

## **Women with hoes and pencils in hand: stories of primary teachers in rural Sergipe (1930-1950)**

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**ABSTRACT.** The following text seeks to understand the life stories of retired school teachers, according to their work, school, and teaching experiences. In order to do so, we analyzed stories collected from sixteen previously-interviewed teachers, considering the early-twentieth century policy of feminization in this profession and, subsequently, the abandonment of the countryside populace, which in turn left them to their own devices, keeping them away from educational improvements, this being the product of heavy investment on the urbanization model going on in the country at the time. However, schools in the countryside and their teachers played, in this regard, and in spite of the precariousness of its facilities and of the overall training of its teachers, an important role in institutionalizing of Sergipe's primary school.

**Keywords:** Life Stories of Teachers, Feminization of Professor Ship, Sergipe.



## Mulheres com enxadas e lápis na mão: histórias de professoras primárias no meio rural sergipano (1930-1950)

**RESUMO.** O presente texto tem como objetivo compreender a história de vida de professoras aposentadas, tendo em vista o trabalho, a escola e a trajetória no magistério. Analisamos as narrativas de dezesseis professoras entrevistadas e consideramos que no início do século XX houve uma política de feminização do magistério e, conseqüentemente, o abandono das populações rurais, que permaneceram desassistidas, afastadas das melhorias educacionais, uma vez que os investimentos públicos concentraram-se no modelo de urbanização que emergia no país, naquele período. Contudo, as escolas no meio rural e as professoras desempenharam, neste aspecto, em que pese à precariedade de suas instalações e da formação de seus professores, importante papel na institucionalização do ensino primário em Sergipe.

**Palavras-chave:** História de Vida de Professoras, Feminização do Magistério, Sergipe.

## Mujeres con azada y lápiz en la mano: historias de profesoras primarias en medio rural *sergipano* (1930-1950)

**RESUMEN.** El presente texto tiene como objetivo comprender la historia de vida de profesoras jubiladas, con miras al trabajo, la escuela y la trayectoria en el magisterio. Así, movilizamos las narrativas de dieciséis profesoras entrevistadas y, por fin, consideramos que en el inicio del siglo XX hubo una política de feminización del magisterio y, consecuentemente, lo abandono de las poblaciones rurales, que permanecieron sin ayuda, aparte de las mejorías educacionales, una vez que las inversiones públicos se concentraron en el modelo de urbanización que emergía en el país, en aquel periodo. Pero, las escuelas en medios rurales y las profesoras desempeñaron, en este aspecto, en que pese a la precariedad de sus instalaciones y de la formación de sus profesores, importante papel en la institucionalización de la enseñanza primaria en Sergipe.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de Vida de Profesoras, Feminización del Magisterio, Sergipe.

## Introduction

The present text aims to understand the life history of retired teachers, in view of work, school and the trajectory in the teaching profession. This text originates in the master's dissertation *Kaleidoscopic Memories: configurations of rural schools in the state of Sergipe*, presented, in 2016, to the Graduate Program in Education of the Tiradentes University (PPED-Unit). It is also part of a national research project led by Prof. Rosa Fátima de Souza, entitled *Training and Work of Rural Teachers and Teachers in Brazil: RS, PR, SP, MG, RJ, MS, MT, MA, PE, PI, SE, PB, RO (decades from 40 to 70 of the twentieth century)*.

We took as a source the oral reports of sixteen retired teachers from eight Sergipe regions. We come to them through the research project Oral Memory of Sergipan Education. To carry out the interviews, we used Oral History<sup>i</sup> methodology, following the experiences of Alberti (2012). Also we take as sources the speech of the sergipano educator Nunes Mendonça, Messages of Governors, lyrics of songs, photographs, interviews, among others. We operate to analyze the prescriptive-normative elements of educational regulations that reflect aspects of the life history of female teachers retired. To delineate this historic narrative,

we asked: What and how was the work, the school and the trajectory of primary rural teachers in the state of Sergipe?

To answer this guiding question, this article is organized in two sections: the first one, entitled “... *woman only learns to write for her boyfriend*”: *work, school and the feminine in rural Sergipe*, in which we outline the Sergipe social status, from work and rural primary school marked by the neglect of the Public Power in relation to the “poor rural man<sup>ii</sup>”. Instruments outdated in agricultural work; the improper conditions of health of the dwellings; the exodus; the scarcity of medical, sanitary and hygienic resources; the lack of roads and highways; the few means of transport and communication are elements that have contributed to the low level of productivity in rural areas of Sergipe, as a consequence of the technical unpreparedness of the rural workers and abandonment of the countryside in the country.

In the second section, entitled “... *I lived with my husband and it was a very painful life*”: *the feminization of teaching in rural Sergipe*, we analyzed some experiences lived by female teachers as students, experiences marked by abandonment, machismo, isolation and forgetfulness of the Public Powers. The initiatives of the State were translated into

actions that, in general, did not meet the needs of the rural environment, because, through the narratives, we can conjecture that at the beginning of the twentieth century there was abandonment of these rural populations, who remained unassisted, away from the educational improvements, since effectively the public investments focused on the model of urbanization that emerged in the country in that period.

**“... woman only learns to write for her boyfriend”: work, school and the female in rural Sergipe**

In the 1950 census, Sergipe had 644,361 inhabitants, of whom 488,792 lived in rural areas (Mendonça, 1958, 21). Most of the Sergipe population was devoted to agropastoral work, including school-age children, as Raimunda Alves dos Santos, 83, tells of his experiences in the village of São Domingos, municipality of Simão Dias, located in the Center-South of Sergipe: “In our region, every girl worked as a hoe. Everyone was sapped by the sun, the girls were wearing a hat on the head, that long mango, and they went to the fields.” (Santos, 2012). The narrative is complemented with that of another teacher, Raimunda Maria de Jesus, 83 years old. In her childhood memories, resurged the work in the countryside, in the village of

Maria Angola, Tobias Barreto municipality, around 1940:

... my father was a farmer, so was my mother. I was born in a place called Maria Angola, municipality of Tobias Barreto, but Maria Angola is a country. After she was seven years old, she was going to work. ... They got there, they [parents] made a container<sup>iii</sup> for us to work with. At that time it was different. The games were a digger, a sickle to work in the field. That was the joke. Seven years was going to the countryside, but when I was seven I went to school. My brothers were not at all. There is not one that has been saved, there is not one. (Jesus, 2011).

Diggers, hoes and scythes were the instruments used by the interviewees to cultivate the land. The childhood narratives of both describe a precarious work, with absence of instruments and agricultural techniques, considered advanced for the time. According to Mendonça (1958): “The hoe is still the instrument of work. Domina, the so-called system of work. This system of economic relations of production enriches the owner of the land, keeps in misery the seed-planter” (Mendonça, 1958, p. 47). It is worth noting that agricultural practices also constituted the family context, as Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos, 83 years old, in the settlement of Sítios Novos, municipality of Canhoba, located in the Médio Sertão sergipano,

... I was born in a place called Salgado. My father worked in the fields, but sometimes he hunted. It was for our livelihood. He would kill the deer who would go into the fields and eat the cotton, eat the beans. ... Mother was just taking care of the house, raising her children and making a pillow. She made a cushion for me. There was a salty brook. In the dry season, my grandmother let the people give water to the cattle there. They say that the cows drank the water and went scowling, so salty it was. (Meneses, 2013).

The jobs with income, cut and sewing belonged to women. These activities inspired the Sergipean Antonio Alves de Souza<sup>iv</sup>, aka “Volta Seca”, to compose the well-known song *Olê mulher rendeira, olê mulher renda*. Our interviewees, from an early age, were familiarized with the work on the farm: children first knew scythes and hoes and then presented them with pencil and paper. However, this link of Sergipe children to the land constitutes a matrix that generates knowledge, knowledge and social practices. Thus, the link with land for rural people is a constitutive and constituent of a rural culture, sometimes marked by material, cultural and social deprivation.

This reality led Mendonça (1958) to consider that the life of the rural man was the most primitive, narrow and miserable, added to physical, mental and social misery. According to him, the rural Sergipe: “... are unaware of the advantages

and benefits of civilization, and are subject to subnutrition, obsolete processes and rudimentary instruments of labor, primitive forms of economic relations of production” (Mendonça, 1958, p. 61). This social picture presented about Sergipe leads us to think about the Brazilian countryside. According to Peixoto and Andrade (2007), in the 1940s, the countryside was very distant from city life, since “... cultivation practices based on rudimentary techniques were close to the pre-capitalist system.” (Peixoto & Andrade, 2007, p. 117). Children and even their parents did not have a “salutary” reference in school education, perhaps because they considered the knowledges at the heart of their own experiences.

Of course the rural school was conceived as Souza and Ávila (2014a, p. 24): “Now to instruct, civilize, moralize, sanitize and nationalize, now as an instrument of modernization and fixation of man in the field and, still, as an element of stability and national security.” Education should be able to modernize man, so that he transformed the “Jeca Tatu<sup>v</sup>” into a working, healthy, disciplined and productive Brazilian, because it was necessary to maintain “... man of the field in the field, but in conditions to turn into modern man, in order to implement the economy associated with the rural one”

(Schelbauer, 2014, p. 79-80). In this sense, the rural school was designed to teach not only reading, writing and counting, but also hygiene habits and the valorization of rural life.

Mendonça (1958) and a whole generation of educators bet on school as a transforming of the mental and social structure of the rural population. In his view, it was necessary for the rural man to abandon the obsolete techniques of cultivating the land and to incorporate his scientific work into his agricultural work. In 1955, in the state of Sergipe, the rural masses reached 69.5% of the state population. In the words of Mendonça (1958), agriculture stood out for the plantation of cotton, rice cultivation<sup>vi</sup>, sugar cane plantation, cattle raising, archaic fishing and subsoil riches. It is worth emphasizing the relative industrialization, which was at an embryonic stage. Regarding economic activities related to the cultivation of land, Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos said: “We planted potatoes, manioc. Father was not rich, had many children. So Father Lima, who was from here, created a cotton-ginning factory, which here was cotton farming” (Santos, 2013).

According to Mendonça (1958), rural Sergipe needed deep social and mental reform through education, because one of

the reasons for the state’s economic backwardness was “... the absence of schools that would provide, besides knowledge on the environment, technical and economic education for the conquest of new and more advantageous forms of relations as a geographical environment” (p. 29). In order to do so, a school was needed that, “without departing from the general guidelines of education, without prejudice to the essential purposes of basic education, undifferentiated, common to all, do not lose sight of the necessity of rural life and contribute effectively to urbanize the countryside” (p. 21).

The rural school was conceived as a modernizing agency of man and his work, and more than that, he proposed to train pupils and teachers in a new mentality. However, part of the Sergipe rural population discredited the school, as teacher Raimunda Maria de Jesus says: “My father is one of those ignorant people. He did not want to go to school, because he said that in school it only gives you laziness” (Jesus, 2011). In fact, one of the problems was that there was a preconception of the rural population in relation to the school, since the population understood that the child should pass quickly through the school and, later, go to the countryside. In this sense, the parents of some teachers claimed that daughters in

school would learn to write letters to their boyfriends:

... my father let the men, because he says that men were to learn and women were to work, because otherwise, he said it was for boyfriend. These ignorant people, are not they, my son? From that time. Then he would not let everyone study, but even so, we got through our mother. (Bispo, 2012).

On the same aspect, Maria Lita Silveira and Maria Dagmar Menezes narrated:

... when I went to school, Maid Maurita [the teacher] she was walking home. Then she came in and said, 'Why do not you put Lita down to study?' So my father said, 'No, because a woman's daughter only learns to write for her boyfriend.' Did not the old folks of the last century use to think like this? (Silveira, 2012).

... I was a young girl and to study was a suffering. My father never allowed me to study, as he could not accept myself being a teacher. My father, with poor ignorance, would say, 'A teacher has intimacy with everyone, she talks to everyone ... No, a teacher could not be a girl.' Teacher was the life of the world, but even so, I disobeyed my father, I achieved my desire as a child: to be a teacher. (Menezes, 2012).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was common for girls from the interior of the state of Sergipe to attend primary school. However, the idea that a woman should learn to care for a house, her husband, and her children was part of

the mentality of the population, especially the rural population. Changing the mentality of the rural population was the main goal of the school. According to Mendonça (1958), the mental utensils of the rural man of Sergipe were worth the clothes he wore. Thus he described the Sergipean rural man's attire: "... The garment consists of coarse trousers and shirt, rustic espadrilles, and a leather hat or plaited straw." (Mendonça, 1958, p. 61). Sergipe's state of poverty and deprivation was felt in his clothing, according to Professor Helena Guilherme da Silva Santos: "I met a 'muier', that her clothes had so much patch, so much patch, so much patch that you did not know what was the color of the cloth, and many lived patched and standing barefoot." (Santos, 2013). Apart from the clothes, the Sergipe's misery showed through the hut that inhabited it. Mendonça (1958) made use of Monteiro Lobato expression "makes the animals laugh<sup>vii</sup>" in order to describe the type of dwelling typical of rural Sergipe. The typical constructions were houses of taipa<sup>viii</sup>, maintained more by the condition of poverty than as an architectural alternative, expressed an intense relationship between the rural man and the environment that surrounded him. According to Mendonça (1958: 59), in rural areas,



... the 'brain furniture', again resorting to Lobato, 'worth the hut it inhabits' ... the predominant type of habitation is the mud-clad house, covered with coconut straw, with a window and door in front, dark and little airy, without sanitary facilities and abandoned the minimum conditions of habitability and health. In the suburbs and in the rural areas of other zones, the same type of house predominates, with the covering of tile.

The construction of a home made of earth amalgamated by water and supported by sticks constituted a moment of solidarity of the rural community. Professor Maria Luiza Barbosa da Silva described the community way of building mud houses in the village of Sebastião Marques, municipality of Poço Redondo, Sergipe High Sertão territory:

... it was a house made out of taipa, there was no masonry house, no block. It was made of mud. At that time people were very fond of

battalion. So the people got together to work together, right? Then the owner of the work made the food and invited the people and the people came to work. Then when it was the day to cover the house, I started to do the tapping with everyone. Well, that's when I built my house. (Silva, 2011).

We can not understand the life histories of retired teachers divorced from these social and cultural interactions that constituted rural primary school. Of course, school is also the expression of the material and intellectual conditions of each time and place. According to Schelbauer and Gonçalves Neto (2013), work on rural primary schools is about understanding the relationship between educational institutions and the geographic and socio-cultural contexts that surround them, the community, and the target audience. Figure 1 depicts the outside of the taipa<sup>ix</sup> house, and gives us a family of ten members.

Figure 1 - Acrísio Cruz with a family from the rural area of Sergipe (1950).



Source: Photographic collection of the historian Luiz Antônio Barreto.

Here is the picture of a family in rural Sergipe! It seems to have been chosen by Acrísio Cruz<sup>x</sup> to portray the familiar configuration of the interior of the state, marked by poverty and deprivation of sergipano. The members of the family showed an air of apprehension and maladjustment generated by the presence of strangers: the machine and the photographer; unlike Acrísio Cruz who, in the right corner, showed an air of confidence and tranquility. The dejected countenance of man can reveal to us his daily life in the work of the field; his partner surrounded by eight children indicates the social role of women in the family and the lack of governmental initiatives related to birth control, because

the the effect “stair of boys” reveals the short interval between pregnancies.

According to Rezende (2014), life in rural Sergipe was not restricted to misery, because it mixed with joy, since they also danced and celebrated themselves in festivities. The favorite feasts, mostly religious ones, and the forrós that occurred more intensely in the month of July, in praise to the harvests. This is how Professor Eliaalda Sousa Reis narrated: “I celebrated St. John at home, lit the fire, all the houses. Then we celebrated the plantations after the rain.” (Reis, 2011). During this period, they consumed foods derived from corn, such as canjica, pamonha, munguzá and couscous of green corn, besides cooked and roasted corn. The fires, retribution to a desire or a grace,

scattered in the farmyards, had a religious character, for they were lit in the days dedicated to St. Anthony, St. John, and St. Peter, and so the families gathered to celebrate the harvest round the campfire as they roasted corn, telling stories and releasing rockets (Rezende, 2014). The teacher Maria José de Carvalho Eleotério also remembered the parties in the field:

... we lived not only in sadness. The party I was doing was Baile Pastoril, Reisado. The Baile Pastoril is the birth of our Lord. We had to put the characters, the shepherds, the three wise men. He had to put one person with the boy on his arm to stage the act. On the arm that was to show that it was Our Lady and make the lapel. Baile Pastoril I had practice to do. And so he organized a very beautiful party all his life. (Eleotério, 2013).

The festivities show the cultural expressions of a people as well as their ways of perceiving and dealing with the transcendent, their past, their identity, their people. The narratives brought by our interviewees cross a certain type of society, social, political, economic and cultural frameworks. In Bosi (1995) perception, it is in the study of the memory of the old that we can verify a social history different from the current one, because they organize their narrative following a ordering from their lived experiences, which brings up facts, names, dates, which may not be in the official historical order.

In this way, the teacher Raimunda Alves dos Santos, in narrating her experiences lived in the town of São Domingos, municipality of Simão Dias, located in the Center-South of Sergipe, traces the social status of a time and place:

... of school I did not like, but of singing ... I sang novenas in the gardens. In the winter I would go, the mud giving here Bom Jesus da Lapa in the month of August. Once upon a time I went by the edge of the night. I would take the macambira straws, hold me so I would not step on the mud. There, I slipped, when I slipped, I stepped in the mud that the shoe stayed. When I got to the river I washed my feet and put on my shoes. The river had no bridge. She was kicking a crazy stone like that, when you stepped, it rolled. Once I came, they got a loaf of bread and gave it to me. I with that bread in the greatest taste of the world. Then, when I arrived I stepped on the stone that rolled the stone I fell into the river like that. The bread the water loaded. (Santos, 2012).

The narrative of the teacher makes us think about the conditions of the roads in rural Sergipe. The mud that formed on the beaten dirt roads made it difficult for people to get around. It is worth mentioning that the main means of transportation in the countryside were horses, donkeys and ox carts<sup>xi</sup>. “More than four thousand of these primitive vehicles moan on the roadsides of the interior of Sergipe ...” according to Mendonça (1958, p. 37). The horse and the donkey were also

used to transport people. On this point, teacher Maria Lima Santos Aragão recalled: “I worked in the fields too. And I had the children, I would leave here in the morning, I would put ... I had an animal, I would put the children, one on the side, the other on the back, I would take them to my mother's house”. (Aragão, 2012).

Here these multiplicities of memories add up to tell the life story of female teachers and their experiences in rural primary school in Sergipe. Maria Lurdes Barreto, 77 years old, recounted her memories of when she was a student in the village of Maniçoba, now municipality of Nossa Senhora de Aparecida, located in Agreste Central sergipano:

... there was no school nearby. No one studied, no school. Me and my younger sister, when we grew up a little bit, from eight to nine years old, we went to school in the village of Tanque Novo.... I would leave home in the morning, I would return at noon. Hot sun, raining, just the way it was. He carried a notebook, a pencil, an eraser. He would take something to eat when he came, not to starve, not to fall on the road. It was not just for me, it was for everyone. So we learned the first letters, then the bo-a-ba, then the primer. ... At that time, schools were paid, had no schools. (Barreto, 2013).

By “listening to tell” these narratives, we are faced with a social deprivation, due to food restriction. “The standard of living of the Sergipe is precarious. The vast majority of the population lives in an

infrahuman situation. It dominates, in the State, the level of poverty. Situation in the area of endemic hunger ...” according to Mendonça (1958, p. 58). The presented situation was of a population that suffered from inferiorities and physiological imbalances, due to the chronic hunger. According to the author, the majority of Sergipans lived with a half-empty or falsely full stomach. Undernourishment or even absolute misery crossed the life trajectory of many teachers interviewed.

In and out of memory we find evidence of a society that lived in a context of deprivation and precariousness, not only because of the absence of schools, but for the political domain, social and economic precarious. Even at a time when Brazil was considered an eminently agricultural country and its largest population contingent resided in rural areas, the number of schools did not correspond to the number of the school-age population. Professor Rosalina Venceslau dos Santos also spoke about the shortage of schools in the village Tapera, municipality of Macambira, located in Agreste Central sergipano, in the late 1930s: “In Tapera, there was no school, at that time there was no school nearby, nor transport to take people. I would come to Macambira walking, walking, my son!” (Santos, 2013). These narratives make us reflect

and question the educational policies that were aimed at the rural primary school.

Another aspect brought by the teachers' narratives was the students' double journey - work and study - according to the parents' mentality regarding the permanence of their children in school. In her memoirs, Maria Lima Santos Aragão recalled that she alternated between working on the farm and her daily school life when she was a student in the isolated village of Várzea Nova, Gararu municipality, located in Sergipe High Sertão: "In the third grade, 'Look, I do not have a son to be a teacher or a teacher. So now already you have reached the stage of helping us with the work of the country.'" And he continued: "There, 'we were' working, planting, planting. He worked, picked cotton and everything. So, we left school to work in the countryside." (Aragão, 2012).

Maria Lima's school memories point to the conditions of the school system in the most remote areas of the country, characterized by the high rate of students being evaded as a result of work in the field. We know that the diffusion of primary education in rural areas has faced several problems of a pedagogical and administrative nature, among them the low frequency of students in times of planting. Thus, a challenge for the Brazilian State,

which should expand rural primary school in a context marked by "the precariousness of schools, the low attendance of pupils and school drop-out, work in the fields." (Souza & Ávila, 2014b, p. 11). Another difficulty pointed out in the narratives was the lack of provision of teachers for the created schools. To paraphrase Berger (2011), until then the rural schools constituted spaces provided by the great landowners and they were in complete condition of abandonment, besides being subject to the demands of the politics of the colonels. The teacher Raimunda Alves dos Santos, 83, witnessed these aspects in the town of São Domingos, municipality of Simão Dias, located in the Center-South of Sergipe:

... we would not go to school at the time of planting, and when Lampião<sup>xiii</sup> was in this world, you know? And we run a lot and hide in the woods. ... The school was like this ... It was a house my grandfather farmer did to teach his grandchildren and neighbors. It was too much of a child. There were about fifty of them. There was no teacher trained, she was a sister of my grandfather, Ana Alves da Conceição. She taught, how do you say ... private. At that time there was no, my son! The task was to know how to read and, knowing how to do it, was 'good!' (Santos, 2012).

The narrative brought by Raimunda led us to reflect on the initiatives of the farmers who often assumed the expenses

with the buildings of the schools and/or release of physical space in the buildings already installed in their property. They were also responsible for the provision of accommodation for teachers and other necessary resources not assumed by the State (Lima, 2013). Raimunda's testimony reveals the ways in which teachers were hired at a time when, in the absence of public competition<sup>xiii</sup>, the positions were occupied.

**“... I lived with my husband and it was a very painful life”: the feminization of the magisterium in rural Sergipe**

The primary teachers were chosen by mayors, councilors, farmers and other figures who held power locally. Professor Maria Lurdes Barreto narrated her memoirs about the hiring of her first teacher in the town of Maniçoba, now the municipality of Nossa Senhora de Aparecida, located in Agreste Central of Sergipe:

This farmer of Tanque Novo, he got teachers from outside. He would go there to teach that people, to teach what he knew. There was no one trained, there was none of that. It was at the base ... 'In the land of the blind the one who has an eye is a king'. (Barreto, 2013).

On this same point, teacher Maria Lima Santos Aragão recalled:

Here there was a teacher, Mrs. Erozina. After she left, the people were left without a teacher for all those people from that region to bring their children. Then, his 'Zé' [farmer] went and got the first teachers that were from the city: Cassilda, then came a Janice. I've already studied them. They did not get used to living in the fields. Then he got a teacher, Maria da Conceição Souza Pinto, who was my third teacher in Várzea Nova. We have so much to thank and pray for her soul, for she was in charge of a single room every year. (Aragão, 2012).

Another difficulty for the work of the teachers, compromising the income of the teaching that they ministered, resided in the existence of multisseriados<sup>xiv</sup> classes. Also called unidocent and/or multigraduate classes, this amalgamation of students of different levels in a single classroom was a striking feature of rural education in Sergipe. This memory was not restricted to the testimony of Professor Maria Lima, because Maria José Santos Freitas, 80, remembering her memories of being a student in private school in São Mateus, Telha municipality, located in Baixo São Francisco, also reported to the multiseriades class: “Professor Antonia did not have a teacher's degree. He was a person who knew a little and that little passed to those who did not know anything. All the little children in a single room.” (Freitas, 2012). Possibly, Professor Antonia would have appropriated the rudiments of reading, writing, and calculus, and was considered,

at that time and place, a person of notorious knowledge, even though she did not graduate from the Rui Barbosa Normal School<sup>xv</sup>, located in the Sergipe capital. Another narrative that helps us to better understand these aspects is that of teacher Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos, 83, when she testified about the working conditions of his first teacher, “Laudiceia”, in the town of Sítios Novos, municipality of Canhoba, located in the middle Sergipe Sergipe in the late 1930s:

... at this time, she was a teacher from here called Laudiceia. She was staying at my house. She was very affectionate to my mother and father ... it was only this school she had in the village. The name of the school was Isolada, at that time nobody was formed here. At that time I did not prepare my non-lesson, in the time I studied. They were the books, because the books came with answers ... [The school] was a big hall. In that school there was a kitchen, there was everything. And she made food for her to eat at home, now she slept in my father's house, that they were afraid to sleep in school only ... They [the teachers] went from here to the city, they arrived in the interior and were afraid to sleep alone in the House. Then my father's house had five rooms, then dad would go and give them a room so they could sleep ... When he had a green corn daddy would give. They were treated like a princess in the interior. A teacher in the interior had a value, today is a serious thing, but I think she still has a lot of respect. (Santos, 2013).

The memories evoked by the teachers Maria José and Maria Odete give

us to see the working conditions of the teachers in the rural environment. Often, they work completely alone, in isolated locations. In addition, the precariousness of their training must be considered and the distance between the school and the Department of Education, which was located in urban perimeters. Almeida (2001), in her dissertation entitled *Voices forgotten in rural horizons: teachers' storie*, when she studied primary teachers in Rio Grande do Sul, thought “... in ‘forgotten voices’, forgotten in the past, perhaps forgotten in the present.” (p. 230). In her study, she identified that it is not by chance that many teachers, recalling their memories, refer to the solitude and renunciation that accompanied them in their work in schools located in rural areas. As a result of the transportation conditions, the teachers were housed in the school itself or in the houses of the people of the community. It is possible that the strengthening of ties with the community was reinforced, precisely considering the solitude in which they lived, as was the case of teacher Laudiceia and others of her time.

Notwithstanding these adverse conditions, Moraes (2014) warns us that we must consider the cultural identity of the rural teacher. This was because there was the possibility that, depending on the

conditions, the teacher would be deprived of the cultural environment to which he belonged and consequently be led to live in a cultural environment with which he had no identity when he did not dislike it. The teacher should start his career by the isolated rural school, considered as an early stage of the teaching career. Only after a certain period had been completed could he be removed to an urban school. In the state of Sergipe, the governor Eronides Ferreira de Carvalho, in a message dated 1936, denounced this situation:

The first appointments are for villages, and the second, for successive promotions, for the villas, cities and Capital. Most of the settlements are in places where social life is full of harshness, where comfort is something unknown and where, sometimes, there is not lack of the fears and perils of banditry ... If in the interior the standard of living is on the other hand, that everything else conspires against the neophyte educator who takes off for Capital, in order to carry out the delicate task of breaking into the conquests of letters the intellengencias in the most unfolding. It is not explained by the logic that a village teacher, sometimes deprived of her right to promotions and rendering service identical to that offered by one of the Capital, has such lower incomes than this one. As a result of this system that seems to me wrong, comes the pediment of removals in which there are only advantages for the teacher and ills for teaching. Urge the search for a means capable of removing the evils that abate the stimuli worthy of strengthening and generate the disapproval of the career of the magisterium. (Sergipe, 1936, 40).

The appointments referred to by Governor Eronides Ferreira de Carvalho concern the “access law<sup>xvi</sup>”, according to which the teacher should start acting within the state. Based on the research carried out by Freitas (2003), who analyzed the trajectory of ex-normalists from 1920 to 1950, at the Escola Normal Rui Barbosa in Aracaju, after graduating, the normalist should follow: “First in a first-class school situated in a hamlet. He would then teach in a village considered second choice. Then to the third entrant, in a school situated in the city. After successive promotions, he could teach in the capital.” (Freitas, 2003, pp. 148-149). Also according to this author, many were the difficulties to get the fixation of the teachers trained in the interior. In addition to the family’s distance and low salaries, some testimonies showed the fear of Lampião. It is worth mentioning that some families did not allow daughters to leave the city and go alone to the interior of the state of Sergipe, especially teachers belonging to the highest strata of society.

The difficulties to carry out the normal rural course, as well as the intensive training courses, were due to the fact that they were teachers with low purchasing power and, for the most part, married women and their families, which made it difficult to travel to the places



where the courses were given. The presence of women in primary rural teaching is predominant in relation to teachers. The female presence in the rural area is justified because the profession of teacher was considered lighter, hence the fact that this work is assumed, in most

cases, by women. “Being a teacher is the only work in the field that does not require ‘brute force’, characteristic of rural work ...” according to Rodrigues (1999, p. 58). Figures 2 and 3, below, show the prominence of the female figure in the rural primary school:

Figure 2 - Rural teachers undergoing training in 1950. At the center Acrísio Cruz and José Rollemberg Leite.



Source: Sergipe. Report of the Rural Teacher Training Course (1950).

Figure 3 - Acrísio Cruz (in the center) with students and teacher of a rural school, carrying hoes for the work in the gardens (1950).



Source: Photographic collection of the historian Luiz Antônio Barreto.

The feminization of rural primary teaching was not a phenomenon that occurred specifically in Sergipe, because it is recurrent in almost all national territory, due to the low salaries paid to a primary school teacher. According to Souza (1998), the replacement of males in primary education by females was due to a process that began in the 19th century. From that moment on, women's activities in the educational field gained prominence. They finally found a trade that "patriarchal society" consented to, since primary education dealt with the elementary education of children, and women would have, moreover, more patience and affability with them, because of their maternal nature. Even educators receiving derisory salary were an opportunity for

women to emerge in the job market by showing their skills. He reinforces this analysis (Souza, 1998, p. 51), when he states:

The use of women's work in the field of education was gaining strength everywhere in the late nineteenth century, in view of the need to reconcile the recruitment of a large number of professionals, to attend to the diffusion of popular education, keeping little wages attractive for men. On the other hand, it would become one of the first 'respectable' professional fields open to women's activity by the standards of the time. (Souza, 1998, p. 51).

The social role of the selfless woman crossed the narratives of the teachers interviewed. Professor Raimunda Alves dos Santos said about this aspect: "I was very attached to my mother and the students. My vocation was to stay with my

mother. I never wanted to get married, my teacher's husband already had a fame to lean against." (Santos, 2012). The narrative of the teacher makes us think about the figure of "Quincas<sup>xviii</sup>", the typical husband of the teacher who did not work and lived at her expense. It is necessary to take into account that the teachers had a fixed salary, although low, compared to the one of the man, free housing and a relative social prestige, among other benefits, perhaps for that reason attracting the figure of "Quincas". The teacher Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos narrated in detail:

... look, when I told you that I started teaching at my house, I lived with my husband and it was a very painful life. He was very bad to me, but I give him to God every day in my prayers, because maybe if he was not so bad with me, I would not have become more attached to God, as I clung. So I taught my students and when they arrived Friday I prayed the rosary. Once upon a time, he lived at my expense. Then had it once he was at home, was in the bedroom lying down and I was teaching, that the school was indoors. I threw the boys around me and went to pray. And the little animals so innocent. My tear came down, because I knew that when the boys went away he would fight and I would not fight. (Santos, 2013).

The narrative of teacher Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos shows the relationship between her private and public life, since the plots between the conjugal and teacheral life were mixed in the daily life of the school house. The fact that the

teachers live and work in the same local also leads us to think about working conditions. In addition to the tasks inherent to teaching, such as class preparation, teaching and control of student discipline, according to Lima and Assis (2013, p. 315), the teacher in rural areas "...was responsible for cleaning of school, school deeds and, at times, the making of snacks and other extracurricular activities." Raimunda Alves dos Santos narrated how the school lunch was made at the Cruzeiro rural school, located in the municipality of Poço Verde, south-central Sergipe:

I used to prepare the snacks. So I would send rice, I would send milk. To make milk rice. I had no servant. The lunch box was me. The servant myself, or my nieces who swept, had nothing. Water, not even water. We used to have to go get water in the tank for the boys to drink. I suffered. (Santos, 2012).

In addition to teaching, Raimunda taught other functions, such as lunch box, caretaker, concierge, among others. These roles were also pointed out by Maria Luiza Barbosa da Silva, when she was a teacher at the Sebastião Marques Rural School, Poço Redondo, Sergipe High Sertão: "... after school lunch, we had to do it ourselves." (Silva, 2011). In this way, we can see that the place occupied by the teachers in their schools conferred local representativeness to them, since they were

polyvalent subjects, whose activities varied between the professorial practices and many other attributions. On the typical school menu of the place, the teacher Josefina Sotero Santos Teles narrated: “In the rural school the teacher herself made the snack. When they did not have them, they would take the homecook, baked potato, baked potato, whatever the mother had put in the bag.” (Teles, 2013). The narratives of the teachers once again lead us to think about working conditions in rural primary school in Sergipe. The teacher Maria Lita Silveira described the conditions of work in rural areas:

... it was a mud stick house. I started to teach, I had no energy. He had to buy a lamp, call a lamp, and put the cotton and kerosene wick. I would teach all day and give at night. I taught adults. That's how I started working. Then I came on horseback, pass the river full, had a flood, once even the horse took a step took me with horse and everything. I just left because God did not want me to die on that day. I almost died. (Silveira, 2012).

According to the deponents, at the time they started teaching, it was very difficult to appoint teachers to the rural area, first because of the precarious working conditions in that area and then because of the low salaries they were offered. However, they mentioned that the community had respect and great consideration by the teacher, even though

they were mostly lay teachers, with only the 4th grade completed. Professor Etemízia Ramos Batista de Andrade mentioned the receptivity of the rural community Pita, municipality of São Cristóvão, Grande Aracaju region:

... was a wonderful people, an orderly people, a friendly people. They said, ‘You’re the president here. ‘I was at school with my mother ... The students wept when I left, cried a lot, I cried myself. At night they would get there, those people with a pipe in their mouths. The tabargues said, ‘Let’s make company for a teacher that she's alone with her mother.’ They got there, telling stories of stride to distract. I was very present. I did not buy anything from greenery. At Pita, people used to plant a lot, it was tomatoes, onions, lettuce, eggs. In the morning the people would bring me a plate of porridge. (Andrade, 2013).

Teacher Josefa de Andrade Fontes also referred to the respect and receptivity of the rural community in Botequim, municipality of Santa Luzia Itanhy, south-central sergipe:

... there was a place of drunk people, none of them touched me. In my school, no one ever came close because they respected it. I went to rural school, they gave me a horse. I got very used to my students, one slept with me at night. I was not afraid, the staff was good to me. (Sources, 2015).

Teacher Maria José de Carvalho Eleotério also emphasized the same aspect:

... I would leave my children and I would receive the money, when I arrived at home, without any penny, which had no money. I spent two years. He did not get a penny. Then they gave me some advice to collect from their parents. Then I said, 'Look, I do not want to charge, because six, eight, fifteen, can you afford to pay and others who do not?' So, when I charge one, I'll have to charge all I do not want enmity. It is better for me to teach for free and you do what you like. Oxente! I did not lack flour, I did not lack beans. They took what they had. It was fish everywhere, it was shrimp, it was crab, it was bean. When I got here, I would give a friend who had a brunette. It was macaxeira, it was yam. I did not lack anything and I raised lots of chickens, I did not lack, but money in my hand I never saw. (Eleotério, 2013).

In the interviews, we noticed that in some cases, when there was adaptation, this situation was made pleasant by the hosts' affection and by the dispute waged by the students to have the teacher in their home, evidencing how important that teacher was in rural communities. Regarding the route and transportation, the interviewees reported that to reach school they had to walk long distances on foot or on horseback; there were also those who resided temporarily in the student's house or in the house reserved for the teacher. When the school had this accommodation, it was located in the same school building, now in a nearby house, which avoided the wear and tear of the long walk to work. Professor Maria Odete Vieira dos Santos quoted this point: "I lived inside the

school. He had a living room and a teaching room. When I came home, I would go back on horseback, because there was no car there. I took two companies, two sisters." (Santos, 2013). Professor Laudiceia Rodrigues Cerqueira described her walk to the rural school Lagoa de Dentro, Arauá municipality, located in southern Sergipe:

... when I went to rural school in the village Lagoa de Dentro I left twelve thirty for an hour I'm there. The class started an hour, sometimes it was out before twelve. Then I got pregnant walking here pregnant. Then the mayor told me to stay here in the same town, my friend – 'Comadre is not going to walk anymore. She will stay here in the city group.' (Cerqueira, 2011).

Teacher Maria José de Carvalho Eleotério also told of her strenuous walk to the rural school Sapé, municipality of Itaporanga D'Ajuda, Grande Aracaju territory:

... I moved to Rural School Rita Cacete with my children and her husband. Then I went to the Felisbelo Freire School Group. It's a group from here. Then I asked for a transfer. In Sapé, I asked for a transfer because it was far from my house. You know if the person wants the best you have to go look for it. I worked, I did not win. My poor mother, how was I going to live my life without seeing a penny in my hand? Two years without receiving. Every month I went to Sao Cristovao and I got there and said, 'I do not have it!' Then he would come back to his feet. He got up and got back on his feet, he did not have the money to take the suburban. (Eleotério, 2013).

The lack of transportation allied to the conditions of pedagogical training, work and salary conditions form a set of characteristics that also configure the rural primary school in Sergipe. To become a rural teacher is not dissociated, therefore, from social, material, intellectual, and time and place conditions, since teachers are possessors of histories, individualities, experiences, names, identities. Thus, it is not possible to speak in a generic rural teacher, it is necessary to understand the life history of women like Maria, Odete, Josefa, Raimunda, among many others forgotten in history.

### **Final considerations**

In fact, we believe that the entry into the life history of retired teachers, in view of work, school and the trajectory in the magisterium through the interstices opened through the narratives, provided a meeting of the reader with several women and everyday. In this way, it is because of the peculiarities found in the life history of the teachers that we highlight the regional differences and the particularities of the state, thus avoiding the use of the word Brazil to refer to a homogeneous whole.

We want to leave our perceptions here. Among the first, we see the feminization of the primary rural teaching

as a phenomenon present in Brazil, since it is recurrent in almost all the national territory, due to the low salaries paid to a teacher of primary education. We can also perceive a Sergipe social situation marked by the neglect of the Public Power in relation to the “rural poor man”, with outdated instruments in agricultural work and improper conditions of health of the dwellings. As a result, other social problems, such as the rural exodus, the scarcity of medical, sanitary and hygienic resources, the lack of roads and roads, among other expressions of economic, political and social precariousness were added.

The experiences of the teachers allow us to see signs of abandonment, isolation and forgetfulness by the Public Powers. Since the initiatives of the State were translated into actions that did not meet the needs of the rural environment, because, through the narratives, we can conjecture that, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was abandonment of these rural populations, who remained disengaged, away from the improvements public investments focused on the model of urbanization that emerged in the country at that time. However, rural schools played in this regard, despite the precariousness of their facilities and the training of their teachers, an important role in the

institutionalization of primary education in Sergipe.

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<sup>i</sup> Interviews provided by the teachers, based on the Letter of Assignment of Rights, providing on the rights and duties of the interviewee, as well as the clarification on the use of interviews for academic research purposes. The interviews were recorded in audio and video and properly transcribed in Microsoft Word 2010, its duration totaling approximately 32 hours. They are stored in the digital collection that will constitute the Memory Center of Sergipe Education, together with 129 other audiovisual interviews resulting from the other subprojects.

<sup>ii</sup> Term used by Moraes (2014), when analyzing the absences, exclusions and differentiations that characterized rural primary education in São Paulo (1933-1968).

<sup>iii</sup> Small area of arable land.

<sup>iv</sup> Antonio Alves de Souza, born in Saco Torto, town of Itabaiana, state of Sergipe. He became one of the most well-known and outstanding cangaceiros of the band of Lampião. Volta Seca, as it was called, composed, between the years of 1950 and 1957, several songs that are linked to the cycle of cangaceiros, as if I knew, Sabino and Lampião, Woman *rendeira*, *Acorda Maria Bonita* and others. In this regard, see Barreto (2009).

<sup>v</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, this image would be crystallized in the well-known character of Monteiro Lobato, the Jeca Tatu. In the article *Old plague*, written for the *Estado de São Paulo*

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newspaper in 1914, and later published in the book *Urupês*, Lobato accuses caboclo of parasite, of destroyer, of lice of the earth. Jeca is represented in the children's and youth literature as a destitute hick in the archaic Brazilian countryside. This is because he is the image of being at the mercy of diseases typical of backward countries, misery and economic backwardness. See Zarth (2007).

<sup>vi</sup> Rice cultivation.

<sup>vii</sup> Monteiro Lobato ideas brought the discussion about the need to impress on the broken, filthy, malnourished, grotesque Brazilian, a sense of belonging to his homeland and civility. According to him: "The cerebral furniture of Jeca, apart the juicy filling of superstitions, is worth the one of the hovel. The three-foot stool, the gourds, the bacon hook, the troughs, all re-enact within their brains in the form of ideas" (Lobato, 2007, p. 174). From the end of the decade of 1950, the caipira could be represented in fiction. From that moment, a retelling of Jeca Tatu, a character created by Monteiro Lobato, began to be shown in Brazilian cinema, mainly by the films of Mazzaropi. In this regard, see Moraes (2014).

<sup>viii</sup> Typical construction of popular houses in the Brazilian Northeast, consists of walls made of clay supported by interlocking sticks.

<sup>ix</sup> Identified in the legend of the original photograph.

<sup>x</sup> Then Director of Public Instruction of the State of Sergipe.

<sup>xi</sup> The ox cart, typical transport of the Northeast, consists of a structure pulled by a joint of four or six cattle and directed by a path. The animals are stung by a caller, usually a child, who, in front of the car, calls the oxen by their names. The ox cart transported the crops to the farm yards or to the grocery stores, and the raw materials for the place of the industries.

<sup>xii</sup> According to Camelo (1992), Sergipe received numerous visits from Lampião and his band, mainly in the 1930s. Lampião was accused of having committed the greatest atrocities of his life in the *cangaço* in Sergipe. Still according to the author, Lampião was received with parties in the Sergipe cities of Aquidabã and Capela in 1929. Lampião died in Sergipe in 1938, near the municipality of Piranhas, state of Alagoas, more precisely in the grotto of Angicos.

<sup>xiii</sup> The Law of March 5, 1835 instituted a public competition for the teaching profession. See Mendonça (1958).

<sup>xiv</sup> The multi-serialized classes are characterized by reuniting in a same physical space different series that are managed by the same teacher. They are, for the most part, the only option for residents of rural communities to have access to the school system. The multi-serialized classes function in schools built by the government or by the communities themselves, or in churches, community barracks, clubs, teachers' homes, among other places less suitable for an effective teaching-learning process. See Ximenes-Rocha and Colares (2013); Pinho e Souza (2010).

<sup>xv</sup> In the state of Sergipe, the formation of teachers for Primary School was, for a long time, under the responsibility of the Rui Barbosa Normal School, located in Aracaju, the state capital. This state institution was founded in 1870, having a provisional existence. The institution only gained identity and regularity from 1911, when the Government Rodrigues Dórea created the building in Praça Olímpio Campos, where the course remained until 1957, when it was transferred to another building, located in Laranjeiras Street, a peripheral district of Aracaju. Other institutions begin to offer the normal course, maintained by religious orders that arise in Aracaju (1925) and inner cities (Propriá, Estância), attending above all to the elite and middle class girls. See Freitas (2003).

<sup>xvi</sup> "Access Law": normalization of the entrance of the primary teacher in the exercise of the state public teaching in Sergipe. According to this law, they should start the career in the interior and go through successive promotions until the transfer to the Capital. See Freitas (2003).

<sup>xvii</sup> Machado's literature brings the figure of "Quincas" as the husband of the teacher who lives unoccupied, without profession.

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