni in conferenze, articoli a giornali e riviste pedagogiche e, soprattutto, attraverso le fotografie che ha scattato sulle attività del club agricolo. Noêmia Cruz ha descritto la sua pratica come una “pedagogia dell'azione”, un riferimento alla Scuola attiva, una tendenza in crescita in Europa dagli anni '20. Nelle poche citazioni identificate nei suoi testi, abbiamo trovato riferimenti all'educatore spagnolo José Mallart y Cutó, che ha scritto sulla relazione tra lavoro e istruzione. I libri di Mallart y Cutó hanno avuto grandi ripercussioni in Brasile e facevano parte di biblioteche pedagogiche, oltre a

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servire come ispirazione per le riflessioni sul mondo rurale. Sotto una lente più ampia, abbiamo notato che diversi paesi associati alla New Education Fellowship hanno fatto considerazioni sull'educazione rurale rafforzando la circolazione di idee pedagogiche intercontinentali e collegando l'esperienza localizzata di Noêmia Cruz alle discussioni sull'educazione rurale condotte a livello internazionale.

Key words: rural education; Noêmia Cruz; Mallart y Cutó; active education; New Education Fellowship; nationalisms.

Parole chiave: educazione rurale; Noêmia Cruz; Mallart y Cutó; educazione attiva; New Education Fellowship; nazionalismi.

Introduction

In the pages of the 28 December 1937 edition of the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper, H. Bassi, analyzing the efforts to disseminate rural education in Brazil, considered the experience conducted at the Butantan Rural Graded School as a microscopic case «when compared to the nationwide problem, and therefore not deserving of all those praises»². In the correlation he established between the curbing of rural exodus and the propagation of rural education, the work developed at the São Paulo primary school emerged to that author as an exceptional, isolated case of little usefulness to revert the attraction exerted upon the rural populations by the urban zones. With his lens adjusted to the macro, Bassi did not recognize the potential of that experience. However, when readjusting our lens and approaching the micro, what could appear as negligible loomed as a proficuous trigger of the understanding about the struggles over representations surrounding the meanings of rural and countryside in the 1930s, of the rural education practices and of disputes around the conceptions of rural education in Brazil and in the world. Starting from “a microscopic case”, namely, that of the Butantan Rural Graded School and of the pedagogical practice of Noêmia Saraiva de Mattos Cruz, we intend to detail the outlines of a history of school, reconstructed in the daily activities in class, in permanent dialogue with local and national dynamics and with the international tensions within the educational arena.

For that, we take Noêmia Cruz's biography as the main thread running through our narrative. The courses she attended, the institutions at which she taught, the conferences she gave, the book she wrote about her practice, the photographs in which she registered activities of the *Clube Agrícola* (Agricultural Club), and newspaper cuttings she collected, all constitute elements that come together in association with the history of the institution and of the region in which she worked and lived. At the same time, this trajectory gives visibility to the debates about rural education, and reveals the interests at stake within this sphere of public policies concerning the reconfiguration of labor relations in the field and of social control.

In the Noêmia Cruz's archives donated to the Rural Graded School we found: Report of the School Agricultural Club (1934-1935); Book of Rural Activities of the

² «frente ao problema nacional, e que por isso não merecia todos aqueles louvores» (*Correjo Paulistano*, 28/12/1937).

Agricultural Club (1934); activities of students in illustrated charts (entomology, silk culture, beekeeping, horticulture and poultry farming), all from 1934; translation of the book *Elevação moral e material dos camponeses* (Moral and material elevation of peasants) by Mallart y Cutó, made by the teacher; the children's newspaper *Rumo ao Campo* (Towards the Countryside) (1936 – photocopy, 1941 – printed); notebooks on silk culture (1937), childcare (1937), poultry farming (1938), horticulture (1939) and gardening (1945); Register of Trees (1934); among others. These sources afforded a better understanding of the school daily life and of pedagogical practices based on the reading activities conducted by the subjects implicated therein – teacher and pupils – and expanded the dialogue with experience, connecting the local (São Paulo) to the global (Spain).

We have also used the Annals of the National Conferences on Education, the educational legislation, newspapers, periodicals and books by Brazilian and foreign educators contemporary to the experiences of the Butantan Rural Graded School. The procedure has allowed us to perceive the actions of Noêmia Cruz as an appropriation of the proposals about rural education that have been gestated since the early 20th century in Brazil and in other countries, providing evidence for the international circulation of pedagogical ideas and practices.

The period covered by the research goes from 1933 to 1943, the time when Noêmia Cruz worked as teacher and later as principal of the institution, but which extends both backwards and forwards when necessary for the construction of the argument. Our methodology was chiefly based on the contributions by Carlo Ginzburg (2007) and Giovanni Levi (1992) about the microhistory and the normal exception, as well as on the warnings by Michel de Certeau (1995) on the formality of practices and appropriations, and by Roger Chartier (1991) about struggles over representation.

Noêmia Cruz and the Butantan Rural Graded School

In the 1930s, educators problematized the teaching at Brazilian schools considering it to be traditional, bookish and distant from the social reality of pupils. The educational reforms of the 1920s³ brought with them new proposals for public education, but it was particularly since 1927 with the Federal District Reform conducted by Fernando de Azevedo (Vidal, 2013) that the New School appeared as a nomenclature that brought together education and pupils' experiences. However, it was only after the publication of the Manifest of the Pioneers of the New Education to the People and to the Government in 1932 that a movement of educators known to the historiography of education as *escolanovistas* (New Schoolers) was constituted (Vidal, 2013).

At the macropolitical level, Brazil was then governed by Getúlio Vargas, who came

³ The 1920s saw educational reforms in the States of São Paulo (1920), Ceará (1922-1923), Bahia (1924), Rio Grande do Norte (1925-1928), Paraná (1927-1928), Minas Gerais (1927-1928), Rio de Janeiro (1927-1930), and Espírito Santo (1928-1930).

to power in 1930 and remained as president of the republic until 1945 as a result of a political coup in 1937. During his government State governors were appointed, and they in turn were responsible for appointing school principals, and also the members of the State Board of Education. In São Paulo, the changes in members of the State Board of Education and State governors followed swiftly, alongside educational proposals and visions about the best teaching practices.

According to Ecar (2017), there were at the time two predominant proposals that contended for initiatives and that saw themselves as original: one by the New Schoolers and the other coming from the pedagogical ruralists. In essence, such proposals had similar principles and ends, based on the interest of pupils, prescribing the contact with nature, the observation and study as mainstays of productive work and formation of the citizen. They differed in geographical reach, since pedagogical ruralism aimed only to strengthen the schools located in the countryside, whereas New School proposed a single urban and rural school adapted to the region in which it was located.

In 1932, amidst such disputes, Sud Mennucci, teacher, literary critic, journalist and staunch supporter of pedagogical ruralism, became head of the State of São Paulo Board of Education and appointed Noêmia Saraiva de Mattos Cruz to work at the Butantan Graded School and initiate therein an experience of rural education. In the research carried out by Ecar (2017) it was not possible to ascertain why Noêmia Cruz was chosen to start the practice of rural education; however, it is known that she was introduced to Sud Mennucci by a teacher called Horácio Augusto da Silveira. The Butantan Graded School was located inside the Butantan Institute⁴. It substituted the Isolated School created in 1908 to cater for adults and children, chiefly employees of the Institute and their children, and which in 1926 had become a Graded school⁵.

Through the newspapers found in the Newspaper and Magazine Digital Archive of the National Library⁶ we managed to follow Noêmia Cruz's history. Born in 1894 in her grandparents' farm in the countryside of the State of São Paulo, Noêmia Cruz moved with her family to the cities of Santos and Taubaté before coming to the capital of the State in 1908 to study at the Secondary Normal School of Republic Square. After graduating, she moved back to the interior of the State, taking up residence in Pedreira. It was common then for the newly graduated to work away from the capital cities even against their will, however in the case of Noêmia Cruz choosing to move to the countryside meant not having to marry early (Demartini 2002), the fate of most women of her age group at that time.

Between 1913 in 1919 Noêmia Cruz alternated teaching in the countryside – at the Pedreira Graded School – and in the Capital – at the Arouche Graded School. Afflicted by tropical ailments that devastated the Brazilian population, after many health

⁴ The Butantan Institute operates since the late 19th century, located in the city of São Paulo, and is renowned for its research and production of serums and vaccines against plagues and diseases.

⁵ The term isolated school refers to a single-teacher unit bringing together pupils of various ages and series under the responsibility of a single teacher. A Graded School was a unit with classes organized by series, with one teacher per series, and a principal responsible for school administration.

⁶ <http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>

leaves, the educator relinquished her post as a teacher in 1920. From that date until 1932 we were unable to find documents that gave clues as to the professional activities of the educator. We only know that she got married, moved to Rio de Janeiro and returned to São Paulo in 1923.

With her appointment to initiate rural education at the Butantan Graded School in 1932, Noêmia Cruz collected her previous experiences living in the countryside during her early childhood, her formation as a teacher, her teaching experiences in the rural and urban zones, and the courses she attended on rural matters. “She started her endeavor by the Secretary of Agriculture. She enrolled for the Farming Course of the Biological Institute of Agricultural Defense in São Paulo, which had as its purpose to divulge knowledge to farmers in conferences given by technicians and scientists” (Ecar 2017, 134)⁷. She also

[...] completed the course and then enrolled in a course for Foremen, organized by the Água Branca Park Animal Industry Directorship, which accepted student from both sexes [...], where she gained practical knowledge about special husbandry, methods for raising and treating domestic animals, care of young animals, manual and mechanical milking, milk, butter and cheese, notions of veterinary medicine, types of slurry pits, and notions of poultry farming, beekeeping and silk culture, knowledges which, according to Adalberto Telles, she already possessed. This course included a visit to the Nova Odessa Farm for observation of the installation of a model farm. After completing the Course for Foremen, she was an apprentice in the Entomology, Phytopathology and Botanic sections of the Biological Institute (Ecar, 2017, 136)⁸.

Noêmia Cruz’s formation in and interest for rural subjects brought her a reputation as an expert. The Butantan Graded School was ruralized by Decree No. 6047 of 19 August 1933, being then denominated Butantan Rural Graded School. The law prescribed the functioning of the school in an experimental mode, that is, Noêmia Cruz had autonomy to conduct her work without any official prescription.

The educator started rural education with the third-series class of male students, and later expanded it to the whole school⁹. When doing this, she proposed to the students the creation of an Agricultural Club, an association in which they should cultivate flowers, vegetables and plants, and raise bees, silkworms, rabbits, and chicken,

⁷ «Iniciou sua empreitada pela Secretaria de Agricultura. Inscreveu-se no Curso para Criadores do Instituto Biológico de Defesa Agrícola em São Paulo, que tinha por objetivo divulgar conhecimentos para os lavradores em palestras dadas por técnicos e cientistas» (Ecar 2017, 134).

⁸ «[...] completou o curso e em seguida se inscreveu no de Capatazes, organizado pela Diretoria de Indústria Animal do Parque da Água Branca, que recebia inscrições de ambos os sexos [...], onde obteve conhecimentos, de forma prática, sobre noções de zootecnia especial, métodos de criação e tratamento de animais domésticos, cuidados com animais novos, ordenha manual e mecânica, leite, manteiga e queijo, noções de veterinária, tipos de estrumeiras, e noções de avicultura, apicultura e sericultura, saberes que de acordo com Adalberto Telles, a professora já possuía. Esse curso promoveu uma visita à Fazenda Nova Odessa para observação da instalação de uma fazenda modelo. Ao terminar o Curso de Capatazes, fez estágio nas seções de Entomologia, Fitopatologia e Botânica do Instituto Biológico» (Ecar 2017, 136).

⁹ At that time, primary education was offered to children older than seven in isolated schools in 3-year modules, and in graded schools in 4-year modules (Decree No. 5884 of 21 April 1933 institutes the Education Code, First Article, see <http://www.al.sp.gov.br/repositorio/legislacao/decreto/1933/decreto-5884-21.04.1933.html>).

among other activities. Firstly, pupils prepared an authorization letter to be signed by their parents, because they would take products home to continue the training given at school, whilst Noêmia Cruz wrote to Dinorah Chacon, principal of the Graded School. After being authorized, students began activities in the Agricultural Club on 19 November 1933, and the first activity was the rearing of silkworm in the classroom.

In the beginning of 1934, Noêmia Cruz recorded in the Book of Rural Activities the names of pupils interested in the proposal, including boys and girls from other series in the school. In the Book there were records of activities of horticulture; gardening; poultry farming; silk culture; rabbit keeping, fields (rice, corn, beans and soy); pomiculture; greenhouse plants (ornamental); beekeeping; sugarcane fields; and silviculture. Initially, activities were coordinated by the educator, developed during break time and before and after classes. Later, according to the teacher, pupils felt the need to extend activities into the class periods.

According to Noêmia Cruz, the proposal was based on the “pedagogy of action” (Cruz 1936), an appropriation of Active School, a movement initiated in Europe in the 1920s¹⁰. «The proposal of Active Schools [for that educator] involved the contact with nature, the care of the self and of the other, the playing, the incentive to assemble a museum and a library, the school outings and works with carpentry and agriculture» (Ecar 2017, 179)¹¹. Noêmia Cruz’s pedagogy idealized the formation of a «patriotic, strong and healthy»¹² citizen (Cruz 1936, 7) in a moment of increasing nationalism in Brazilian politics, also experienced by other countries just before the start of World War II.

At that moment, Brazilian intellectuals began to question and somehow to build the “roots of Brazil”, seeking to value regional products and to affirm that the formation of the country had its “origin” in three races: European, black and indigenous. The mention to the “strong and healthy” citizen by Noêmia Cruz meant to foster practices of personal hygiene, including eating healthily, and to establish medical knowledge as the single way of guaranteeing health to individuals. The mention to “strength” denoted a valuation of eugenic science to the formation of a robust, vigorous and potent “race”.

To Noêmia Cruz, rural education gave the child the opportunity to «observe, abstract and generalize» (Cruz 1936, 16)¹³. In the vision of that teacher, by observing and interacting with nature the child would recognize itself as a living being acting in its environment, caring for the region, for the soil, extolling agriculture as the basis for the progress of the country. To the educator, rural education achieved «[...] a true reform of the mentality of our people, and its beneficial action, starting with the forgotten man of today’s backlands, will reach all sectors of life in the country, giving them precisely what they now lack for the security of our future and greatness of

¹⁰ To Daniel Hameline (1995), the expression Active School was disseminated in Switzerland after 1919 and more intensely in the other European countries after 1922, having been created by educator Adolphe Ferrière.

¹¹ «A proposta de Escola Ativa [para a educadora] envolvia o contato com a natureza, o cuidado de si e do outro, o brincar, o incentivo à montagem de museu e biblioteca, as aulas-passeio e os trabalhos com marcenaria e agricultura» (Ecar 2017, 179).

¹² «patriota, forte e sadio» (Cruz 1936, 7).

¹³ «observar, abstrair e generalizar» (Cruz 1936, 16).

Brazil» (Cruz 1936, 8)¹⁴. She also warned that «As a Brazilian educator, that is how I understand the national problem, and wishing to work for the good of our nation and for the happiness of the Brazilian people I have been putting sincere effort in the service of a cause that I deem patriotic and of immense benefit to the nationality» (Cruz 1936, 8)¹⁵.

An innovation in the experience of Noêmia Cruz was to link rural education to the contents of the official primary education of the State of São Paulo, even though she worked at an experimental school. While students sorted the food for poultry, the teacher proposed the weighing process, thereby teaching on the theme of “weights”. In one occasion Noêmia Cruz was with her class in the classroom when one of the pupils noticed that the bees they kept had left the beehive to land on the cypress. The teacher took that moment to present to the pupils the inside of a beehive, showing them in a practical way what she had been teaching about bees. Pupils wrote a text reporting on the occurrence, exercising writing according to the contents of “Language”. Other examples illustrated the interconnection between the practice of the Agricultural Club and official curriculum, demonstrating how the teacher would translate Active School tenets in her daily work in the classroom.

The actions of Noêmia Cruz were not an isolated experience, but rather a synthesis of endeavors conducted to expand rural education in a moment when Brazil sought to establish itself as a prominent country in the agricultural field. She divulged her work, among other places, at the First Conference of Regional Education in Bahia in 1934; in 1939, when she represented the State of São Paulo in the Education Conference of Minas Gerais; and in 1942 at the Eighth Brazilian Congress of Education. The repercussion of her work brought her an invitation to organize rural education in the city of Juiz de Fora in the State of Minas Gerais in 1939. With the creation in 1943 of the Technical Assistance of Rural Education in the Department of Education of São Paulo, she assumed the position of Inspector of Rural Education, becoming head of the section in 1950.

Thus, from her local dimension, the work as teacher at a school of the rural neighborhood of Butantan, the educator reached executive power, enlarging the scope of her action to the whole city of Juiz de Fora, and later to the whole State of São Paulo.

Rural education and the reconfigurations of work relations in Brazil

Brazil was in 1888 the last country of the American continent to abolish slavery, a movement in which Monarchy too was being questioned as a viable form of govern-

¹⁴ «[...] uma verdadeira reforma na mentalidade do nosso povo e a sua ação benéfica, começando pelo esquecido sertanejo de agora, atingirá todos os setores da vida do país, dando-lhe, justamente, o que lhe falta para segurança do nosso futuro e da grandeza do Brasil» (Cruz 1936, 8).

¹⁵ «Como educadora brasileira, compreendo assim o problema nacional e desejando trabalhar pelo bem de nossa pátria e pela felicidade do povo brasileiro, tenho posto minha dedicação sincera a serviço duma causa que julgo patriótica e de largos benefícios para a nacionalidade» (*Ibidem*).

ment for the country, being replaced by the Republic in the following year. Various issues emerged at that time, such as the hygienization of spaces and individuals, the search to ensure hegemony in the production of coffee and sugar as the main products exported by the country, checking the movement from the field to the cities, and the whitening of the population with the incentive to the entry of European foreigners, among others. The establishment of the Republic did not occur without tensions and disputes among different groups with contrasting, or even diverging, social, political, economic and cultural interests.

In the sphere of agriculture, specifically in São Paulo, middle classes strived to demonstrate that the nation's progress would follow the preparation of the workforce through farming studies and techniques to make the most of the land. This perspective conflicted with that of large coffee producers who, at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, had the city of São Paulo, capital of the State, as a place for business and leisure, while maintaining farms in the rural areas, and often keeping illegal slave workforces. The former group defended diversified cultures for the development of the soil, whilst the latter was committed to monoculture. Both, however, were contrary to industrialization and the urbanization of cities.

The educators, both the pedagogical ruralists and the New Schoolers, dialogued with the middle classes. At the outset of the 20th century, the Directorship of Public Instruction of the State of São Paulo suggested that schools should have an “agricultural face”, that is, that the idea was not to «convert public schools into agricultural centers of learning, but to make use of the lessons of intuitive education and highlight life in the fields through their hygienic, economic and natural beauty characteristics, in an attempt to oppose urbanism» (Ecar 2017, 39)¹⁶. The incentive to lessons from objects¹⁷ seems to have been a way to promote affinity between individual and land, establishing a connection between the producer and the consumer of nature.

After World War I, the discourse about the “eminently agricultural” Brazil received much attention as the call for nationalism intensified and the idea emerged of rediscovering a “folkloric and regional” Brazil (Oliveira 2002, 349). Intellectuals began to build a social scenario based on the supposed “national backwardness”, and, according to Oliveira (2002, 349), at the same time that they extolled the man of the backlands as the “authentic symbol of nationality”, they despised him for his illnesses of body and intellect.

The distinction between rural and urban was also present in the educational scenario, becoming clear in São Paulo with the 1918 classification of schools into isolated rural, district, and urban. In 1920, the educational reform brought about by Act No. 1750, diagnosing a deficit in assistance to schools located in rural zones, most of them

¹⁶ «converter as escolas públicas em aprendizados agrícolas, mas aproveitar as lições do ensino intuitivo e destacar a vida no campo pelo lado higiênico, econômico e das belezas naturais, tentando fazer uma oposição ao urbanismo» (Ecar 2017, 39).

¹⁷ The method of object lessons was initially proposed in the final decades of the 19th century as a way to introduce the primacy of empiricism in primary education. It proposed that learning should start from the senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell) to achieve scientific knowledge. Seen as concentric, teaching should go from the near to the far, from the concrete to the abstract, progressively expanding the contents mobilized in the classroom.

isolated schools, authorized the purchase of an area for the building of a teachers' residence, as well as of a small field for the development of agricultural education.

The educational initiatives in São Paulo were aligned with proposals put forward at the national level during the 1920s. The educational reforms conducted in the other States of the federation indicated labor as an educative principle, based on the contact with nature, and already by the end of the decade, as an axis for school activities. At that point, studies about agricultural techniques had achieved considerable development; Brazilian industrialization had grown alongside urbanization, particularly in the capitals; and a new wave of immigration brought foreigners to the country to join the ranks of workers in the fields and in the cities. The New York Stock Market Crash at the end of the decade, contributed to the imbalance of world economic relations, stimulating defense policies of the National State.

The discourse about Brazil as an “eminently agricultural” country was followed by the allegation of a supposed field-city migration initiated at the end of the 19th century. A representation of the rural areas as spaces to be still explored, particularly by the Brazilian, was then forged. The fear that immigrants might occupy lands in the interior of the country drove proposals for the permanence of Brazilians in the rural areas, so as to protect and perpetuate the territory for the nationals. In this sense, the proposal by pedagogical ruralists aimed at settling individuals on the land, teaching them to be productive citizens and to contribute to the future of the nation based on their insertion in the countryside. New School educators also presented mechanisms to curb rural exodus, which brought together discourses and initiatives from those two groups, creating a zone of consensus in spite of the disputes about the general features that such rural school should assume.

While Noêmia Cruz's experience stood out as an interdisciplinary initiative, it did not take place in isolation. According to Moraes (2014), in 1933 São Paulo had 22 rural graded schools in operation, out of which 21 were located in the interior of the State. During that decade, for the primary education in rural areas «legislation prescribed the contact with nature, the cultivation of the land, the knowledge and valuation of the region in which students lived, the acquisition of moral and hygiene habits and, with that, the settling of families in their localities» (Ecar 2017, 67)¹⁸. These principles were reinforced by Noêmia Cruz in her book *Rural Education* (1936), in which she “discussed the “love of the land”, the “cooperation”, “the care of the body” and the “learning by doing” as characteristics of a school in a rural area. The “learning by doing” was described as the basis of her work (Ecar 2017, 67).

Such characteristics were also present in the translation made by the educator of the book *La elevación moral y material del campesino*, by José Mallart y Cutó, published in 1933 in Madrid by the Gráfica Mundial (Pérez Fernández 2003, 155). In her experience, the educator established a dialogue with Mallart y Cutó regarding the

¹⁸ «as legislações previam o contato com a natureza, o cultivo da terra, o conhecimento e a valorização da região em que os alunos viviam, a aquisição de hábitos higiênicos e morais, e, com isso, a fixação das famílias em sua localidade» (Ecar 2017, 67).

need to ruralize primary education, and of making use of silviculture to the reforestation of devastated areas, and the feast of the trees for extolling the virtues of land and life. It is equally noticeable the mention to the theses of the book when the educator discussed the high intelligence of the peasant, and work as reverberation of organized society, in line with the thesis presented at the Eighth Brazilian Congress of Education in 1942.

International circulation of pedagogical ideas about rural education

José Mallart y Cutó, the only foreign author cited by Noêmia Cruz, was born in Spain in 1897. He trained as a teacher at the *Escuela Normal de Maestros* (1911-1915) and subsequently attended the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, collaborating with Édouard Claparède and attending the classes of Pierre Bovet, Lutoslawski and Pillard y Malsch (Pérez Fernández 2003, 155). The Spanish author received an invitation from Editorial Labor to «present the state-of-the-art in the application of the Science of Education» (Padilla, and Huertas 1999, 343)¹⁹, and the result was the publication in 1925 of the book *Educación Activa*. The work travelled quickly to Brazil distributed by *Livraria Editora Freitas Bastos*, in Rio de Janeiro, and by *Livraria Lealdade*, in São Paulo. In 1931, in an advertisement published in the newspaper *A Gazeta* of São Paulo, the book was on sale for the price of 8\$000 (*A Gazeta*, 16/06/1931, 6). Even before that, the Teachers' Library (*Bibliotheca dos Professores*) of the 2nd District of Rio de Janeiro recorded the volume as part of its archives (*Jornal do Brasil* 24/04/1931, 17).

Indeed, the work had an impact on the reflection of Brazilian educators and references to it circulated in newspapers in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Paraná, contributing to the arguments in defense of Active Education. In the Education Page (*Página da Educação*) section of the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* of 15 August 1930, Atilio Vivacqua, a reformer of public instruction from Espírito Santo, referred to Mallart y Cutó and explicitly to his book *Active Education (Educación Activa)* as one of the theoretical frameworks of the plan implemented in the State in 1929. José Vitorino, talking about the “Modern School and Politics” recalled the Spanish author to comment on the changes implemented by Annibal Bruno in the Technical Directorship of Education of Pernambuco (*Diário de Notícias* 15/08/1930, 5).

Other books by Mallart y Cutó were also made available in Brazil almost immediately after their publication in Spain. The newspaper *A Gazeta* in its 9 July 1931 edition, under the instigating headline of “New School: interesting and useful collection of books targeted at the teachers”²⁰, recommended the reading of *La escuela del trabajo*, published in Spain in 1928 (*A Gazeta* 09/07/1931, 6). The theme was then fashionable, and the work was promptly incorporated into the national literature. Aristosto Espinheira, in an article entitled “Active School or Work School” (*Escola Activa*

¹⁹ «exponer lo más moderno de la aplicación de la Ciencia de Educación» (Padilla, and Huertas 1999, 343).

²⁰ «Escola Nova: interessante e util collecção de livros destinados ao professorado» (*A Gazeta*, 09/07/1931, 6).

ou do Trabalho), published on the Education Page in 1931, cited the Spanish author to affirm that «the introduction of the idea of work in education is a logical consequence of civilization» (*Diário de Notícias* 07/01/1931, 7)²¹.

According to Pérez Fernández (2003), Mallart y Cutó in association with others had created the National Committee of Scientific Organization of Labor in 1928, and was ahead of the *Revista de Organización Científica*²². In 1932, he was appointed Inspector of Work Schools by the Ministry for Education, and in 1934 he was appointed chief of the Pedagogical Section of the National Institute of Professional Reeducation. During this period, he published, among others, *La elevación moral y material del campesino* (1933) e *Organización científica del trabajo agrícola* (1934) (Pérez Fernández 2003, 155).

From the first of these works, we have news based on the translation prepared by Noêmia Cruz. The book was divided into four parts. The first problematized the rural exodus in Spain, dealing with the ruralization of primary schools, with reforestation, as well as with silviculture; the second part discussed questions about work, professional formation and specialization of agricultural labor; the third part dealt with the valuation of the “especially gifted” in the fields; the fourth part discussed the scientific organization of labor, emphasizing the creation of school institutions, including trees feasts, silviculture and the youngsters club.

About *Organización científica del trabajo agrícola*, references can be found in Brazilian newspapers and purchase records can be located in libraries focused on teacher education, as in the case of *Educación Activa*. In June 1935, in the Bibliography section of *O Campo* of Rio de Janeiro, therefore soon after its publication in Spain in 1934, the work received a review (*O Campo* June 1935, 68). In the column entitled Exposition of Motives (*Exposição de Motivos*) of the newspaper *Jornal do Comércio* of 12 December 1935, the Ministry of Agriculture, Odilo Braga, referred to the draft bill on progressive and compulsory standardizing of agricultural products destined to export by mentioning the title by Mallart y Cutó to justify the need for a worldwide organization of agricultural production, based on the diagnostics of a clear globalization of the economy.

Alternating between the territories of education, scientific organization of labor, and agriculture, José Mallart y Cutó, despite being almost completely forgotten today, was an author called upon as a legitimacy factor in the disputes about these themes in Brazil during the 1930s. Noêmia Cruz’s contact with his work may have taken place locally, since it was present in libraries and emerged cited in texts targeted at the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro teachers, chiefly, but not exclusively. However, the

²¹ «a introdução da ideia do trabalho na educação é uma consequência lógica da civilização» (*Diário de Notícias* 07/01/1931, 7).

²² The theme of the scientific organization of labor is of great relevance to the period, and deserves to be better detailed. Unfortunately, it is not possible to do that within the limits of this article. However, we wish to mention that the issue was not limited to Spain, on the contrary, it had followers in Brazil, among them the renowned New School educator Manuel Bergström Lourenço Filho, who played an important role in the creation of the Institute for the National Organization of Labor in São Paulo in 1931, and promoted the Second Rural Economy Days in 1942-1943 (Correia, and Almeida 2013).

issues that the Spanish author discussed were not local. On the contrary, they were addressed to a debate that crossed borders, reaching several countries in the world, and presenting contrasting perspectives that were accentuated as the political scenario in Europe underwent transformations throughout the 1930s.

According to José María Hernández Díaz (2008), with the rise of Francoism in parts of Spain in 1936 and with the end of Spanish Civil War in 1939 in the whole country, significant changes took place in the educational arena. In his view,

The Francoist political regime brings back the discourse of rurality as an expression of ideological survival (the deepest values of patriotism and of religion were found in peasant families), as well as of social and economic survival, since after the Civil War consumer goods could no longer be found in the cities, and people could do little more than survive, having barely the minimum to stave off hunger (Hernández Díaz 2008, 66)²³.

The case of Spain is paradigmatic, but not isolated. The tension between the conception of rural education based on the principles of Active School and the growing incentive to nationalisms made itself felt also in the Brazilian debates, which became more acute as the 1930s advanced, as will be explained in the next section. It was also present in debates carried out in other countries. It is perceptible when inspecting the pages of the periodical *The New Era*, official vehicle of the *New Education Fellowship* (NEF), also known as the *Ligue Internationale Pour l'Education*.

Created in 1921 with the objective of bringing together people from different walks of life, from teachers to laypeople interested in educational subjects, who shared the belief that the problems threatening civilization were grounded in interpersonal relationships, and that only the education of men and women to a world in permanent change could alter this picture, NEF was characterized by the dissemination of ideas and practices associated to the principles of New School. It had among its founders Adolphe Ferrière, and among its associated periodicals, apart from *The New Era*, *Pour L'Ère Nouvelle*, a periodical associated to the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, where Mallart y Cutó did his studies between 1915 and 1916.

The issue dedicated to publishing the annals of the Conference organized by the NEF in New Zealand in 1937 is particularly instigating. Bringing together delegations from Austria, Canada, Denmark, England, Japan, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland and United States of America, apart from educators coming from other nations, it discussed the following themes: «curriculum and examination reform, psychology and child development, elementary and secondary schooling, adult and university education, rural education and teacher training» (Abbis 1998).

Regarding rural education, the periodical *The New Era* collected the papers from representatives of the United States, Germany, Czechoslovakia, England, Australia, South Africa, Japan and India (Vol. 19, n. 4, Apr., 1938). The work was mostly con-

²³ «O regime político franquista retoma o discurso da ruralidade, como expressão de sobrevivência ideológica (os valores mais profundos do patriotismo e da religião encontram-se nas famílias camponesas), bem como de sobrevivência social e económica, pois, após a guerra civil, não se encontram bens de consumo nas cidades e as pessoas apenas podem sobreviver e pouco mais do que mitigar a fome» (Hernández Díaz 2008, 66).

stituted of reports of experiences conducted in their respective countries, in a way similar to what Noêmia Cruz did when attending conferences in Brazil. The unsigned *Editorial Note*, possibly authored by Beatrice Ensor, editor of the periodical²⁴, distinguished two contemporary trends in rural education.

The one is to centralize, to build larger schools fed from larger areas, thereby allowing of better accommodations and equipment, more and better-paid teachers and wider range of subjects and interests. The other is to remodel the old small village school into something more in accordance with the modern spirit (*Editorial note* 1938, 89).

To conclude, she wrote about South Africa, describing her own experience. She identified the strong influence of primary teachers from small rural schools and the importance of their work with the land for its pedagogical value. She emphasized that,

New varieties of wheat and different types of fertilizers for potatoes, and various methods of pruning and spraying fruit trees were tried out. Practical farmers here have told me that they learn a lot from their children. The vegetables are sold, and the money so made has bought books (*Editorial note* 1938, 89).

The two trends identified in the editorial of *The New Era* were not a novelty. On the contrary, they expressed distinct streams existent in the educational sphere and repositioned a debate that harked back to the initial years of the 1930s. In 1932, in the volume of the journal *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle* dedicated to the education in France, and in preparation for the discussions of the NEF Conference that would occur in Nice in that same month of July, P. Barrier, academic inspector adjunct of the Director of Primary Education of the National Ministry for Education, described a methodical action being conducted in France to adapt education to the rural needs (*Pour l'Ère Nouvelle*, 11, n. 79, Juillet 1932, 175-176).

According to the inspector, there were three main motivations for the initiative, that referred to pedagogical, economic and social principles. Regarding the first of them, there was a demand for an approximation between the school and the real world experienced by pupils and the claims for concrete teaching. From an economic point of view, there was the need to arm the rural producer with more advanced and scientific techniques to work the land. Lastly, the social motivation found support in the prevention of rural exodus. To such end, schooling should be extended up to 14 years of age, with the introduction of a higher primary course that associated general culture to theoretical and practical knowledge of rural interest. For the boys, they proposed working in the school garden and in the demonstration fields; to girls, the practice of tricot, culinary and rural domestic economy, apart from advanced teaching of hygiene and childcare. Finally, they defended the adoption of post-school complimentary courses on agriculture and rural domestic economy, of a theoretical and practical nature, to those that could not follow the higher primary course.

²⁴ The journal had as its assistant editor P. Volkov. However, since in the text of the *Editorial Note* there is explicit reference to the experience of the author in South Africa, and since Beatrice Ensor had moved to the African country at that time, it can be surmised that she was responsible for the text.

Gathering educators mostly from England, the United States, Germany and France, the Nice Conference received delegates from 53 different countries and had as its theme “Education in a changing society” (Brehony 2004, 750). Six months after it took place, *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle* in its edition compiling the results of the event brought another article about rural education in France, signed by M. Roger and entitled “Une révolution nécessaire à l'école rurale” (*Pour l'Ère Nouvelle* 11, n. 83, Déc. 1932). In it, the primary teacher from Camphin-en-Pélève discussed at length the advantages of grouping in rural primary schools as a way to overcome the disadvantages for the pupils of having a single teacher, of studying in small facilities, and sharing the space with colleagues of various ages and levels of learning. It defended the creation of what it called “child city”, comprised of workshop, fields, gardens, play areas, swimming pools, stables, and everything else that could be made available to pupils, thereby constituting an intellectual center for the formation of rural childhood.

The experience initiated by Noêmia Cruz in 1932 at the Butantan Graded School was in tune with the second of the trends identified above, of substituting isolated schools with grouped ones, and repositioned arguments presented by the French educator in Nice in that same year, clarifying connections between the local and transnational dimensions with regard to the rural education and to the international circulation of education theories and practices. The concern with the incentive to patriotism made it possible to envisage also the competing representations about rural education during those years that can be regarded as the “extreme 1930s”, given that the swerves occurred at the end of that decade turned out to be practically antipodes of the ideas proposed in the initial years of the decade.

Rural education and the exacerbation of nationalisms

Analyzing the trajectory of the *New Education Fellowship* between 1921 in 1938, Kevin Brehony (2004) says that in the 1930s two phases could be distinguished. The first started precisely with the Nice Conference and extends up to 1936. The second phase coincides with the beginning of World War II, and is made explicit in the 1937 New Zealand Conference. Brehony argues that Nice represented a turning point in the history of NEF. He refers «to the new principles that had already appeared in *The New Era* and which were discussed at the conference. These shifted the emphasis from the individual's to social needs» (Brehony 2004, 750). The change had as its effect a decrease in the emphasis that was previously given to psychology and psychoanalysis, and received impulse, according to Ray Hemmings «as a response to hopes dashed by the coming to power of Stalin in the USSR on the one hand and the “infiltration” and “virtual takeover” of the NEF by a number of professors on the other» (Hemmings 1973, apud Brehony 2004, 750).

In 1937, the Rockefeller foundation withdrew the financial support it gave to NEF, producing a crisis in the *Fellowship*. The English section, however, continued alive and maintained the event scheduled for New Zealand. The works at the Conference,

on the one hand, demonstrated the growing focus on academic discussion intensifying the professionalization of members and the pushing aside, initiated in 1932, of the groups of laypeople who had contributed to create the organization. On the other hand, the works made clear that the change in emphasis from the individual to the social already noticeable in Nice had unfolded into the promotion of extreme nationalisms, in what was regarded by Ensor in the *Editorial Note* as an education in which there was no room for «freedom of thought for individual, and consequently no real fullness of life».

It is not possible to disconnect the experience of Noêmia Cruz initiated in 1932 in São Paulo from similar initiatives that occurred in other countries; neither is it possible to unravel from the Brazilian context the new directions brought by Second World War for the reorganization of world power relations. Not only Brazil initiated in 1937 the authoritarian regime of Getúlio Vargas, which extended until 1945, but this state of exception flirted openly with the Axis powers.

Soon after the coup that led him to the presidency and installed the “New State”, Vargas dissolved the National Congress and abolished political parties. Territorial integration was one of the proposals he put in place with the objective of nationalizing the country. The conquest of the Brazilian West, seen as a new Eldorado, should couple the populating of the land with access to the natural resources of the rural areas, thereby increasing the prosperity of the nation. The “Marcha para o Oeste” (“March to the West”), as the movement became known, was a policy of occupation of the countryside, with a view to integrate the Brazilian regions, guaranteeing national unity and forming the Brazilian man. Other policies of eugenic and hygienic matrix, of social control through the rural school were coupled to that, launching a process of compulsory nationalization of education in Brazil.

According to Lúcio Kreutz,

At the federal level, the regulation of nationalization of education began with Decree No. 406 of May 1938, which targeted directly rural schools, which were those that apparently represented greater danger. This decree was followed by that of No. 1545 of 25 August 1939, considered as the most important one. This latter Decree prohibited that the position of principal of a school were given to a foreigner, that foreign languages were used during public assemblies and meetings, [and it required] that an officer of the Armed Forces appointed by the military commander of the region should be in charge of Physical Education. It also instructed State Secretaries of Education to construct and maintain schools in areas of foreign colonization to foster patriotism in students, and that they should supervise the teaching of foreign languages, and intensify the teaching of Brazilian history and geography. There were also Decree 1006 of 10 December 1939, Decree 2072 of 8 March 1940 and decree 3580 of 3 September 1941 that complemented the process of nationalization in several aspects, which effectively meant the end of ethnic schools for immigrants (Kreutz 2010, 78)²⁵.

²⁵ «No âmbito federal, a regulamentação da nacionalização do ensino iniciou com o Decreto n. 406 de maio de 1938, que se dirigia diretamente para as escolas rurais, que eram as que aparentemente representavam maior perigo. Esse decreto foi seguido do de n. 1.545 de 25 de agosto de 1939, considerado como o mais importante. Este proibia que a direção da escola ficasse a cargo de estrangeiro, que se fizesse uso de língua estrangeira em assembleias e reu-

The policy of populating the countryside also included the building of hospitals and railways, and resulted in the establishment of the city of Goiânia, located in the Brazilian Centre Plateau. To celebrate the occasion, the Brazilian Association of Education (ABE) promoted the Eighth Brazilian Congress of Education between 19-27 July 1942, having rural education as its main theme. Created in 1924 in Rio de Janeiro, ABE gathered intellectuals from all over Brazil with the conviction that the future of the country depended on changes in education catering for the needs of modern society (Carvalho 1998). Among its objectives was to disseminate education through the population, breaking away from the situation of illiteracy that at that time afflicted roughly 70% of the nation's population (Ferraro and Kreidlow 2004, 186)²⁶. Its initiatives comprised the Congresses organized in several cities with the objective of bringing together educators around specific themes.

The debates carried out during the Eighth Congress focused on different definitions of rural zone (in cities and villages in the countryside, in common areas, areas of immigration and in the deep backlands) and on experiences carried out at those places. As conclusions, it firstly affirmed the understanding that rural and urban schools constituted modalities of a single category, and not two distinct categories, contributing to promote the centralization of educational policy and the cultural uniformity through civic education, public celebration of National holidays, the teaching of Portuguese language, and of Brazilian history and geography. In the second place, it reiterated the importance of sanitary education, the prevention of diseases and the betterment of the race through adequate eating and physical activity, with a clear eugenic inclination.

Noêmia Cruz attended that Congress as member of the delegation of the Estate of São Paulo, presenting the thesis entitled “Educação Rural em zonas rurais comuns” (“Rural education in common rural zones”). In it, she argued that rural education should interconnect the official education program to rural contents, with the purpose of «cultivating love and respect of pupils for nature, and to form the future national citizen» (Ecar 2017, 101)²⁷. This is how the educator defined her pedagogical proposal,

Indeed, the discipline of action, this discipline formative of character, has in the agricul-

nidades públicas, que a Educação Física ficasse ao encargo de um oficial das Forças Armadas, indicado pelo comandante militar da região. Instruía ainda aos Secretários de Educação Estaduais a construir e manter escolas em áreas de colonização estrangeira para a estimulação do patriotismo por parte dos estudantes, sendo que deveriam fiscalizar o ensino das línguas estrangeiras e intensificar o ensino de história e geografia do Brasil. Ainda tivemos o decreto 1.006 de 10 de dezembro de 1939, o Decreto 2.072 de 08 de março de 1940 e o Decreto 3.580 de 3 de setembro de 1941, que complementavam o processo de nacionalização em diversos aspectos, o que significou efetivamente o término das escolas étnicas de imigrantes» (Kreutz 2010, 78).

²⁶ Illiteracy rates in Brazil in the 1920s varied widely between States, ranging from 85.9% in Piauí to 53.4% in Rio de Janeiro and 53.8% in Rio Grande do Sul. «Between 1920 and 1960 there is a sharp fall in illiteracy rates. For the whole of the country, the rate falls during that period from 71.2% to 46.7% among people older than five years, a reduction of 24.5 points» [«De 1920 a 1960 acelera-se a queda do analfabetismo. Para o conjunto do País, a taxa cai, no período, de 71,2% para 46,7% entre as pessoas de 5 anos ou mais, uma redução de 24,5 pontos percentuais»]; the disparities between States, however, were maintained. While illiteracy rates in Alagoas reached 72.6% in the 1960s, in Rio de Janeiro they were of only 27.3% (Ferraro and Kreidlow 2004, 86ff.).

²⁷ «cultivar o amor e o respeito dos alunos pela natureza e formar o futuro cidadão nacional» (Ecar 2017, 101).

tural practices its most sympathetic, adequate and fruitful form, the most complete form of educating the child, for it corresponds to their integral culture under the powerful stimulation of spiritual, physical and normal needs. Integral culture, yes, – because agricultural practices, apart from exercising intelligence by putting attention, observation and reasoning into action – giving room to comparison and judgement, establishing the experience, develop a physical culture in the best of environments: under the sun, outdoors. They develop a moral culture that fortifies the spirit of order, the habit of observation, reflection, prudence, foresight, the strong will, the energy, the love of work – values that emerge from the conscious struggle of men with nature, and that infuse an infinite respect by God’s inimitable creative work. (Ibge 1944, 107)²⁸.

To Noêmia Cruz, rural school represented a vector for the return of populations to the fields, reverting the adverse effects of the rural exodus. Her argument was in tune with those of the large landowners that defended an economic intervention by the State. Simultaneously, it was in line with the hygiene policies and with the dissemination of patriotic values, in consonance with the new directions that the debate about the rural had taken in the late 1930s, without neglecting to observe the precepts of Active School. It therefore operated in a bordering zone, merging competing representations of rural education and negotiating meanings at a delicate moment of national politics.

On 22 January 1942, Brazil suspended diplomatic relations with the Axis powers, but it was not until the 31st of August of that same year that it declared war against Germany and Italy. During the intervening seven months, 19 Brazilian merchant vessels were torpedoed, causing hundreds of deaths²⁹, the city of Goiânia was inaugurated in the context of the “March to the West” and ABE organized the Eighth Brazilian Congress of education with rural education as its central theme.

Final considerations

This article started with the introduction of Brazilian educator Noêmia Saraiva de Mattos Cruz and the experience she initiated at the Butantan Rural Graded School in 1933. It concluded by making reference to the positions defended by that teacher at the Eighth Brazilian Congress of Education which took place in Goiânia in 1942. In the building of the argument, however, the article took a specific case that was turned

²⁸ «Com efeito, a disciplina da ação, essa disciplina, formadora do caráter, tem nas práticas agrícolas a forma mais simpática, adequada e proveitosa, a forma mais completa de se educar a criança, pois corresponde à sua cultura integral, sob o estímulo poderoso das necessidades espirituais, físicas e normais. Cultura integral, sim, – porque as práticas agrícolas além de exercitarem a inteligência colocando em atividade a atenção, a observação, o raciocínio – dando lugar à comparação e ao julgamento, estabelecendo a experiência, desenvolvem uma cultura física no melhor dos ambientes: em pleno sol e ao ar livre. Desenvolvem uma cultura moral, que fortifica o espírito de ordem, o hábito de observação, a reflexão, a prudência, a previsão, a vontade firme, a energia, a afeição ao trabalho - valores estes que emergem da luta consciente do homem com a natureza e que infundem um respeito infinito pela obra criadora, inimitável de Deus» (Ibge 1944, 170).

²⁹ See <http://cpdoc.fgv.br/producao/dossies/AEraVargas1/anos37-45/OBrasilNaGuerra>. Accessed on 1 December 2017.

into a motto for an incursion not only into the scenario of São Paulo rural education but indeed into the Brazilian and even international scenarios. The discussions took us to faraway regions, such as New Zealand, France and Spain, and then back to Brazil and to São Paulo.

Along these trajectories, we made contact with different representations about education and about rural school, which competed with each other both synchronically and diachronically, in the sharp changes that took place in what we denominate the “extreme 1930s”, inspired by the reflections of Eric Hobsbawm (1994). We intended to capture the context of these debates, and to highlight the shape they assumed without establishing a unique meaning of rural education, nor a predominant concept of it. The literature does not allow one to advance in this direction, either because rural reality varied too much from country to country, or because the discourses were always contaminated by references to education and to the rural school. It is difficult to ascertain if it was the geographical situation of the school that singularized the rural expression, or if it was the modality of teaching that did it.

Such indetermination appears in the writings of national and international educators, and the swift movement of political events during the 1930s left little room for homogenizing perceptions, given that they were captured by nationalist and eugenic proposals strengthened with the eruption of World War II. The field is simultaneously the locus for the promotion of a new, healthy and strong national citizen, and the cradle of traditions; the place of economic backwardness and a populational void to be filled; the space to be reconquered as a means to resources and conditions for a pleasant life. In this picture, old Rousseauian precepts are mixed with new pedagogical utopias.

If the threads we have weaved led us to the composition of this vast tapestry, we clearly see that it was because of each stitch done, because of the microscopic cases we have placed in relation to each other, because we exercised the understanding that «every social configuration is the result of the interaction of countless individual strategies: a tangle that only close observation allows reconstituting» (Ginzburg 2007, 277)³⁰. The Butantan Rural Graded School worked as the normal exception, the trigger that allowed us to operate through anomaly, and not through the analogy of discourses. The result does not affirm a single definition of rural education, but a multifaceted set of understandings, modulated throughout the 1930s by political and economic pressures, at the same time consensual and contradictory.

We must also emphasize that Noêmia Cruz remained as principal of the Butantan Rural Graded School until 1943, therefore, during practically the whole period of fiercest oppression during the New State in Brazil. Similarly, Mallart y Cutó continued working at the Pedagogy Section of the National Institute for Professional Reeducation between 1934 and 1942, despite being accused of collaborating with the rising of the *Ejército Rojo* (Red Army) and being subjected to a cleansing process.

³⁰ «toda configuração social é o resultado da interação de incontáveis estratégias individuais: um emaranhado que somente a observação próxima possibilita reconstituir» (Ginzburg 2007, 277).

The two examples we gave demonstrate the multiple and shifting meanings of rural education, and the margins of negotiation established by the agents under authoritarian governments, offering elements to distrust univocal interpretations about the relation between education and State, even under regimes of exception.

Lastly, by articulating various geographical dimensions, we hope to have demonstrated the potential of the local to the historical-educative investigation, both to foster the understanding of what is specific to each locality, and in regard to the opening of dialogues between national and transnational spaces. In so doing, we contradict H. Bassi in his diagnostic that a microscopic case can offer little to educational debates about an era.

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