Representations of rural primary school in Brazil (São Paulo, 1933-1943)

Représentations de l'école primaire rurale au Brésil (São Paulo, 1933-1943)

Representaciones de la escuela primaria rural en Brasil (São Paulo, 1933 – 1943)

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ABSTRACT

This text consists of a study on representations of rural primary schools in Brazil, especially of the state of São Paulo, in seeking to understand how the images contributed to strengthen the contempt towards rural school and society. The documentary corpus research consists of 199 photographs of rural schools attached to the reports of the Regional Offices of Education, technical inspection bodies of the Department of Education of the State of São Paulo, produced from 1933 to 1943. The photograph analysis focuses on three thematic groups: school building façades, students' and teachers' pictures, and school practices.

Keywords: history of education, rural primary education, rural education in Brazil, elementary school, school culture, Brazil.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce texte consiste en une étude des représentations et mémoires des écoles primaires rurales au Brésil, spécialement, de l'État de São Paulo, en cherchant à comprendre comment les images ont contribué à renforcer la disqualification des écoles et de la société des régions rurales. Le corpus documentaire de recherche consiste en 199 photographies d'écoles rurales attachées aux rapports des Bureaux régionaux de l'Éducation, qui sont les organes d'inspection technique du Ministère de l'Éducation de l'État de São Paulo, produits de 1933 à 1943. Le texte discute comment la culture scolaire produit et consolide une image de l'école par la photographie.

Mots-clés: histoire de l'éducation, éducation primaire rurale, éducation au Brésil, école élémentaire, culture scolaire, Brésil.

RESUMEN

El artículo estudia las representaciones aparecidas en las memorias de la administración educativa de las escuelas primarias rurales en Brasil, concretamente del estado de São Paulo. Basándose en un corpus documental de 199 fotografías de escuelas rurales producidas entre 1933 y 1943 y adjuntas a los informes de las Mesas Directivas Regionales de la Enseñanza, órganos de inspección técnica del Departamento de Educación del Estado de São Paulo, busca entender cómo las imágenes fotográficas contribuyeron a reforzar la descalificación de la escuela y de la sociedad rural. El texto analiza el modo en el que la cultura escolar produce y consolida una imagen de escuela por medio de imágenes fotográficas.

Palabras clave: historia de la educación, enseñanza primaria rural, educación rural en Brasil, escuela elemental, cultura escolar, Brasil.

Introduction

Over time, educational institutions have produced and used numerous visual images. From wall charts to the digital whiteboard, a wide variety of objects, processes and technologies have relayed the use of images at school. Drawings, illustrations, photographs, pictures, posters, filmstrips, albums, shows, slides, and many other educational resources, have mobilized the pedagogy of sight, illustrating that the image has been chosen as an effective means for teaching and learning. However, this prominence of image in school culture has been little investigated by historians of education. The historical issue of visual culture in school requires the deepening of material culture in school, a little explored theme that has been gaining the attention of Brazilian and international researchers in the last decade. In this vast field of visual culture in school, subject to analysis, we focus on photographs taken here as sources for the History of Education and memory support.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the established representations of rural primary schools in the state of São Paulo, taking school photographs as documentary sources in seeking to understand how the images contributed to strengthening the contempt towards rural schools and country life. This study stems from research that we have been conducting on the history of elementary schools in the state of São Paulo, from 1931 to 1968, in order to understand the policies implemented by the governors of São Paulo for the expansion and renovation of primary rural education.¹

In Brazil, there are few studies on the History of Education involving photographs, whether as a documentary source or as an object of research, despite the expansion of

¹ The project “History of Rural Primary School in the State of São Paulo (1931 - 1968): Circulation of foreign references, government initiatives and school culture” was funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), in the period 2012–2015.

production in recent years.² This study aims to contribute to this production, by highlighting some little publicized and studied school photographs in the historiography of Brazilian education. The first part of this paper reconstructs the trajectory of the documentary corpus of research indicating the uses of photography in the administrative documentation of public education in the state of São Paulo. The second part consists of an interpretive exercise involving photographic images, conducted by associating the iconographic aspects with the ways of conceiving rural school that are inscribed in the school inspection reports.

As Kossoy (1980, 2003) innovatively indicated, the photographic image has multiple faces and realities. The first is the visible, that is, its exterior reality, which is still in the document, the appearance of the referent – *the second reality*. The other faces are invisible and remain hidden. They concern the production of the image, the creation of the photographer, and the technology used in regarding the life situations of those portrayed – *the first reality*. “Every photograph is the testimony of a creation. On the other hand, it is always the creation of a witness” (Kossoy, 2003, p. 50).

Historian Jacques Le Goff (1994, p. 466) has emphasized the role played by photography in the memory revolution of the nineteenth century, due to its multiplication and democratization giving it “an accurate and visual truth never before achieved, thereby saving the memory of time and chronological evolution.” As a frozen fragment of the past, photography works in our minds as a reminder of a time and situation. As Kossoy notes (2003, p. 139), “The moment lived, frozen by the photographic record, is irreversible.” The scenarios change, the characters portrayed disappear with time, as do the photographers/authors; however, the picture survives and the visible registered there evokes a memory perceived by the viewer. Treating photography as a documentary source for historical study implies considering form and content, the iconographic and iconological aspects. Dialogue with the past requires the historian’s interpretation, for she or he is also an image receptor. However, it is important to consider that every interpretation is made in accordance with the cultural repertoire of the receiver. In addition to overseeing the production cycle, circulation and consumption of images, another relevant methodological indication recommends retracing the biography of photographic images, that is, the trajectory of the images, treating them as objects/materials in interaction with social aspects (Edwards, 1992).

The dissemination of school photographs, understood herein the same way as Bencostta (2011) did, i.e., as photographs produced in or referring to the school environment, began in the late nineteenth century, when the consolidation of national education systems put childhood schooling in the center of family concerns within different socioeconomic groups. The photography trade found in schools a great commercial

² Among the academic papers that deal with school photography, the following should be highlighted: Abdala (2013), Almeida (2002), Barros (1997, 2005), Bencostta (2011), and Lima (2015).

potential for families, the institution and the state. In schools, the photographs became part of the school culture in many ways: as an institutional memory, as school memory, as administrative documentation, and as teaching material.

In Brazil, in the early twentieth century, photographs of school buildings became popular with the spread of postcards and were used to certify state action in education and as a sign of urban modernity. Throughout that century, other types of school photographs became common, such as individual or class portraits, and also graduation pictures. But this abundant photographic production portrayed many more educational subjects and schools in urban areas than in rural areas for social and economic reasons.

Despite the high concentration of the population in the countryside until the first half of the twentieth century, the primary public school expansion policies carried to term by state governments favoured urban areas over rural areas.

Even in the state of São Paulo, where republicans invested substantially in the expansion and modernization of primary education, in the first decades of the twentieth century there was a spatial differentiation in childhood education. While in the cities graded schools, a new model of primary school considered modern and better, were installed, in the countryside remained the installation of individual schools, called Isolated Schools, where a teacher taught children of different levels in the same classroom.

In 1904, there were 3,797 isolated schools in the state of São Paulo and 148 graded schools. The registration in the graded ones was superior to that of the isolated schools, that is, 89,724 registrations in the former, and 58,138 in the isolated schools. Difficulties of provision to these schools remained, especially in rural areas. Out of the 3,797 existing schools, 911 were located in city districts (593 were provided and 318 were vacant), and 2,886 were in the countryside and peace districts.³ From that number only 632 were provided, while 2,254 were vacant (Souza, 2009; Ávila, 2014).

In 1940, the overall population of the state would reach 7,239,711 inhabitants, of which 3,199,952 (44.2%) were in cities and 4,039,759 (55.8%) in the countryside. Out of all school-aged children who attended school, 342,683 of them were attending urban primary schools, and, in rural schools, including rural districts, there were 211,649, for a total of 554,332 (Almeida, 1945).

The differentiation of urban schools from the rural ones became a space and pedagogical classification device designed in the 1910s, legitimized by administrative rationality. Faced with difficulties around the setting-up of rural schools, including the dispersion of population, and the lack of roads and incentives for teacher retention, political authorities determined criteria for the opening and closing of schools, reduced the time duration of primary school to three years, and simplified educational programs.

Although the distinction between urban and rural primary school was ratified by administrative arguments, it also expressed recurrent ways of interpreting Brazil present

³ In Brazil, the term peace district is usually used to refer to a small village on the outskirts of a city.

in the social imaginary. As we are reminded by the analysis of Nísia Lima and Gilberto Hochman (2000), the antagonism between inland and coastal (hinterland and coast) regions set up a spatial representation of the country anchored in opposing social divisions between an archaic Brazil and a modern Brazil, operated by literature and Brazilian social thought, especially the medical-sanitarian discourse. Despite the varied positive and negative representations of peasants and life in the hinterland region, the most striking representation of the Brazilian rural type was the image of the indolent caboclo, who was backward and improvident. In this type of representation, peasants were considered rustic human beings, plagued by disease and laziness.

Even though the national economy was almost entirely dependent on agricultural production, negative representations of the countryside associated the field with tradition and backwardness, whereas the city was associated with development and modernity. However, these perceptions of social aspects, as Chartier (1991) warns us, are not neutral discourses. They are socially positioned discursive practices, and they produce strategies and choices in both conduct and reform projects.

In the context of rural education, elements of this representation of the peasants can be found in São Paulo's school inspectors' reports, presented to the General Directorate of Public Instruction in the early twentieth century. Responsible for visiting schools in the most remote corners of the state, these education professionals testified to the poor condition of rural schools and criticized the work of the teachers. Among the most pressing problems of education in the countryside was the instability of schools due to the low attendance of students motivated by child labour and the lack of teachers. In addition to these problems, which prevented the very existence of the school in the countryside, there was material insecurity – a lack of housing for proper installation of schools, as well as school furniture and teaching materials. The working conditions of rural teachers were poor and school performance much lower than expected. In addition, the isolated school, due to its formation, was seen as inefficient for the promotion of popular education. This negative conception of isolated schools was well expressed by Theodoro de Moraes, an inspector who recorded the following statement in the 1909-1910 education directory:

It would be a true utopia that someone, whether the most competent, the most dedicated teacher, would gain, from the isolated schools, the same advantages that we get from the homogeneous classes in graduated schools. The isolated school has, and will never lose, defects that are inherent to its nature. And the biggest one, if not the origin of it all, is having the teacher educate children of different ages and levels, which give them not one, but several audiences. This fault cannot be remedied: it is incurable. The isolated school has to deal with it here and everywhere. It is an organic defect. Grace, practice, and experience can often reduce it to a minimum, but never cure it radically (São Paulo, 1910).

This opinion was shared by a number of public education authorities to whom the educational problems stemmed not from the lack of political policies consistent with the

needs of rural areas, but, above all, from parental lack of interest in education and the inadequacy of rural school teachers. Thus, these educational agents expressed prejudices and stereotypes against the inhabitants of rural areas, considering them ignorant and presumably not accustomed to civilization.

Photography as evidential documentation in the practices of the school administration

The requirement of reporting as a measure of control, monitoring, evaluation, and standardization in the primary school was established in the Province of São Paulo in the 1830s in the public education modernization process (Paulo & Warde, 2013). Such a requirement fell to the Inspector General of Public Instruction, who was to annually report on the progress of education in the province, and on public early education teachers, who were themselves obliged to semiannually submit detailed reports on the operation of their respective schools, including the number of enrolled regular students, the division of classes, the teaching method employed, the list of furniture and utensils, and data on test performance.⁴

With the Republic Proclamation in 1889, a new administrative-bureaucratic structure for education was established in the state of São Paulo. In addition to the public general education inspector, the technical inspection service was created for the purpose of inspecting schools, and guiding and controlling the actions of teachers and principals. Various laws established during the First Republic (1889-1930) expanded and restructured the administrative organization of public education, reiterating the obligation of school administrators to submit regular (every six months or annually) reports of activities. Like the inspectors and school principals, the Director General of Public Instruction also submitted detailed reports of activities, pointing out problems, difficulties, and actions taken for the public school.

When preparing their reports, these administrators of public education availed themselves of a growing number of photographs used as evidence, irrefutable proof of aspects of school life, whether they were of the building where the school was located, or of school activities that were conducted.⁵ Thus, the reports constituted themselves as teaching and modeling devices and as a visible field of school practices. A hierarchical bureaucratic network that defined the relationship between positions, the positions of authority, and the power exercised by educators was involved in producing these authorized reports. Through this hierarchical network, the government maintained regulatory action on the whole educational process, ensuring permanent surveillance of

⁴ The Public Archives of the State of São Paulo have about 1800 reports from primary school teachers for the period 1856-1907.

⁵ The practice of inserting photographs to prove the development of public education was widely used by the directors of school groups and normal schools. See Abdala (2013) and Souza (2001, 2009).

teachers, school principals, and technical inspections. It is therefore necessary to understand these reports as elements of school culture – seen precisely in one of their analysis levels that refers “to the discourse and normative practices of political and institutional order that define the educational system as an organization” (Escolano, 2006, p. 25) – whose production, involving information, reviews, complaints, and proposals, inscribed the position of who elaborated and who used the reports to limit the relevance and pertinence of what could be said.

Between 1908 and 1937, the reports of São Paulo state education authorities gained public visibility when published, wholly or partially, in the *Annual Education Directories of São Paulo State* (Annual Official Education Report). Produced with the state government’s permission in order to standardize education, the annual directories aimed to offer a situational diagnosis of public education through gathered statistics, balance sheets showing major educational problems, exposure of activities performed by administrators, comments and discussions on and prescriptions for pedagogical issues, and measures to be taken. Thus, the annual directories contain different representations of the public school, including ways to design, qualify, and classify graded schools and isolated schools, urban schools and rural schools. Noteworthy is the abundant use of photographs in some copies of this publication, proof of educational modernity carried out by the state governments of the time.⁶

In 1933, the São Paulo State Education Code came into effect (Decree number 5.884 of 21 April), prepared by Fernando de Azevedo, which introduced several principles of the New School in the ordering of state public education. Regarding school administration, the Code determined the State was to be divided into 21 school regions, therefore reestablishing the Regional Offices of Education, created for the purpose of decentralizing school inspection services.⁷

According to this legislation, the teaching delegates were to “implement and enforce the laws and school regulations and determinations given by the Director General of the Department of Education” (São Paulo State Education Code of 1933). It was the responsibility of the delegates, then, to verify compliance to the laws, visit the schools,

⁶ The *Annuals* for the years 1907-1908 and 1909-1910 contain numerous photographs of school buildings, followed by histories of each educational institution and the names of their principals and teachers. The photographs used in these two annuals belonged to the State Department of Labor, whose album was passed on to the Agronomic Institute of Campinas in the late twentieth century, and donated to the Memory Center of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). In 1929, the album *State of São Paulo Buildings* was published, comprised of photographs of state school architecture to be presented at the 3rd National Conference on Education. The *1922 Annual* assembled a set of 64 photographs of Boy Scout groups from different regions of the state, documenting the implementation of Boy Scout programs in São Paulo public schools. The *Annual* for 1923 includes numerous photographs of urban and rural schools in the state of São Paulo.

⁷ The Regional Offices of Education were first created in São Paulo in 1920 for the purpose of improving and decentralizing the supervision of public and private education.

monitor the work done in schools in their area, and guide principals in relation to school documentation (Silva, 2004).

Each Regional Department of Education had a group of school inspectors and inspection assistants whose duties involved: a) visits to schools to inspect techniques and efficiency of teaching, competence and attendance of teachers, and discipline and hygiene of students; b) orientation of principals and teachers in relation to educational work, assisting them in applying the methods and processes of teaching, and suggesting or creating demonstrations and experiments; and c) monitoring, at least twice a year, in each municipality, the monthly meeting of isolated school teachers (Article 315, São Paulo State Education Code of 1933). In addition to these tasks, it would be up to each of the administrative hierarchy posts to report to their immediate superiors the work carried out. Thus, through the completion of forms and the elaboration of reports, a complex network of production and administrative roles shaping school bookkeeping to organize activities and the exchange of information was instituted, ensuring state control over education professionals.

In the period analyzed in this study (1933-1943), the Education Division at the Department of Public Education and Health of the State of São Paulo issued regular statements directing and requiring delegates and school inspectors to draw up annual reports on the work done in schools. The rules for the production of these reports varied during the decade analyzed here; in some years, more detailed information was requested, and in others the reports were more succinct. In any event, there were indications regarding the required form and content of the reports, and recommending the comprehensive collection of data on various aspects of school functioning.

In addition to gathering and presenting statistical data on school units in urban and rural areas, including on the enrollment, performance, and attendance of students, delegates were instructed to use other textual and visual elements to compose the reports, such as tables, charts, graphs, drawings, maps and photographs. They were therefore to describe the social and economic characteristics of the region, report on the history of each graded school, analyze and evaluate problems in early education, and note how the training renovation was taking place in São Paulo. In this set of strategies suitable for the systematic examination of school activities, highlighting changes and progress, the photographs were used to play the role of documentation, that is, as a reliable record, provide evidence supporting the information given by the education authorities to instances of government.

Considering the period 1933-1945, it is likely that the 21 Regional Offices of Education produced about 270 annual reports, but less than a third of them were safeguarded in the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo, 66 of which are available

online.⁸ There was, of course, in the requirement of school directors, the intention to establish a memory of primary schools in the state of São Paulo. Converted to documentary sources, these reports and the photographs they contain indicate the way in which they were built and perpetuated representations about public school.

The first step was the collection of existing images in the 66 reports, which resulted in the identification of 964 photographs present in 29 reports.⁹ From this set, it was possible to identify as images of rural schools 187 photos found in 13 reports, including, therefore, 19% of the total sample images. Once more, the predominance of production and consumption-related photographs of urban schools was noted, possibly due to the interest of educational administrators in highlighting educational improvements in urban schools, or even due to the fact that it was easier to hire professional photographers' services in those areas than in the rural areas.

In most of the sample photos selected for this study, there is no identification of the image's author. It is also not known whether the photographs were specially ordered to appear in the reports or if inspectors gathered them from the album or from teachers' and students' archives. Regarding how pictures of rural schools were presented in the reports of the Regional Offices of Education, they were either pasted on pages interspersed in the text or appeared at the end of the report without any direct link to the textual record. Most images have no subtitle, although some written information can be found, sometimes at the beginning of the page where they were glued, either in handwritten or typed form. Given the demands of the director of education, the photographs were attached to the reports as evidence proving the recorded information.

São Paulo's rural schools in photographs

The photographs that comprise the series used in this research were grouped according to thematic recurrence in three groups: 1) school building façades; 2) portraits of students and teachers; 3) school practices. The highest number of photographs record the school building pictured alone or with a group of students. Thus, 49 images highlight the school building (26.2% of the sample) and 71 images highlight the façade of the building with the students (38%). Pictures of teachers and students represent 18.7% of the sample (19 are teachers' pictures and 16 are students'). Under the theme "school practices," 32 pictures were identified, corresponding to 17.1% of the sample.

The grouping of images allowed us to notice how the schools were represented. As cultural objects, photographs preserve links to the institutional memory and the memory of educational agents. As Bencostta stresses (2011, p. 400), school photographs "reveal at once the way of being, but also of designing the school; besides revealing certain forms of

⁸ In the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo, there are reports from the Regional Offices of Education covering the period from 1933 to 1945. However, some of these reports have not been made available online. See <http://www.arquivoestado.sp.gov.br/educacao/>

⁹ Regarding this set of photographs, see the research from Celeste Filho (2012) and Souza (2009).

the subjects' behavior and representing their roles – teacher, student, class, etc.” As a historical source, photography requires from the historian an interpretation that takes into account both the visible image and the symbolic, since the whole picture is a representation of the referent built by the photographer/author of the image from sociocultural references. It is for the historian, the interpreter of the photograph, to question the visible and the invisible image, its production and circulation context mobilizing historical knowledge. Given these considerations, we seek to build an interpretation of the representations of rural primary schools in the state of São Paulo by associating the iconographic analysis to the history of rural education.

1. Schools in houses

The photographs of buildings that served as rural schools in the state of São Paulo, appearing in the Regional Offices of Education reports, show the precariousness of school facilities in the countryside and the lack of identity of the school space. The same house that housed the small farmer or rural worker was used as a school. Taken in the foreground, in a closeup or general framework solutions (Figures 1 and 2), the images emphasize the old house, almost in ruins, with boarded doors, and exposed plaster wall, or faded by time, with cracks and crevices. The details of the buildings make the desolate landscape visible.

Figure 1. Rural school building. Neighbourhood of Taubaté. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Taubaté Regional Office of Education, 1935.

Figure 2. Municipal School - Neighbourhood Muniz – Botucatu. São Paulo State.

Source: Report from the Botucatu Regional Office of Education, 1938.

The predominant popular house in the country, built from adobe, rammed earth or wattle and daub is denotative of local arrangements, with the use of materials and techniques specific to the region. However, the variety of installation conditions for rural area schools is wide. Although the precariousness of the school prevails in most of the photographic representations, the house available to the school, in every neighbourhood and on every farm, is the result of an intricate set of negotiations between the local community, public authorities, and education authorities.

In the Itapetininga City Regional Office of Education report, written in 1943, the delegate Licínio Carpinelli, according to the arrangement given to the photographs of school buildings, sought to contrast a past of bitterness and a present of brave improvements. First, the image of a hut was relayed, a hovel built from wattle and daub used to portray the poor conditions of the rural schools installed in the region (Figure 3). On the image, the handwritten phrase *"Old building: how our schools used to be..."* invokes a temporal cut from the past and present and posits a comparative intention. Subsequent images exemplify changes. In one of them (Figure 4), the School in the Silvas' neighbourhood, the new or renovated masonry house has a pleasant appearance, the walls are painted and the windows are open, indicating improvement of school facilities.

Figure 3. "Itaberá's old school". Itapetininga. São Paulo State.

Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1943.

Figure 4. "Building of the school Bairro dos Silvas. Município de Itapetininga". São Paulo State.

Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1943.

The establishing counterpoint of difference announces the efforts and achievements of the technical inspection and the state in relation to education in the countryside. This is also noticeable in the set of photographs of the school on Fazenda Tarama attached to the

report of the Lins City Regional Office of Education, for the year 1936.¹⁰ The teacher's residence photograph (Figure 5), the only image of this type found in the sample, highlights a well-built, medium-sized home, comfortable-looking, with a painted wall with a porch decorated with wooden ornaments and glass windows with large side openings. Unlike the houses of rural workers, it is a planned house that uses more elaborate materials.

Figure 5. Teacher's house. Tarama Farm School, Lins. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Lins Regional Office of Education, 1936.

This is another contrast that exposes the projection of the significance of the improvement represented by the teacher's house, which is a lot different from the architectural composition of farm workers' homes. One can therefore say that the photographs of buildings that are rural schools constitute representations that, on the one hand, denounce the precarious materiality of educational institutions and reaffirm the

¹⁰ Tarama Farm Rural Schools were opened in the decades from 1930-1950 as typical rural schools. In the report of the Lins City Regional Office of Education, 1936, there is a detailed exposition of the teaching initiatives developed by the teachers of the Fazenda Tarama Boys and Girls' School. The fazenda was inhabited by a colony of Japanese people and located 16 kilometres from the city of Lins. Agricultural activities implemented in these two rural schools encompassed the formation of crop fields for planting vegetables, cereal cultivation, the practice of sericulture in the mulberry plantation surrounding the courtyard of the schools, silkworm breeding, and poultry development through creating Leghorn chickens. To document the "good results" in these initiatives, 10 photographs depicting various school activities in these schools were attached to the report. See Report from Lins City Regional Office of Education, 1936.

school's civilizing action on rural areas; on the other hand, they introduce the absence and difference between the urban and rural school as constitutive of the school memory.

In the state of São Paulo, the school building acquired great importance in the modernization policies of public education implemented by republican administrations in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In line with the emphasis given to popular education, several monumental buildings were built for normal schools and graded schools in the capital city and in the inland cities of the state. These school buildings configured the school as a place, that is, making it a bearer of an architectural identity that differed from other public and civil buildings, and, at the same time, identified the school as a proper space for educational activities. The symbolic and pedagogical dimensions of these buildings exercised an educational action also in their surroundings, in the social fabric of the city. It is not surprising, therefore, that this implied modernizing language in architectural rhetoric has been exploited by photographers using images of school buildings in postcards; and higher education institutions themselves have used this type of photography as an institutional memory – a resource for the school's historical documentation and a record of its spatial identity (Woolf, 1992).

In the photographs of rural school buildings, it is possible to see a very different representation of school as this shown by the pictures of urban school architecture. In the countryside, there is not a modern and uplifting school, but the isolated rural school, considered by education inspectors as “a necessary evil” that should disappear from the educational system. Most rural schools in the state of São Paulo, in the 1930s and 1940s of the twentieth century, did not function in buildings built by the state. These spaces had only one classroom, with no space for a library, a laboratory, an office, or a cafeteria. The recreation area was the area surrounding the building itself.

The need for school buildings, including the teacher's residence, to be constructed by the state itself, the municipalities, or by private individuals, was constantly noted by school administrators. Proper housing for the teacher was assigned as an indispensable condition for the establishment of teaching in the countryside and to resolve the problem of instability in schools, that is, the closing and the frequent moving of the institution from one location to another. The problem that had dragged on for decades in the state of São Paulo became the target of state action in the 1930s, but with few effective results.

2. Portraits of students and teachers

The isolated school was the predominant type of primary school in rural areas of the state of São Paulo until the 1980s, and was characterized by the practice of gathering children of different age groups and levels in one classroom. Pictures from students of this type of school showcase the implied heterogeneity in this pedagogical organization of elementary school. In the two images below (Figures 6 and 7), the children organized in rows denote the camera framing solution that was consecrated in pictures of groups of students. These

were mixed schools, very common in the Brazilian countryside, at a time when it was inadvisable to mix genders in school classes. In the first image (Figure 6), the teacher accompanies the group of students. It is possible to notice the absence of a uniform, but the care of the clothing indicates preparation for the picture, although some children are barefoot, quite a common habit in rural areas that lasted in Brazil during much of the twentieth century. In the second image (Figure 7), children pose for the photo without the presence of the teacher. They are dressed in simple clothes, suggesting that this is everyday clothing.

Figure 6. Rural school. Neighbourhood of Taubaté- São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Taubaté Regional Office of Education, 1935.

Figure 7. Rural school. Neighbourhood of Taubaté - São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Taubaté Regional Office of Education, 1935.

The posing stands out in pictures of student groups because, as Leite says (1993, p. 97), although disguised, posing is inseparable from the picture: "It has been said that the picture is a representation of someone who knows he is being photographed." However, the children's posture and the sense of order and discipline expressed in the image draw attention: children's arms are either crossed or extended, with their serious faces staring into the camera. Thus, the representation of class re-creates and symbolizes the school order presupposed in the simultaneous teaching method adopted in primary schools in the final decades of the nineteenth century, in which individual differences are subsumed in the class that is treated as a unit. Unlike in graded schools, where each class corresponds to the supposedly homogeneous group of students at the same level of knowledge, each class corresponding to a series and each class to a teacher, in the isolated school, class, grade and school overlap to form a single group. In this case, the identity of the group is not related to the class/series, but to the space in which the school operates and to the teacher.

Another aspect to emphasize in these two images is the social condition of the students. The representation shows poor white and colored children, highlighting various black and mulatto children. In Figure 8, the photographer gave priority to the plan to frame the class of students in rural surroundings. In this photograph, you can see the gate, an

animal, a tree, and houses in the background, and the pose of the children is more relaxed. Despite the distortion caused by the focus distance, by zooming in, we can see a smile on the face of several children. But still, what the observer sees is the hierarchical and disciplinary school order.

Figure 8. “Aracassu – Bury School.” Neighbourhood of Itapetininga. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1936.

However, it is the building that houses the school that becomes the privileged setting for the photographer to immortalize the memory of the school (Figures 9 and 10). The predominance of the building connects the teacher and students to the space. Thus, representations of the rural school give visibility to key aspects that in these locations build the identity of the school: space, teacher, and student. In Figure 9, the willingness of children to pose separates girls on one side and boys on the other, as they are grouped by size and positioned in order to maintain the balance and harmony of aesthetic representation. In Figure 10, the teacher and students make up the scene in which centrality is given to the school building, a good-looking house that stands out in the landscape, symbolizing the desirable structure for school facilities in rural areas.

Figure 9. Rural school at the Areia Branca neighborhood, Bauru. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Bauru Regional Office of Education, 1933.

Figure 10. Municipal School at Fazenda São Pedro Paraíso, Botucatu. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the Botucatu Regional Office of Education, 1938.

Abdala (2013) distinguishes two groups of individual school portraits: laudatory, related to patrons, principals, politicians, and personalities related to education, and identifying, those that are taken by individuals as souvenir pictures. In the series of

photographs selected for this study, in addition to photographs of classes of students, we found souvenir portraits of rural teachers.

Figure 11. "Jurú-Mirim school, Itapetininga." São Paulo State. Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1936.

Figure 12. "Co-ed School of Graminha," Tabatinga. São Paulo State. Source: Report from the São Carlos Regional Office of Education, 1943.

Women are the majority in this series of photographs, which demonstrates the feminization of teaching as an urban and rural phenomenon in Brazil. Wearing nice clothes and posing with austerity, the teacher is photographed close to her school, a space that moulds her professional identity. Again, a symbiosis is observed between the materiality of the school environment and the educational agent, made concrete in the symbolic dimension of the school.

The photographs represent the positive affirmation of the school in the countryside. But what they do not reveal is the intermittency of school days for teachers and students. In fact, the teachers' permanence in the countryside was a recurring problem in Brazilian education during the twentieth century. In the state of São Paulo, many schools created by the state in rural districts did not work due to the absence of teachers. The teaching profession in the countryside did not appeal to professionals due to poor working conditions. In the 1935-1936 *Annual Education Directory*, Almeida Junior, general education director, referring to the problems of rural primary school in the state of São Paulo, was emphatic in the synthesis of what he considered to be the largest of rural education problems in the state, called by him "the seven deadly sins of rural school": the

difficulty of access because of the absence of roads, the teacher's situation of dependence in relation to the landowners, the discomfort of life in the countryside, the isolation felt by the teacher because of the contrast between urban culture and the culture of the rural dweller that hosted her, the lack of stimulation in the work done individually by the teacher in isolated schools, the difficulties in terms of self-improvement, that is, in conducting professional development courses, and the lack of resources for education (São Paulo, 1936).

For the teachers, who were mostly women, working in the countryside meant facing the discomfort of precarious and makeshift housing, receiving low wages, and working in poorly installed schools and without material resources. In addition, there were the intrinsic educational difficulties in isolated schools, that is, the simultaneous teaching of student groups of different levels and grades. And, not least, the instability, i.e. the problem of student attendance, which permanently compromised the schools run in the rural districts.

For the few children who were enrolled in rural schools, schooling did not last long, only one or two years, with frequent abandonment due to the demands of work or of the family moving to another location. It is understood in this way because, for school administrators, child labour was considered one of the greatest enemies of primary education, for it hurt the regularity of school attendance. Nevertheless, the use of children's labour on the farm was a family survival condition for rural workers who also faced problems of adverse life conditions and work in the fields.

3. The teachings of the rural school

In the iconographic sources analyzed in this study, there are few photographs of classrooms. Despite being the key space of the school, which realizes the formative purpose of teaching and learning, it often escapes the photographic eye in the period analyzed here. Figure 13 combines all the characteristic elements of this educational space.

Figure 13. Rural school. Neighbourhood Itapetininga. São Paulo State.

Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1936.

Girls and boys are sitting at double desks lined up in a rectangular room, accompanied by an adult, a woman who is standing in the back, indicating the exercise of authority and responsibility involved in supervising the children. The windows are open and on the wall at the back of the room there are two framed pictures. The children are wearing uniforms. All remain orderly and serious, staring deeply into the camera that freezes emotions, operated by a photographer. The fronting of education, one of the most important devices of the modern school setting, is well observed in this representation

In the isolated school, the classroom is the school itself. It is in this space that children learn the ordinary knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, in the photographs analyzed, we can notice the emphasis on agricultural activities in the following three images (Figures 14, 15, and 16).

Figure 14. "Rincão-Guara school. Garden". Neighbourhood of Itapetininga. São Paulo State. Source: Report from the Itapetininga Regional Office of Education, 1943.

The records highlight the relationship of children to the ground, forming seedbeds, dealing with the garden, taking care of birds, all activities taken as signs of life in the countryside. The teaching of agriculture-related content was not new in São Paulo rural schools, but in the 1930s and 1940s, it gained greater prominence in the context of teaching renewal and the strengthening of the ruralist movement that advocated an intrinsically rural school. This was a type of school with rural purposes, infrastructure, education programs, and teachers specially trained for rural education, which could cultivate in children a love for life in the fields, including a respect for the importance of agriculture in the economic and social development of the country.¹¹

¹¹ For deeper readings on pedagogical ruralism in Brazil, we suggest Ávila (2013), Monarcha (2007), and Moraes (2014).

Figure 15. “Aviculture”. Fazenda Tarama school, Lins. São Paulo State.
Source Report from the Lins Regional Office of Education, 1936.

Figure 16. Rural school at the Cocais neighborhood, Jundiaí. São Paulo State.

Source: Report from the Jundiaí Regional Office of Education, 1943.

There was nothing more appropriate, therefore, than a representation highlighting the practice of agriculture in schools and the technical training of the peasant. Placing, permanently, the peasant in the countryside was part of the national political agenda. It was up to the primary school to contribute to this purpose by developing in the countryside a program that awakened in children the love and care for nature. Therefore, it was necessary to disseminate practical and useful knowledge to the children of field workers, knowledge that took into account the agricultural work and culture in rural areas. As stated by the ruralist educator Noemia Cruz (1936, p. 195), “the country child should be educated as a child of the countryside, to live in the countryside and feel happy with life in the countryside.” In this way, the school would provide a great service to the country, because, from the love for the land, true patriotism would flourish. Adapting the child to that environment presupposed the enhancement of agricultural activity, through the learning of seeding practices, germination, garden irrigation, small animal care, notions of fertilization and forestry, poultry farming, beekeeping, and so on. Figure 14 is representative of the civic value assigned to teaching agricultural activities.

A group of children wielding hoes conducts activities in the garden. They pose, smiling, for the photographer, who records the contentment afforded by the practical activity, the students’ motivation for land tilling. A similar activity can be viewed in Figure 16; however, in this image, it is the lesson that stands out. The students hold birds and

stand to listen attentively to the teacher's explanations or guidelines. The chicken coop, a common presence in students' houses, is converted into a teaching laboratory, a practice mediated by the school mode of transmission and appropriation of culture.

Figure 17. Rural school at the Antas neighborhood, São Carlos. São Paulo State.
Source: Report from the São Carlos Regional Office of Education, 1942.

Lastly, the image of a physical education class (Figure 17) gives visibility to another educational practice quite encouraged in the public schools of São Paulo State in the 1930s and 1940s. Children in rows with open arms make up the singular scene. All elements of space are contrasting and denote the idealized content of the image. Despite the lack of uniforms or a suitable place for the activity, the children practice physical education under the supposed guidance of a teacher who is absent from the picture. It is the overcoming of adversity in order to bring physical education to the fields, an activity that denotes strong morals, and civic and patriotic content.

Final considerations

In conclusion, we can say that the photographs of rural primary schools in the state of São Paulo instituted a memory statement of the school's ideal of civilizing rural dwellers. In the reports of the Regional Offices of Education, they were used as evidence and as the instrument with which to denunciate the precariousness of isolated schools.

These images allow for a better understanding of the history of primary school, especially its diversity and different ways of service to different social groups. In this sense,

they inscribe in educational memory the tensions arising from the socio-cultural conditions in which they were produced. Eternalized over seven decades, these photographs call into question the binaries of presence/absence and civilization/barbarism, whose antagonistic elements can only be understood in their interaction and interdependence.

The representations of the rural school showcase a single institution, narrow and poorly installed. Still, a *school*, which is necessary in rural areas for the edifying purpose of the dissemination of modern codes, whether they be the rudiments of writing culture, or the notions of civility, and moral, civic, and patriotic values. It is, therefore, in the symbolic dimension of absence that the representation gains more sense. It expresses a way of conceiving the rural society, that is, it claims that the countryside school is very different from the city school, since the rural society has not overcome its backwardness. However, it is in the relation and mutual comparison with other school photographs, also inserted in the reports of school delegates, that the representation of the difference becomes more evident. Photographs of rural schools indicate absences. We do not observe in them the lavishness and monumentality of the many school buildings installed in the capital city and in the interior of the state of São Paulo. We do not identify in the images several icons of educational renewal adopted in São Paulo public schools from the 1930s, such as libraries, dental offices, dining halls for school meals, cooperatives, museums, field trips, graduation pictures, crafts displays, civic parades, excursions, environmental rooms, choral singing groups, and so on. In short, it can be said that school pictures are important cultural artifacts for understanding the cultural history of society, as they permit us to understand different construed representations of the schools, students, and teachers.

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