

ARTICLE

From SIRENA to MEB: interrelations between entrepreneurs, Catholic Church, and State for the implementation of radio education in Brazil (decade of 1950)

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the interrelations between the Catholic Church, Philips do Brasil, and the Brazilian government for the implementation of an educational radio system in the country. We assessed the interinstitutional relations throughout the 1950s when the fight against illiteracy became a national policy. The examination of sources favored, besides official documents and other writings, the book *Educação fundamental pelo rádio* (Elementary Education on the Radio) by João Ribas da Costa, professor, radio education enthusiast, and Philips employee. Based on Michel de Certeau's strategy concept, we aimed to identify the arguments defending the implementation of the National Educational Radio System (Sistema Rádio Educativo Nacional — SIRENA), understand the idea of the role and responsibility of the State circulating at the time, and highlight the distinct interests that converged on a common project. Lastly, we evaluated the relations between the constitution of this System and the establishment of the Basic Education Movement (Movimento de Educação de Base — MEB), in 1961.

KEYWORDS

radio education; Catholic Church; Philips do Brasil; SIRENA; Movimento de Educação de Base.

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DO SIRENA AO MEB: ARTICULAÇÕES ENTRE EMPRESÁRIOS, IGREJA CATÓLICA E ESTADO PARA A IMPLANTAÇÃO DA RADIOEDUCAÇÃO NO BRASIL (DÉCADA DE 1950)

RESUMO

O artigo analisa as articulações entre a Igreja Católica, a Philips do Brasil e o governo brasileiro relacionadas à implantação de um sistema radioeducativo no país. Observamos as relações interinstitucionais ao longo da década de 1950, quando o enfrentamento ao analfabetismo se constituiu em política nacional. O exame das fontes privilegiou, além de documentos oficiais e outros escritos, o livro *Educação fundamental pelo rádio*, de João Ribas da Costa, professor, entusiasta da radioeducação e funcionário da Philips. Com base na ideia de estratégia, de Michel de Certeau, buscamos identificar os argumentos em defesa da implantação do Sistema Radioeducativo Nacional (SIRENA), compreender as noções do papel e da competência do Estado então veiculadas e destacar os distintos interesses que convergiam em um projeto comum. Finalmente, observamos as relações entre a constituição desse sistema e o estabelecimento do Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB), em 1961.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

educação radiofônica; Igreja Católica; Philips do Brasil; SIRENA; Movimento de Educação de Base.

DE SIRENA A MEB: ARTICULACIONES ENTRE EMPRESARIOS, IGLESIA CATÓLICA Y ESTADO PARA LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE LA RADIO EDUCACIÓN EN BRASIL (DÉCADA DE 1950)

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las articulaciones entre la Iglesia Católica, Philips de Brasil y el gobierno brasileño, relacionadas con la implantación de un sistema educativo por radio en el país. Observamos las relaciones interinstitucionales en los años 1950, cuando la lucha contra el analfabetismo se convierte en política nacional. El examen de las fuentes favoreció, además de los textos oficiales y otros escritos, el libro *Educación Fundamental por Radio (Educação Fundamental pelo Rádio)*, de João Ribas da Costa, profesor, entusiasta de la radio y empleado de Philips. A partir de la noción de estrategia de Michel de Certeau, buscamos identificar los argumentos en defensa de la implementación del Sistema Nacional de Radio Educativa (*Sistema Rádio Educativo Nacional - SIRENA*), comprender las nociones del rol y competencia del Estado divulgadas y resaltar los intereses que convergieron en un proyecto común. Finalmente, observamos las relaciones entre la constitución del Sistema y el establecimiento del Movimiento de Educación de Base (*Movimento de Educação de Base - MEB*) en 1961.

PALABRAS CLAVE

radio educación; Iglesia Católica; Philips de Brasil; SIRENA; Movimento de Educação de Base.

INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence in the country, radio broadcasting was sold as an effective way of disseminating education to large population groups. Taking into account the significant predominance of the rural population in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century, the impact desired with this information technology becomes evident¹. Founded in 1923, the first regular Brazilian broadcaster, Rio de Janeiro Radio Society (*Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro*), defined its objective as “bringing a little education, learning, and joy to every corner” (Tavares, 1999, p. 8). In this respect, Edgard Roquette-Pinto, one of its founders, wrote:

Radio is the newspaper for those who do not know how to read; the teacher for those who cannot go to school; free entertainment for the poor; the instigator of new hopes; the comforter of the sick; the guide of the healthy, as long as it is driven by a selfless and noble spirit. (*apud* Tavares, 1999, p. 8)

Roquette-Pinto was one of the main responsible for the first initiatives of radio education in Brazil. A pioneering project in this respect was the Municipal Radio School of the Federal District (*Rádio Escola Municipal do Distrito Federal* — PRD-5), inaugurated in 1934, which provided a more systematic education. With a widely cultural and ambitiously civilizatory concept, their schedule had the decisive support of Anísio Teixeira (Gilioli, 2008). In the first decades of radio in Brazil, besides this example, several attempts were made by private broadcasters to associate educational precepts with and accommodate them to the demands of commercial programming, a topic analyzed by Patricia Costa (2012) in her thesis².

Power centralization, originated at the start of the Getúlio Vargas administration (1930–1945), boosted new forms of intervention and regulation of national education, via the Ministry of Education and Public Health, resulting in the creation of the first national projects for radio education. An example was the show University on Air (*Universidade do Ar*) from Rio de Janeiro National Radio (*Rádio Nacional do Rio de Janeiro*), created in 1941 and supervised by the Division of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Education. Its goal was to provide continuing education for high school teachers working in schools from the then national capital (Romero, 2014). In 1950, the first known literacy radio project was

1 Data from demographic censuses of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* — IBGE) report the urbanization rate in Brazil was 36.1% in 1950, increasing rapidly afterward and reaching 55.9% in 1970 (Girardi, 2017).

2 Regarding the emergence period of radio in Brazil, Maria Salvadori (2010) highlighted an interesting dimension. At the same time the vehicle was promoted as an educational tool, humor programs were created satirizing school themes. This scenario resulted, in part, from a reversal in the radio system, which went from an educational panacea to explore more commercial and popular aspects. The author, based on examples from this programming and its resulting reactions, analyzes the existing tensions between the initial pedagogical and civilizing mission of radio and its subsequent development.

carried out in the country. The project conducted by Valença Radio Club (*Rádio Clube de Valença*) was called Literacy Course, an initiative aimed at teaching young people and adults aged 14 to 30 years to read and write (Baumworcel, 2008).

From another perspective, the Catholic Church has historically treated education as an important field of disputes, competing with various religious, political, and ideological groups of different hues — protestants, anticlericals, anarchists, socialists. In the first half of the 20th century, the Catholic Church used the written press as the main weapon to spread its ideology, especially in urban centers³. However, throughout the 1950s, new forms of dispute faced by the Catholic Church in the religious and ideological domains led it to bet on the huge communicative potential of radio as “the newspaper for those who do not know how to read.” Thus, ecclesiastical authorities mobilized to implement the National Catholic Broadcasting Network (*Rede Nacional de Emissoras Católicas* — RENECA).

However, this movement was not the first of its kind in Latin America. The large-scale project of rural education by radio broadcasting started in Colombia in 1947. Known as Popular Cultural Action (*Acción Cultural Popular* — ACPO), it was broadcast by Radio Sutatenza and coordinated by Monsignor José Joaquín Salcedo⁴. In the early 1950s, ACPO had 7,500 school stations, distributed into 533 parishes throughout the country (Baumworcel, 2008, p. 5; Fávero, 2006, p. 35; Horta, 1972, p. 101). In Brazil, the first catholic radio education experiences occurred in the Northeast Region, inspired by the Colombian model, in the late 1950s. Among them, we highlight the initiatives by Dom Eugênio Sales, from the Natal diocese⁵, and Dom José Vicente Távora, from Aracaju⁶.

The private initiative also became interested in this new niche opened by radio education, and the Philips company, which had been providing the receptors used in Colombian classes, began to play, through its Brazilian subsidiary, an important role in the legitimation and expansion of the national educational radio system. Among other measures, the company funded the publication of a book that had a significant impact and influenced some decisions within the Ministry of Education related to the creation of the National Educational Radio System (*Sistema Rádio Educativo Nacional* — SIRENA).

3 For more information about how catholic sectors used the written press throughout the First Republic, see, among others: Gonçalves (2008).

4 José Joaquín Salcedo was ordained priest in 1947, the same year he took over the Sutatenza parish, in the rural department of Boyacá, Colombia. Next, he started a small radio broadcaster there, initiating the ACPO project, which would expand to a radio system, reaching the entire country. Radio broadcasts continued until 1989 (Vaca Gutiérrez, 2017).

5 In 1948, he founded the Rural Assistance Service (*Serviço de Assistência Rural* — SAR), broadcast in Natal and the inland of Rio Grande do Norte. He also created, on the outskirts of Natal, clinic-schools linked to community centers.

6 The Sergipe Educational Radio System (*Sistema Rádio-Educativo de Sergipe* — SIRESE) had a performance and a training center, a broadcasting station, and a school station network under the responsibility of the Aracaju diocese (IPEA/IPLAN, 1976, p. 24 *apud* Baumworcel, 2008, p. 6).

These actions of the Catholic Church and Philips do Brasil occurred in the midst of a development-driven project underway in the country at the time. This project strongly accused the rural environment of being “backward” and abandoned, advocating the need for a productive restructuring. Such restructuring would require, among other actions, increasing the role of the National State through policies such as the agrarian reform, extending the labor law, and expanding basic education to rural workers. This last measure relied on the recognition of the serious illiteracy problem in the country, especially in rural areas. According to data from the 1950 census, among the rural population, almost 60% of men and approximately 70% of women were illiterate (Ferraro, 2012, p. 952). According to Alceu Ferraro (2012, p. 950, author’s emphasis), “the process of *construction* of illiteracy as a national problem” started in this period.

After this brief contextualization, the article aimed to analyze the interrelations between entrepreneurs and the Catholic Church related to the expansion of radio education among the rural Brazilian population and how they pressured the State, focusing on efforts for the establishment of an educational radio system in Brazil.

The perspective adopted herein is guided by the analysis of the historical conjuncture. Specifically, we intended to assess the characteristics of this cooperation between the Catholic Church and entrepreneurs — represented here by Philips do Brasil — throughout the 1950s; identify the arguments defending the implementation of radio education; understand the idea of the role and responsibility of the State circulating at the time, and evaluate the relations between the constitution of this System and the establishment of the Basic Education Movement (*Movimento de Educação de Base* — MEB), as of 1961.

The following questions guided this discussion: what were the paths that led to the cooperation between the Catholic Church and entrepreneurs for the implementation of an educational radio system? What arguments were used to defend the implementation of and public funding for this initiative? How did this initiative favor the creation of broader educational movements, such as MEB, established as of 1961?

The empirical foundation of this analysis was mainly based on the book *Educação fundamental pelo rádio: alfabetização de adultos e cultura popular por meio de sistemas radiofônicos com recepção organizada* (Elementary education on radio: adult literacy and popular culture by radio systems with organized reception) — published in 1956 — by João Ribas da Costa, teacher and Philips do Brasil employee at the time. Besides this book, we analyzed the following documents: the conference “O rádio como meio de educação nas zonas rurais” (Radio as a means of education in rural areas), delivered by Monsignor José Joaquín Salcedo — published in *Anais do Seminário Latino-Americano de Bem-Estar Rural* (Annals of the Latin American Colloquium for Rural Welfare) — held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1953; Friar Gil Bonfim’s article “Pregai por sobre os telhados” (Preach on the rooftops), published by *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* (Brazilian Ecclesiastical Journal), in 1955; the *Projet d’Accord entre l’Unesco et l’OAS concernant l’établissement d’un Centre de formation*

*du personnel et de préparation du matériel d'éducation de base pour l'Amérique Latine*⁷, signed in February 1950 (UNESCO, 1950); the *Exposição de motivos para a criação do Sistema Rádio-educativo Nacional* (Explanatory memorandum to the creation of the National Educational Radio System), presented to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), in 1957; and the *Sistema Rádio-educativo Nacional: projeto de esquema de trabalho* (National Educational Radio System. Work Plan Project), elaborated by MEC, also in 1957.

Methodologically, we opted for document analysis, inspired by André Cellard's guidelines (2012). Initially, we conduct a broader examination of the context in which the documents were produced. Thus, we seek to understand the political, economic, social, and cultural scenario of the period. Next, we present information about the producers — individual and/or collective — of these documents, recording their biographical data, social status, and relationship networks, as well as potential motivations for elaborating the analyzed documents.

We also add another two contextual dimensions, which are more directly analytical. We assess the internal logic and key concepts of the texts, and attempt to identify the meanings and historicity of the terms employed by the authors. Lastly, we perform an interpretative analysis, that is, we gather, classify, and compare preliminary information and interpret the texts based on the guiding questions and analytical categories proposed (Cellard, 2012, p. 299-306).

Supported by Foucault and his “archeology of knowledge”, Cellard (2012, p. 304) recalls that the researcher deconstructs their material — according to the dimensions described — for a subsequent reconstruction, aiming to answer their questions. Guiding questions arise from the search for still unexplored aspects of the theme and theoretical choices likely to mediate this approach.

In this regard, the theoretical foundation to assess the relations involving the institutions participating in radio education programs — the Catholic Church; companies, in this case, Philips do Brasil; national and supranational organizations, such as UNESCO — is based on the strategy concept⁸ defined by Michel de Certeau (2012). According to the author, *strategy* is

the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimit-

7 *Agreement project between UNESCO and OAS for the establishment of a center for personnel training and development of basic educational materials for Latin America.* (Translation ours). We would like to thank the librarian Katia Midori Hiwatashi, from the Department of Economics and Statistics/Rio Grande do Sul, for her assistance in locating and providing the documents.

8 Certeau's (2012) *strategy* concept is developed in opposition to that of *tactics*, which, in short, corresponds to the capacity for action of the weakest, with less propositional potential. It is a more reactive action, working in the interstices of strategies outlined by power, and occupies, in fact, most of its reflection. Although they are, in a certain way, complementary concepts, the first seems to be the determinant for our study, given the social agents involved. For more information, see Certeau (2012, p. 91-97).

ited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats [...] can be managed. As in management, every “strategic” rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its “own” place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an “environment”. (Certeau, 2012, p. 93, author’s emphasis)

Initially, the concept requires realizing the social agents involved have their share of power, allowing them to establish what Certeau (2012) identifies as a (specific) *place* of their own, which is both the result of an initial position and, most importantly, the effect of enhancing that power. In this regard, we believe the most notorious examples are the instances of state power, in all their levels. Nonetheless, the author’s reflection also contemplates the understanding of development and legitimization actions of other institutions, such as religious and business ones.

When deepening this concept, the author recognizes that the social practices of agents with the means, that is, the power to devise *strategies*, demonstrate these strategies are also

a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place. Thus military or scientific strategies have always been inaugurated through the constitution of their “own” areas (autonomous cities, “neutral” or “independent” institutions, laboratories pursuing “disinterested” research, etc.). (Certeau, 2012, p. 94)

Although it may seem paradoxical, since neutrality is not in question — especially regarding the Catholic Church, which propagates a very clear doctrinal discourse —, what we should consider is that effective practices, as well as the use of media for doctrine dissemination, wear a cloak of neutrality and independence when they are established as “above” political interests and intended for the common good and national development. Thus, the developmental context, coupled with the widespread perception of illiteracy as a problem, makes the idea of radio education acceptable on its own, regarding a project surrounded by distinct interests as relatively independent of ideological implications.

In addition, Certeau’s (2012) work also makes an important reference to relations established in the dispute of strategies:

In sum, strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed. They combine these three types of places and seek to master each by means of the others. They thus privilege spatial relationships. At the very least they attempt to reduce temporal relations to spatial ones through the analytical attribution of a proper place to each particular element and through the combinatory organization of the movements specific to units or groups of units. (Certeau, 2012, p. 96)

Therefore, we understand the strategy concept in this study as a result of the capacity of purposeful action, which derives primarily from a position of power particular to each agent involved, but that should be analyzed in relation to the strategic potential of others. Considering a specific historical context, different institutions laid the foundation for radio schools. Thus, analyzing the “combinatory organization” of actions taken by state, ecclesiastical, and business agents (the “group of units” formed at that time for a joint project) can contribute to the reflection on and understanding of still little-discussed aspects about the topic.

The development of this discussion will be carried out in three parts: initially, we present a general contextualization of Costa’s (1956) work and adult radio education, especially with respect to the process of construction of illiteracy as both a national and international problem. Next, we analyze the relationship network comprising the Catholic Church, UNESCO, and Philips do Brasil, the involvement of these institutions with the topic, and their perspectives and pressures on the State. Based on this analysis, we reflect on the justifications and possibilities for the legitimation of the system presented in the book. Lastly, we establish relations between how these interests combined and their possible impacts on the constitution of SIRENA and, subsequently, on the institution of MEB.

ILLITERACY AS A PROBLEM: THE CONTEXT OF RADIO BROADCASTING IMPLEMENTATION AND ADULT EDUCATION

As mentioned above, the attitude of the Catholic Church, in their effort to disseminate basic education in the rural environment, can be read as part of a strategy to oppose new contenders in the political and religious arena. In this scenario, we can mention, among others, the fight against the expansion of the Brazilian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Brasileiro* — PCB) among rural workers⁹ and the need to respond to advances of radio broadcasting promoted by other religions in the country. Among them, the initiative by pastor Paulo Leivas Macalão stood out in this period, as he, in addition to expanding Assemblies of God temples in the Southeast Region, started the program *Voz das Assembleias de Deus* (Voice of the Assemblies of God) in 1955¹⁰.

Precisely in 1955, catholic authorities mobilized to implement their radio broadcasting network. A milestone of this process was the presentation of a study by Franciscan friar Gil Bonfim (1955) inspired by the experience of Monsignor José

9 In 1950, the Brazilian Communist Party defined, in its *Manifesto de Agosto* (August Manifesto), the strategy of building a social rural-worker base as a political course of action. In response to the expanding activity of communist parties in Africa and Latin America, Pope Pius XII published the encyclical *Fidei Donum*, in 1957. The document had, among its main goals, the missionary work of evangelization and fight against communism (Alves, 1968, p. 68; Montenegro, 2010, p. 95).

10 Regarding this pastor’s work and the dissemination of *Assembleísmo* in Brazil, the following references can be consulted, among others: Fajardo (2011; 2015) and Barrera Rivera (2012).

Joaquín Salcedo in the above mentioned ACPO, in Colombia. In 1958, RENECA was finally implemented, assuming the responsibility of catechetical and educational coordination and guidance of catholic stations and managing as many as 32 radios scattered throughout the national territory (Fávero, 2006, p. 22). The referred educational experiences of radio stations coordinated by Brazilian bishops in the Northeast Region date from the same period.

However, in addition to ecclesiastical initiatives, the transformation of this issue into a national policy was strongly built on the conviction that illiteracy is one of the main obstacles to economic development in the country. Albeit diffusely, this idea was in line with the principal assumptions of the human capital theory. This theory was propagated in the United States throughout the 1950s and postulated the existence of correlations between investment for personnel training, increase in personal income, and the economic development of countries¹¹.

The concern with literacy was also connected to another international variable, given that Brazil, as a signatory of the Convention which originated the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), supported the claim of “gradually achieving, with the cooperation of peoples in the fields of education, science, and culture, international peace and common prosperity for humankind” (Convention, 1946, p. 84 *apud* Araújo; Alcoforado; Ferreira, 2015, p. 15). In the late 1940s, UNESCO started to influence educational policies of member countries, based on its international resolutions, conventions, and agreements (Araújo; Alcoforado; Ferreira, 2015, p. 17).

One way of exercising such influence was the creation of a basic education center for Latin America. This initiative integrated the efforts of UNESCO and the Organization of American States (OAS). The agreement between them, signed in February 1950, established the creation of the Basic Education Center in Mexico and the Basic Education Bureau in Washington, D.C. The first would be managed by a UNESCO team, while the second would be coordinated by OAS. Both institutions would use their respective budgets and have administrative autonomy, but would be subordinate to a general committee. This committee should, among other tasks, coordinate the actions developed in Mexico and the United States and appoint the director of both the Center and the Bureau (UNESCO, 1950).

According to this agreement, the Center in Mexico was responsible for supervising studies, training personnel, and developing educational materials consonant with cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the populations assisted, without defining geographical boundaries. The Bureau, in the USA, should conduct investigations and develop educational materials to be distributed to Latin American countries that established literacy and basic education programs (UNESCO, 1950). The text indicates a certain overlapping of functions, generated, perhaps, by the attempt not to establish hierarchies between them.

11 In an article entitled “Investment in human capital and personal income distribution”, published in the *Journal of Political Economy*, Jacob Mincer (1958) presented a summary of his main postulates.

Basic education, as defined in the document, would consist of campaigns for literacy and expansion of elementary education to adults who had not attended or had dropped out of school. One of its main tasks was spreading hygiene awareness, agricultural knowledge, domestic economy, and support for the development of local crafts and artistic expressions. According to this understanding, such a set of knowledge and practices would boost the economic and social development of the locations assisted (UNESCO, 1950).

These international initiatives had a strong impact on radio education projects in Latin American countries, despite not being, at first, a methodology mentioned in the agreement between UNESCO and OAS. Among the projects benefited from the establishment of the Basic Education Center was the Colombian ACPO.

In the 1950s, the Philips company — which provided transmitters to ACPO — expanded its consumer market in Brazil, with the establishment of SIRENA and MEB, in the early 1960s. Concerning this potential niche, since the 1940s, Philips had been investing in the production of more sophisticated and expensive products, such as motors, X-ray apparatus, and computer components. Thus, the supply of radio sets might have been a way of directing simpler and cheaper production to markets with lower purchasing power. This hypothesis can be reinforced by reports from Frederik Philips, son of the founder and leader of the company at the time:

Philips has set up a pilot plant in Utrecht where we adapt production to the circumstances in developing countries. Instead of using the most sophisticated or expensive machines and the minimum man power, we study how we can make parts for radios or TV sets, for example, in the simplest way with small hand presses and cheap tools, thus giving work to a larger number of people. (Philips, 1982, p. 286)

Still according to the entrepreneur's memories,

This way of adapting manufacturing methods to local needs is highly successful, and our Utrecht factory has started many activities around the world, for over a decade. The experience gained in one country can be applied to others. We will need much work, for many generations yet, to meet the needs of the Third World. (Philips, 1982, p. 286)

Particularly when recalling the impacts on education and on the possible dissemination of the radio education experience to other continents, Philips (1982, p. 275) commented:

In 1963, I visited Ethiopia and met the minister of Education. I told him about the results obtained in a Latin American country, teaching the population to read and write by radio. [...] Then, we sent an interested individual to Latin America to learn what they had on these radio courses. Upon his return, he wrote a good report, and we sent him to Ethiopia.

Therefore, the funding of the book *Educação fundamental pelo rádio*, written by professor João Ribas da Costa (1956), then employee of Philips do Brasil, is part to a wider marketing context of successful experiences in other countries. However, we postulate the success of the publication, in 1956, cannot be explained only by business planning, as it results from an extensive relationship network formed between Philips do Brasil and the Catholic Church.

The book shows the project was initially submitted to ecclesiastical authorities in 1955 and published in the following year by the Catholic publishing house of São Paulo. To that end, it had to undergo the Catholic Church's bureaucracy, initially waiting for the approval of the censor, Monsignor Heládio Correa Laurini, then receiving the *Nihil Obstat* (nothing stands in the way), and subsequently being sent to the publication order of the Auxiliary Bishop (Costa, 1956). Submission to such proceedings indicates the importance given by the company to the catholic support for the work — which could have been published by any publisher. In this regard, the 118-page book, in addition to the ecclesiastical stamp, had its preface written by the Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General of the Archdiocese of São Paulo. Besides the preface, the work is preceded by three presentations, one from the UNESCO representative and two from military officers. This unusual number of presentations shows the project developed by Costa and funded by Philips do Brasil received other important seals of approval, in addition to that from the Catholic Church.

In the preface, Bishop Paulo Rolim Loureiro, among many compliments to professor Costa's work, wonders why radio, this "vehicle for goodness," is not "at the service of teaching and education in this vast multitude of fellow citizens who live — or better yet, vegetate — in the shadows of ignorance, in the darkness of illiteracy?" (Loureiro, 1956 *apud* Costa, 1956, p. 7). In the first presentation, the president of the Brazilian Institute of Education, Science, and Culture (connected to UNESCO), Paulo de Menezes Mendes da Rocha, guided by the human capital theory, stressed: "Education is not just a social or political issue, but, above all, a matter of economy and survival" (Rocha, 1956 *apud* Costa, 1956, p. 10). He added that was the reason for the growing relevance

assigned to education in economic development programs and the transcendent meaning of the Herculean and usually unknown work done by UNESCO [...] in the areas of basic education and its dissemination in rural and sparsely populated areas. (Rocha, 1956 *apud* Costa, 1956, p. 11)

In addition to the perceived fact that the professor's perspective was quite focused on productivity and development ideas converging to defend liberal capitalism, we underline the importance of registering here another legitimation resource Costa added to his project through the direct participation of a UNESCO representative in Brazil.

Besides this presentation, the book had another two, provided by the military segment. The first text was produced by the commander of the then called Central Military Zone of the Ministry of War, General Olympio Falconieri da Cunha. The second was written by Marshal João Batista Mascarenhas de Moraes,

commander of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (*Força Expedicionária Brasileira* — FEB) during World War II, a national hero in some sectors and an active participant in the Brazilian political life at the time. The Marshal suggests the author

should seek to attract the Church's sympathy to this cause, as they have powerful moral and material resources throughout the inland of the country and are particularly suitable for this task due to its apostolate nature. [...] A national entity does not have the necessary flexibility for such, and soon it would be subject to regional or political interests that would undermine the objectives of the campaign. (Moraes, 1956 *apud* Costa, 1956, p. 18)

Even though the Catholic Church recognizes the need for and seeks partnership with the State, as future projects make clear, we should highlight at least two aspects of the officer's rationale. The first concerns the attempt to give an apolitical character, free of private interests, to the project, a theme to which we will return. The second is the very presence of his collaboration, which is, undoubtedly, a political gesture by Costa, for the legitimacy that such authority figure bestows.

The work, so generously prefaced and presented, allows us to penetrate the intricacies of a set of connections between institutions that are in the genesis of fundamental actions for the Brazilian education, as in the case of radio education systems. These issues are tackled in the next topic.

INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN PHILIPS, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND UNESCO: FORMS OF LEGITIMATION AND PRESSURE ON THE STATE

The presented economic, social, and political context shows a set of interests of various orders that surrounded the implementation of the educational radio system. This topic intends to assess the relationship network created, based on different objectives and strategies (according to Certeau, 2012) of institutions that were significantly present in the process. Even if the historic memory generally described radio education as an initiative of the Catholic Church, supported by the State, with important participation of UNESCO, we must also recognize the role of private companies, notably of Philips do Brasil, in its implementation. The documentation in question, especially Costa's book (1956), allows us to perceive a work portraying a combination of interests around an education and information project.

As to the Catholic Church, what we have exposed about the ecclesiastical approval demonstrates how the project was of particular interest to them. Moreover, the book recurrently references the Sutatenza experience and praises the work of its founder, Monsignor Salcedo. Nevertheless, in order to bring the issue closer to the national picture, Costa (1956) often resorts to the ideas exposed by friar Gil Bonfim (1955) about the convenience and possibilities of implementing the educational radio system in Brazil.

The author frequently and complementarily cites Bonfim's studies (1955), making sure to show his closeness with the cleric. He reports that, in a meeting during the 36th International Eucharistic Congress, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1955,

We exchanged ideas regarding our common plans, and, as a result, he honored us with a visit to São Paulo, when we took the opportunity to play him some original recordings from Colombian radio schools. On the same occasion, we recorded our debate on the subject, and the persistent Franciscan took the magnetic tape to propagate our ideas through northeastern broadcasters. (Costa, 1956, p. 58)

This is another example of the confluence of actions, in this case, between the Catholic Church and the company that would provide technical support. We highlight the importance of expressions such as “common plans” and the role assigned to the cleric as the “herald” of ideas that supported these plans in the Northeast Region.

The Philips employee also reports the friar elaborated an analysis of the “conditions of popular education in Brazil, affirming later the *saving measure* lies in the implementation of radio schools in our land” (Costa, 1956, p. 58, emphasis ours). This passage is crucial because the defense of a saving mission enables moving the issue from commercial interests and ideological discourse in defense of the market — too straightforward to be exposed — to a stronger, more socially acceptable image, allowing the entrepreneurial action to infiltrate the religious practice context.

In fact, the text written by Gil Bonfim (1955) and referred by Costa (1956) has far more evangelizing that educational potential. It was published in the section “Pastoral Affairs” of the Brazilian Ecclesiastical Journal in 1955. The text started with a Bible quotation: “Quod in aure auditis, praedicate super tecta” (Mt. 10:27) (what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops), relating this verse to the “miracle of broadcasting: the providential moment when waves that are invisible, expansive, and fast as thought are converted by man into song and poetry, eloquence and education” (Bonfim, 1955, p. 405).

Bonfim (1955) reminds us that the Catholic Church

usually responds to Providence times. When the art of printing was invented, and while the Press remained the greatest propaganda weapon for any ideology, the Catholic Church used it, from the start, to guide the broad masses. [...] Also, it is noteworthy that the Catholic Church not only used the Press but *resorted to having their own publishers* to achieve their goal more effectively. (Bonfim, 1955, p. 405, author's emphasis)

In this passage, we underline the great amount of propaganda and ideology dissemination. Intentionally or not, the friar reveals aspects of the program that go beyond the educational problem. In this regard, we emphasize that, despite education being a fundamental instrument for the Catholic Church, it will be at the service of a larger goal, of moral and theological nature, which is salvation (Romano, 1979).

When speaking in the Latin American Colloquium for Rural Welfare, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1953, Monsignor Salcedo also highlighted the religious aspect involved, stating the event participants understood that

under conditions of a society that, for centuries, has sought the good of humankind, a catholic priest feels immense joy at the realization of the dream of direct communication between their office and the ranches of country people. This miracle was performed by radio. (Salcedo, 1953, p. 102)

However, potential miracles or salvations conducted by radio education also need the legitimizing seal and technical support of international organizations. In this direction, Costa's general argumentative tone points to the importance of UNESCO participation. Such a strategy had actually been used in Sutatenza. Hernando Vaca Gutiérrez (2009), the author of a thesis about this experience, reports its founder (Salcedo)

sympathizes with international organizations. Indeed, in 1948, he makes two trips to the United States to seek help for his work. In his speech at the United Nations, he exposes the need to promote rural development and the possibilities offered by means of mass communication. His ideas are well received, and, as a result of these meetings, he convinces UNESCO to send a Technical Assistance Mission. (Vaca Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 109, author's emphasis).

Present in Colombia since 1953, the institution was important in building the project.

Organization and planning were some of the strongest characteristics of Radio Sutatenza. A radio education committee was created to address the needs and challenges of radio education. It was composed by UNESCO technicians, the head of radio education research, and the professor-speaker, as well as the dean professor of Sutatenza as an advisor. (Vaca Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 214, author's emphasis)

In fact, these practical results were effects of a well-defined policy of supranational organizations. The agreement mentioned above between UNESCO and OAS, for example, stipulated in its article 3, paragraph b, that the Center for personnel training should coordinate efforts of national and international organizations or of governments that undertook the development of Basic Education materials for Latin America, and provide technical information (UNESCO, 1950, p. 23). When recurrently referring to UNESCO, Costa, as a representative of a multinational company, legitimizes his defense of education supported by the authority of a respected organization, and, at the same time, transcends the limits of the State, further widening the possibilities for intervention and potential markets.

This observation should not obliterate a potential commitment to education, but the position of the company in defending the industry and the expansion of its market is clear. When justifying the initiative to sponsor the work, the author stated Philips do Brasil wished not only to "cooperate with the dissemination of modern educational processes enabled by Electronics" but to highlight

the value and importance of the national receptor industry, since the present work extensively demonstrates that a radio set should not be considered a mere music box that entertains; it is and should be the most efficient educational and popular culture tool, anywhere in the world. (Costa, 1956, p. 19-20)

The company acted in Brazil similarly to how it worked in Colombia. According to Father Rauber (1956), another cleric who wrote about the subject: “Based on the information provided by Philips do Brasil, over 20,000 devices have been ordered to this Company for radio schools in Colombia” (Rauber, 1956, p. 943). With this know-how, the company presented itself as the most suitable for the supply and maintenance of the equipment. This aspect was also evidenced in Costa’s text:

Concerning warranty and technical assistance, [...] the technical and commercial responsibility for the products should be attributed to a renowned industrial company, traditionally established, and whose organization is widely spread throughout the country. (Costa, 1956, p. 82)

Although he did not name it, the task was directed at Philips do Brasil. We underline the work was published precisely when the company experienced its most significant expansion as to industrial and commercial activities when it was proud to be present in the entire national territory. Recalling the 1950s, an official publication of the company declared: “Brazil’s economic growth boosts the market performance of Philips in the country” (Philips, 2004, p. 36). The document was also a little more explicit with respect to marketing expectations for radio sets:

In Brazil, radio has always been an important instrument of national integration. By launching the massive campaign “a radio station in each Brazilian city”, Philips wanted to sell radio transmitters and receivers throughout the country (Philips, 2004, p. 32).

Furthermore, Costa’s text (1956) is permeated by technical observations related to types of equipment, as well as use possibilities and specificities. In this respect, he acts as a legitimate representative of his company. At the same time, his arguments, numbers, and information go beyond this technical specification, presenting many estimates of how the educational radio system would be more economical than the conventional school system. According to his figures, the costs for maintaining conventional schools for one year would be “enough to implement and run the educational radio system for five years, and we would have over twenty million cruzeiros to spare” (Costa, 1956, p. 43). Shortly after, the author states “the reason for this astonishing difference between the costs of these two systems lies in the replacement of thousands and thousands of teachers for a few experts working with a microphone at the broadcasters” (Costa, 1956, p. 43). Reinforcing the argument, he contends

In the current school system, the money *spent* each year with work bonuses is completely unrecoverable. In the already cheaper educational radio system, most of the *money used is not lost* because it is invested and becomes a respectable wealth, represented by broadcasters and the tens of thousands of receivers. (Costa, 1956, p. 46-47, emphasis ours)

This part of the argument evidences the fact that salaries of teachers from the conventional school system are presented as money “spent,” while infrastructure costs to implement a radio system are regarded as “money used that is not lost,” allowing wealth accumulation. In no part of the text, the author considers the basic issues of depreciation, obsolescence, and maintenance of the technological apparatus as possible expenses. Moreover, these calculations do not account for the largest part of the human resources necessary to operate an educational radio system — monitors responsible for following classroom lessons in person.

This absence is explained next, when the author states these monitors would work voluntarily and for free in Brazil, following the Colombian model. This part of the work would be developed based on the apostolate concept, recruiting “people of both genders, with at least some knowledge, who would assist the teacher-speaker in their task”, relying on the “heart and soul of the good inland people” (Costa, 1956, p. 45).

Costa’s (1956) arguments presented, therefore, an interesting paradox: the defense of technological modernization concomitant with the maintenance of religious archaism in human relations. In the text, this possible contradiction was overcome by the naturalized presentation of teaching as a ministry. Thus, the adherence and reproduction of these ideas by clerics who defended the system in Brazil became crucial.

However, besides the Catholic Church, the State, with the government at the time, would necessarily have to participate in the implementation of the system. This participation primarily corresponded to financial support, in association with other institutions. When analyzing the Colombian experience, Costa (1956) summarizes what we could call interinstitutional cooperation, based on questionings about the funding of a project of this magnitude. The resources would come from various sources.

Namely, in addition to the Catholic Church, the government, realizing the importance of the work, assumed an active role in the implementation of the system, aiming at increasing the educational action that would directly benefit rural centers of the country. Large industrial and commercial companies also contributed their share, not only due to the noble purposes of the enterprise but also because, clearly, the better educated the people, the more efficient the production centers and the broader the consumer market. (Costa, 1956, p. 27)

Next, the author mentioned UNESCO, whose solid support “ensured the cooperation of specialists who would be in charge of combining audio-only teaching, by radio, with the appropriate visual items, funding the acquisition of complementary material” (Costa, 1956, p. 27).

The previous excerpts raise a question to be considered. Besides disseminating more immediate company interests, Costa's (1956) discourse also reveals arguments of a more ideological nature, defending a value system whose essence is the liberal capitalism, then in dispute in Brazil and the world. Hence the relationship established between education, productivity, and expansion of the "consumer market." The intent was defending ideas that valued the "human capital," which had been spreading among intellectuals and technicians at the time. The Catholic Church was also involved in this line of argument: "Technique is technique — and means more productivity in less time —, and the Church knows it very well" (Costa, 1956, p. 64).

Specifically in Brazil, with respect to the funding and support that a broad educational radio program would require, Costa (1956) claimed several institutions would be willing to contribute, as the system would benefit them. Among them, he cites state enterprises, such as Petrobras and Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, trade, industry, and agriculture unions, banks, and private companies. "All these entities [...] would benefit from Radio Schools because 'better educated people means *better market*'" (Costa, 1956, p. 77-78, emphasis ours). In this scenario, given the task of "redeeming" adults from their illiterate condition, he argued it would be necessary to overcome the "passive resistance" that opposed educational campaigns. To that end, the path would be "attracting them gradually with the transmission of practical knowledge that could be transformed into *obvious and immediate material benefits*" (Costa, 1956, p. 92-93, emphasis ours).

In addition to its economy and efficiency, the implementation of the radio system was also supported by the assumption that it would be above political vicissitudes. Costa advocates the creation of a soundly structured organization to "overlook the tumultuous circumstances that surround us and be responsible for the establishment of radio education" (Costa, 1956, p. 62). In Brazil, this organization would be coordinated by the Catholic Church, and not the State, and conducted by technicians from UNESCO and Philips, institutions presented as above and beyond politics.

Costa's claim illustrates Certeau's (2012, p. 94) argument on independence and alleged neutrality involving action strategies. There was a project underway, and, in the case of the company, this project consisted of expanding the market of receivers. This intent cannot be expressed in such a way; thus, the company resorts to a solution that combines its strategy to a broader one. It involves the Catholic Church and the State, almost as a minority partner, and underlines the commitment of "technicians" from different areas, considered unconnected to the entanglements of political life in "tumultuous circumstances." The proposed arrangement promotes the "combinatory organization of the movements specific" to its participants (Certeau, 2012, p. 96).

However, the identification of certain ideological positions corresponds to only one aspect of the author analyzed. We reiterate this work does not intend to portray João Ribas da Costa as a mere employee defending the interests of his company. He is more than that. He is a character who moves between various interested institutions and organizations, which effectively participated in radio

education projects, thanks to his extensive training not only as a technician but also as an educator, as well as the strong relationship network he built.

His contribution was recognized, soon after the publication of the book, in 1957, when Ribas da Costa was chosen to organize and direct SIRENA, under MEC. His prestige was evident in the explanatory memorandum to the creation of the System sent by Heli Menegale, director-general of the National Department of Education, to the Minister of Education, Clóvis Salgado da Gama. The document mentioned only one person — Costa: “Another advantage for the immediate viability of the initiative stems from the participation, in this endeavor, of professor Ribas da Costa, whose collaboration the Minister has requested recently for this specific purpose” (Brazil, 1957a, s.p.). He added

Considering his expertise in this field of activity, acquired after several years of study and research, the contribution of this associate will significantly save time and, consequently, resources in the implementation of this project, especially in the planning, launching, and initial development stage of the educational radio system. (Brazil, 1957a, s.p.)

Besides defending the indication of the teacher, the proposal document for SIRENA sent to the minister is largely grounded on technical data and information present in Ribas da Costa’s book (1956). This text was then defined as the reference for the emergence of a consensus on the necessity and viability of the System.

Soon after its implementation, in 1957, SIRENA joined the National Campaign for Rural Education, a governmental program occurring since 1950 that contributed to the development of pilot radio education experiments in some municipalities throughout Brazil¹². Also, when MEB was founded, in 1961, SIRENA and RENECE paired up to create the radio broadcasting network used by the Movement. Nevertheless, despite the accumulated expertise, the success of the experiment was relative, and the System was dissolved in 1963. According to Sonia Moreira, among the reasons for this dissolution are “the excessive concern with material resources, at the expense of personnel qualification and result control, and political fluctuations” (Moreira, 1991 *apud* Andrelo, 2012, p. 145).

In addition to these factors, we can speculate the System lacked a more effective configuration of active agents, as seen in the development of MEB. In this regard, the Catholic Church — which had such a central role in coordinating and disseminating the idea of radio education —, although not absent, eventually had relatively small participation in SIRENA. In the System implementation project, the topic that defined the responsibility for the local administration of organized reception for classes included a reference to Dioceses or “groups of parishes.” However, they were listed along with state and municipal administrations, and even interested private institutions (Brazil, 1957b, s.p.).

12 They are: Leopoldina (MG), Timbaúba (PE), Benjamin Constant (AM), Santarém (PA), and Júlio de Castilhos (RS), according to Costa (2012, p. 54).

Regardless of the range of effective results of the first experiments, the historical event we sought to describe, based on the political, interinstitutional, and even personal relations analyzed herein, shows a convergence of interests. This convergence resulted in the emergence of a consensus around the need for implementing a rural education system by radio broadcasting in Brazil. This legitimation was grounded on arguments stating this system would be efficient, economical, and apolitical, given that it was funded by the State, coordinated by the Catholic Church, and technologically supported by Philips. Such consensus became fertile soil for future radio education projects, especially in the case of MEB.

Created by the Catholic Church in early 1961, this Movement stood out as the most comprehensive and lasting educational project based on radio schools nationwide. It aimed at assisting rural populations from areas considered underdeveloped in Northern, Northeastern, and Midwestern Brazil. Although it originated from an ecclesiastical initiative and coordinated by clerical members, its operation was funded by the Federal Government. The accord was established by executive order, signed in March 1961. According to Osmar Fávero (2006, p. 6)¹³, the Movement had as many as 7,353 radio schools, covering 14 states, in early 1964. Classes were transmitted by a network of 29 broadcasters, and approximately 320 thousand students completed the literacy cycle in the first five years of operation.

In 1961, when the Decree instituting MEB was signed, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* — CNBB) had at its disposal the broadcasters affiliated with RENEC, which, together with those of SIRENA, comprised the network of stations used by the Movement. Philips do Brasil secured the exclusive right to provide captive receptors, that is, devices that only tuned into the station belonging to the network of each region. Devices were distributed by the local priest, who was also responsible for choosing classroom monitors for radio lessons (Fávero, 2006, p. 37).

MEB was heavily inspired by its Colombian predecessor, and, in a similar fashion, the implementation of the Movement in Brazil only became possible because it counted with a comprehensive network involving entrepreneurs willing to carry out, with the Catholic Church, a massive campaign of legitimation and persuasion of government sectors as to the viability and efficiency of establishing a network of school stations.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The argument developed herein was initially based on a historical event, seeking to contextualize the period investigated. In this scenario, we macro-politically highlighted the constitution and exposure of illiteracy as a world obstacle to

13 Osmar Fávero was part of the National Secretariat of MEB from its inception until May 1966. He was responsible for creating local teams and good part of the methodological guidelines of the Movement educational action (Beisiegel, 2006, p. XI). Fávero's work, published as a book in 2006, was initially presented as a doctorate dissertation at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, in 1984.

economic growth and reduction of inequalities. This discourse was mainly directed at the so-called “Third World,” and had theoretical matrices defending the dissemination of liberal capitalism in a world polarized by the Cold War. One of these matrices was the human capital theory, which counted on education, especially of adults and the poorer, as a way of joining a market economy.

Faced with this scenario, the documentation presented and examined, from which we underline the proposals and plans related to educational radio programs, is particularly suited to the Brazilian conditions. Besides official texts, we analyzed reflections from different authors, with special attention given to João Ribas da Costa’s (1956) work. Studying his ideas, considering them in relation to the context described, and comparing them with other sources allowed us to describe Costa as a versatile interinstitutional agent. As an educator and Philips do Brasil technician, his trajectory enabled us to identify a series of relations. This chain of events involved the company, the Catholic Church, the Brazilian government, and UNESCO.

Guided by Michel de Certeau’s (2012) concept of *interest*, our assessment of the involvement of these institutions with the theme highlighted the justifications and forms of legitimation of the proposed System. Its legitimation became evident in the results of the negotiations emphasized for the constitution of SIRENA.

Document analysis allowed us to perceive that, even though the success of SIRENA can be regarded as relative — especially considering its short operational period, from 1957 to 1963 —, the discussions for its implementation produced more lasting results. Among them, we can mention the emergence of a consensus around the idea that radio broadcasting would be the most effective, economical, and stable way of disseminating basic education in rural environments. Ribas da Costa’s (1956) book, funded by Philips, provided broad arguments both for clericals and state agents who joined the project.

Thus, we postulate the development of actions for the implementation of radio education in Brazil was associated with intense interrelations in the negotiation of various interests and strategies, enabling the production of knowledge — both in a broader sense and the specific one defended by Certeau (2012). Such knowledge, at the same time, legitimized the Catholic Church, Philips do Brasil, and governmental and supranational organizations, and secured their primacy in the intention of massifying popular education, especially by radio. Under this perspective, we can regard the subsequent organization and trajectory of MEB, for the most part, as a consequence of the discussions, disputes, and convergences analyzed herein.

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