



"Dear reader." Gender and schooling experience in Argentina in the 1930s¹

“Lectora amiga”. Género y experiencia de escolarización en la Argentina de la década de 1930

“Leitora amiga”. Gênero e experiência de escolarização na Argentina na década de 1930

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the relationship between gender and schooling experience in the Argentine Federal Capital in the 1930s. Starting from the biography of a "girl" who attended school between 1932-1937, her particular experience and what is taken from her textbooks and class notebooks will be related to the representations on the roles or places assigned to the "girls," as future women, in the reading books authorized by the National Council of Education to be used in the schools. In this sense, elementary school textbooks have become a valuable source, as they are fundamental support in disseminating moral, aesthetic and patriotic values of the time. In a plot that articulates macro and micropolitical elements, the richness that the biographical experience gives through particular stories of the 'body to body' (Agamben, 2014, p. 19) provides tools of excellent heuristic value for the study of that relationship.

Key Words: Gender representation. Biography. Textbooks. Elementary school.

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Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la relación entre género y experiencia de escolarización en la Capital Federal Argentina en la década de 1930. Partiendo de la biografía de una “niña” escolarizada en esa década, se pondrá en relación su experiencia particular -recuperada también desde sus lecturas y cuadernos de clase - con las representaciones sobre los roles asignados a las “niñas”, como futuras mujeres, en los libros de lectura utilizados en las escuelas de dicha jurisdicción. En este sentido, los libros de lectura para la educación primaria se convierten en una fuente muy valiosa, por ser un soporte fundamental en la difusión de valores morales, estéticos y patrióticos de la época. En una trama que articula lo macro y micropolítico, la riqueza que la experiencia biográfica arroja a través de historias particulares, del ‘cuerpo a cuerpo’ (Agamben, 2014, p. 19), aporta herramientas de un gran valor heurístico para el estudio de dicha relación.

Palabras Clave: Representaciones de género. Biografía. Libros de lectura. Escuela primaria.

Resumo

Este trabalho analisa a relação entre gênero e experiência de escolarização na Capital Federal Argentina nos anos 1930. Partindo da biografia de uma "menina" que frequentou a escola naquela década, será relatada sua particular experiência - recuperada também de suas leituras e cadernos de aula - em tensão com as representações sobre os papéis atribuídos às “meninas”, como futuras mulheres, nos livros de leitura utilizados nas escolas. Nesse sentido, os livros de leitura utilizados no ensino fundamental tornam-se uma fonte muito valiosa, pois são um suporte fundamental na disseminação dos valores morais, estéticos e patrióticos da época. Numa trama que articula elementos macro e micropolíticos, a riqueza que a experiência biográfica lança através de histórias particulares, do “corpo a corpo” (Agamben, 2014, p. 19), fornece ferramentas de grande valor heurístico para o estudo do dito relacionamento.

Palavras-chave: Representações de gênero. Biografia. Livros de leitura. Ensino Fundamental.

Introduction

This paper aims at analysing a school experience based on Z. F.'s biography reconstruction, who attended elementary school in the Capital City of Argentina in the 1930s. The idea is to relate a particular experience with the representation of the assigned roles to the "girls," as future women, expressed on their copybooks and their 6th-grade reader books at elementary school, which is their final year at primary level. The books are considered the main support in the transmission of moral, esthetic and patriotic values of the time. Furthermore, involving gender in the analysis allows us to find key elements in the school experience of a girl, which have an impact on her personal life as well.

This analysis brings back the historical context in which this girl's school trajectory is embedded in order to observe different meaning constructions that come to light in Argentina's educational system: nationalism, Catholicism and pedagogical renovation movements that have emerged against positivism, which have impregnated the origins of this educational system.

Regarding the sources of this paper, it analyses Z.'s 6th-grade copybook, considering this one as a tool to organize homework and classwork (Gvirtz, 1997); a book that was used that same year: "El Forjador. Reader for advanced grades" written by Luis Arenas (teacher, professor and presenter of New School in Argentina), and some life stories written by the woman herself in her seventies, after finishing her school career.²

Considering the biography as a source in this paper aims at showing how general processes with individual trajectories allow rebuilding particular experiences in a specific context, understanding subjects as "informants and witnesses who tell the story of their lives, (...) in their double quality of singular individuals and collective subjects" (Barela, 2004, p.13). The idea is to reflect upon how these speeches act in the early moments of life "in the connection between people and gadgets" (Agamben, 2014, p.18). The gadgets are seen as diverse, complex and singular devices from which meeting points emerge but also differences among the subjects.

Moreover, as a fundamental source for the history of education, the reading book is seen as a school object or teaching device and an object of cultural transmission, a mediator between state politics and pedagogical movements. Furthermore, it is seen as the primary source of values transmission related to men and women's place in society at the beginning of the 20th century.

This article will be divided into three main parts. First, we shall analyse the school texts and their bond with school experiences in our country. We shall examine the characteristics of the materials concerning the subjects, their traditions, trajectories, material and symbolic culture, and the context in which they are embedded in terms of Escolano (1999) "Their education microworld." In the second place, we shall address gender and its path through the fields of historiography and education history as essential reading for this analysis. At this point, we shall articulate the main aspects that refer to women's place in society in the addressed period, which will allow us to penetrate the experience of a girl in 1930. Lastly, we shall attempt to rebuild the main elements necessary to contextualize schools in Argentina in the 20th century. Taking that into account, we shall analyse the implication of being a school girl at that time. This last part will be organised into three parts. The first one is centred on the reconstruction of Z.'s school experience. The second one is centered on the presentation of the

² The stories were requested by one of the authors of this work in mid-2004 on the occasion of the proximity of her 80th birthday. She was not asked to write on a particular topic or under a defined format, but she was given a notebook to write whatever she wanted to tell. By her own will, the author opted for a double ordering of the stories, chronological (from birth to adulthood) and categorical (childhood, neighborhood, parents, siblings, family). They were complemented with interviews about what was written there. The author passed away in June 2014. We express our gratitude to her.

book "El Forjador" and its relation with her school experience, and the third one is focused on analysing and comparing the two editions of the book "El Forjador" from a gender perspective; for boys and girls; for a male friend reader or a female friend reader.

1. School reading texts, experience and schooling

The study of the school reading texts was part of the historiographical renovation in the field of the history of education at the beginning of the 1980s³. It also implicated a dialog with the social and cultural history and the renovation of sources and objects of study. In the case of Argentina, this renewal did not occur until democracy was back in 1983; and in the mid-1990s, some education research groups emerged. These ones worked together with some European projects as IRPESM⁴ in the analysis of school texts in Latin America (Ossenbach and Somoza, 1999; Ossenbach, 2000). In 2000, some works about books and school texts from sociological, linguistic and historical perspectives were identified (Kaufmann, 2002). However, the authors mentioned above agreed in those years that, far from being exhausted, the field was enriched with the analysis of the impact on teaching processes and the comparison between countries. Moreover, some other aspects within this analysis were the presence of pedagogical currents in the configuration of the texts, the problems of gender, native people and minorities, as well as the methodological discussions regarding the use of textbooks and school manuals as historical sources. Some of these concerns are recovered in this work, recognizing how much progress has been made in the almost twenty years that have elapsed since the diagnosis.⁵ As a range of possibilities to explore, Escolano Benito (1999) stated that:

As a true educational microworld, the school book also turns out to be a mirror that reflects in its material frameworks the features of the society that produces it, the culture of the environment in which it circulates, and pedagogy, which, as a self-referential system, regulates the use of its teaching practice (p.35).

Therefore, it is in the access to the school's material culture where various "school cultures" are intertwined (Escolano en Viñao, 2008). On the one hand, the "culture of experts" is the authors of school books whose work contributes to marking the school curriculum. In Argentina in the 1930s, these experts/authors were teachers and/or professors with an outstanding career, retired inspectors, or other system agents. On the other hand, the "culture of politicians or managers" is present in school texts' approval and guidelines. With the enactment of Law 1420 of 1884 in Argentina, it was established that all books used in national schools had to be approved by the National Council of Education (NCE). Similarly, some provinces also did. At the same time, the foreign texts primarily used in schools were suppressed according to the surveys carried out by the NCE (Waimermann and Heredia, 1999), driving a small industry of publishing houses that edit this type of text (Montenegro and Mendez, 2017). Thus, on the back cover, the material book includes the

³ As a general reference, we can refer to the founding works of Choppin (1992) in France and the work directed by Escolano (1998) for the Spanish case, in addition to those that are referenced throughout the work.

⁴ The Interuniversity Research Project on European School Manuals.

⁵ We can highlight the works of Waimermann and Heredia (1999) that, from a gender perspective, analyse the concept of family and work; The collective works directed by Cucuzza and Sprengelburg (2012), Cucuzza and Pineau (2002) the works of Cucuzza (2007) and Ascolani (2010) related to the ideas of nation, morality and patriotic principles and the analysis of Montenegro and Mendez (2017) on the expression of immigration policies in reading books in their mediation with the immigrant student.

approval seal of the NCE to be allowed to circulate within the institutions. Finally, and at a level that is difficult to access from the history of education, the "artisanal" culture emerges. It is the one that is generated in the practice of teachers and professors, more coinciding with what is called "school grammar" or "Academic school culture" that implies the mediatization of textbooks in the daily practice of teachers.

Likewise, we must not forget the subjects or recipients of the school book -the boys and girls- as well as their families, since their particularities, their mothers and fathers (Viñao, 2008), their traditions and trajectories, and the context in which they are inserted, mediates school work. This puts in tension the representations that circulate through the school and its material and symbolic cultures. With these warnings, the present work proposes an approach that opens the spectrum of that "educational microworld" (Escolano, 2006) to enter into dialogue with the different components that go through these devices, some of which are intrinsic to it -authorship, the structure of the work, pedagogical references, etc. - and others are extrinsic to it and exceed it - characteristics of the students: gender, social belonging; reception context: characteristics of the institution, the teacher, among others.

From there, putting the text into dialogue, with the biography of a girl who used it in her schooling in a given historical context, reveals contradictory tendencies and points of tension between socio-historical, pedagogical and, of course, gender elements, showing that schooling is not a closed totality, coherent and seamless machinery. In terms of Depaepe and Simon (2008), we try to think that, in everyday life, the school could form a pedagogical island, but that it is at the center "of life itself and not outside of it." (p.114).

2. Gender as a key to reading

Together with the historiographical renewal of the 1980s, the category of gender in the field of educational history is also a conquest of the last decades of the 20th century. Barrancos (2005) stated that a series of national and international events made the renewal of Argentine historiography possible, giving rise to what is known as the History of Women. In this development, although gender relations with history are "constitutive" (p. 36), these links in countries such as Argentina date back to the last 25 years of the previous century.⁶

Very gradually, gender was installed as a vital category for historical analysis, not only as a social construction of sexual difference; but also as a form of power relations, as "construction of meanings, limited by the context, the social and cultural situation of the study subjects and the historical time" (Scott in González Giménez, 2009).

In our country, two aspects made this historiography possible, one represented by the crisis of Social History with the adoption of specific objects of Cultural History. The other, by the projections of feminism and its intellectual production between the 70s and 90s, which delimited a field. In this sense, the central aspects presented by the historiography of women in Argentina are expressed in a clear epochal predominance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which has prioritized the action of the women's movement⁷, have been studied above all.

⁶ Dora Barrancos affirms that the history of women (of Anglo-Saxon origin) has directly affected the historiographic aspects with the same force as the political and social events experienced by socialism or the current conditions of capitalism. Also, North American historiography has been enriched in recent decades by historiography referring to women. This attracted a holistic theoretical arsenal that has improved the study of historical phenomena, new academic and epistemic formulations.

⁷ Barrancos (2005) affirms that there have been highlighted analyses around precursor or prominent figures, as well as their political and ideological inscription. Studies have also predominated on worker women in certain industrial and service branches (textiles, refrigerators, telephony, fishing industry, teachers), others with a broad approach to prostitution. In the middle of the 20th century, the figure of "Peronismo" (Argentinian political movement), and the women identified with that political expression.

The main dimensions addressed have revolved around health and hygiene, politics, family, education and work. Although women in history are usually seen according to the perspective of a particular group of women (middle class, white, etc.), in recent years, the viewpoints have multiplied, social history has strongly intersected with the history of women, and new feminist positions have proliferated. These ones have begun to claim equality in difference by reviewing the sexism of the 60s (De Almeida, 2008), giving a plural treatment, and recognizing the multiple modes of expression of gender relations.

Education has been one of the main areas where the female condition and the role of women have been studied in depth. As stated by De Almeida (2008), gender and its derivations have been widely discussed in the analyses of the educational process and in school relations, among teachers, students, managers, in the differentiation in teaching for boys and girls, in the sexual stereotypes derived from culture, so that the educational field became an appropriate field to "articulate gender and ethnicity or gender and social class" (p.229).

However, the context in which women entered the educational system at the end of the 19th century was based on myths and prejudices. Women were denied their intellectual capacities. They were placed in the domestic and procreation sphere from a place of inferiority reduced to caring for children and housework, "helping" the man, who carried out productive work and was the only one responsible for satisfying the family monetarily. In this way, the area par excellence of women was the private one, and she possessed certain qualities (patience, passivity, sweetness) that came to complement the strong, brave and intelligent man. This division of spaces (public-private / intellectual-moral) and the complementarity to men justified and legitimized women's subordination to them (Elverdin, 2012).

For the period that we address in this work, the speeches of those who are thinking about the nation, the State and the relations between social groups account for the main topics that allude to the place of women: "their nature and sensitivity built around the domesticity,⁸ the maternal ideal and the regeneration of the race"(Lobato in Barrancos, 1993, pp.69-70).

This climate of the early twentieth century had undergone some modifications that became more noticeable in the interwar period when issues related to women, sex, and the family were exposed and discussed, although without objecting to the home as the appropriate environment for them. Throughout those decades, the representations most related to the bourgeois ideal of the family spread: the woman in the house, tidying it, taking care of her children, accompanying the husband in a serene environment, and thus nourishing a society divided into exclusive areas (although in practice they were not): the economy, politics and culture in the exteriority of the public world, and the domestic world, the domain par excellence of the family and women⁹.

The popular classes also accepted the generalization of this ideal model. However, tension increased since to satisfy family needs, women had to return to work. The progressive insertion of women in manufacturing or working activities was carried out in a generalized context "on the terrible consequences for health, their morals and that of their children" (op. Cit, p. 70).

It should be noted that, by the 1930s, female participation in the public scene was also linked to social Catholicism at the beginning of the 20th century. The Catholic Church

⁸ According to Lagarde (2001), the model of woman built in the social imaginary is that of the woman as "being of domesticity," of the domus, of the house, of the home as her natural space. This ideal of the women as housewives, domestic, homemakers makes those who walk in the street, those who come and go, be the bad ones or the wrong ones (p. 48).

⁹ To this, we should add that the care of the body and the ideal of beauty that appear in the magazines with the highest circulation tend to accentuate the figure of women as the "queen of the house. In the 1940s, even doing sports or gymnastics served "the good of their health, the glory of their beauty, and above all, contributed decisively to the happiness of men, giving the nation healthy and beautiful generations that glorify humanity" (Lobato in Barrancos, 1993, p. 71).

emphasized the traditional role of women as an educator and companion in the family, and as a philanthropist and guardian of purity in society at large. To restore order and promote nationalism in the 1930s, the places they occupied had to do with dining rooms, vocational schools, the training of housewives, which generated fears in the upper class in the face of the threat of "Masculinization of women" in these spaces.

A solid female presence sustained the motto of Homeland and Home in this period since for the Nationalist Right, the order in the sexes and in the family environment symbolized and reinforced order throughout the social sphere, and male and female participation was necessary to maintain the status quo. In this way, the feminine was associated with the moral education of women in the interconnection between chastity, property and fidelity, where a rigid border was established between the natural and the social.

3. Schooling in Argentina in the 1930s: being a girl and a schoolgirl

The 30s of the twentieth century constitute for Argentina a convulsed period in the national history of which some coordinates will be indicated¹⁰. In this decade, the world had gone through a world war and found itself in a scenario of uncertainty regarding the validity of liberal institutions and representative democracy, which in the world was stressed by the left and right ideologies, nationalism, racism and antisemitism on the rise. This was called A world storm by Halperín Donghi (2003), within which Argentina encountered its own political, economic and institutional difficulties and crises. 1930 marks the year of the first coup d'etat that attacked the incipient democracy achieved by the middle class in 1916 -the first of what would later become a series- with the overthrow of the government of Hipólito Yrigoyen¹¹ in the hands of "a small group of military forces" (Macor, 2001, p. 53). This gave rise to a complex institutional and political scenario that led to "the 1930s [have] remained in historical memory as a period of deep political crisis" (Privitello, 2001, p. 139).

A relevant element to understand national particularities is the network generated between the army and the Catholic Church, in what has been called the passage from "liberal Argentina" to "Catholic nationalism." This period is characterized by a double process: the militarization of society and the Catholicization of the Armed Forces (Mallimaci, 1995). In it, a strong influence of a type of hegemonic Catholicism develops since the mid-1920s: the integralist¹², which seeks to strengthen itself in the State by

¹⁰ The bibliography that has been used in this work to analyse the period from both history and the history of education is extensive. See the volume directed by Alejandro Cattaruzza (2001).

¹¹ In 1916, Yrigoyen of the Radical Civic Union was consecrated president by popular vote due to the sanction of the Sáenz Peña Law of universal male, compulsory and secret voting. In 1922 his term ended, assuming another radical politician: Marcelo T. de Alvear, dividing radicalism into "antipersonalistas" and Yrigoyenists. The former, followers of Alvear, demonstrated against the caudillo's policy; the latter defined themselves as the true interpreters of the popular, revolutionary, transformative and Americanist character of radicalism, accusing the former of being a covert form of conservatism. The confrontation between both factions worsened at the end of Alvear's mandate when in the 1928 elections, Yrigoyen obtained a landslide victory. Such popular support quickly gave way to the general discontent caused in our country by the unexpected crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929 and its widespread consequences, generating favorable conditions. On September 6, 1930, General José Félix Uriburu commanded a coup d'etat against the government.

¹² Mallimaci (1992) conceptualizes integral Catholicism in a strong unity between Church and State. Oriented to militarism, this Catholicism considers that the participation of Catholics in politics is necessary because, although it condemns party democracy for being the cause of divisions in society, Catholics must participate to Catholicize public life, instilling the Christian values. This is anti-modern, anti-communist and anti-liberal. It emerges in sectors of the middle and upper classes and confronts the liberal state model and those fractions of Catholicism that tried to make a pact with it. In this context, it is proposed as a pillar of "Argentinity" and of the homeland, and as the foundation of national identity.

penetrating the Armed Forces. In this context, the Church strives to occupy more and more public space and regain the prominence lost by secular liberalism by proposing "a new Christian order" based on the union between Catholicism and nationality, a fact that is strongly observed in the educational field. Integralist Catholicism sought to be the cultural matrix in which nationality was sustained, but also to homogenize the different variations of Catholicism as a result of the massive European immigration that arrived in Argentina since the end of the 19th century.

Furthermore, the crisis of capitalism in 1929 put an end to the high growth rates of the Argentine economy as a consequence of the exports of agricultural products, leading, according to Korol (2001), to the rethinking of the Argentine productive structure, with more significant state intervention and development of a plan to increase industrial production, modifying the economic system as well as the social structure and the job market¹³. Until then, Argentina was an agro-exporting country and mainly rural, but with a strong and growing urban middle class within the main metropolises (Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Rosario, among others) that mainly consisted of public employees, small merchants and independent workers who worked in blacksmithing, carpentry, etc. There was a rural middle class of small tenants and landowners, especially in the Pampean and coastal regions of our country. Whether in rural or urban areas, this middle class was essentially made up of the mass of immigrants who had populated the territory in the preceding decades.

But the crisis of 1930 altered these policies and changed the face of the liberal State. On the one hand, the economic turmoil limited the creation of job positions and even brought unemployment. What is more, the arrival of immigrants accentuated this problem. On the other hand, the advance of leftist ideologies and fascism in Europe after the Great War and the Russian Revolution came to our country hand in hand with immigrants, making this a suspicious and dangerous element and susceptible to being deported for its political activity. The world's storm was in Argentina.

Z.'s schooling: a crossroads of experiences

Z. F. grew up in the context previously described. She was born in Buenos Aires, Federal Capital of the Argentine Republic, on January 31, 1925, in the Liniers neighborhood, being the penultimate of five siblings. Her parents were Syrian-Lebanese immigrants who arrived in Argentina at the beginning of the 20th century *"like so many other immigrants, in search of peace and new horizons that would allow them to live from their jobs, start a family and forge a happy future for their children."*¹⁴ Her parents, Antonio and Sraia, were part of that first migratory wave from the Middle East that occurred between 1860 and 1918/20 due to the confluence of three factors:

A tremendous demographic growth in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, which causes the balance between land and population to break down. A parallel process of incipient industrialization [that] leaves small merchants and artisans in a situation of significant vulnerability, who see emigration as a plausible way out [and] the fierce persecution suffered by Christian minorities within the Turkish Empire (De Luca, 2006, pp.3-4).

¹³ Following the largest cumulative drop in GDP during what has been called the "Great Depression" of the 1930s, the crisis was followed by a more stable recovery. As stated by Angus Maddison (1991), it marked a turning point in the growth strategies initiated in the 19th century, since the substitution of imports, and in the post-war period, the industrialization process became a new growth model throughout America. Latina (Díaz Fuentes, 2006).

¹⁴ From now on, quotations referring to life stories are in italics.

Her hometown, Liniers, like many other neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, results from the combination of European immigration at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th and to the development of the railway. It has the name of the railway station inaugurated on November 1, 1887. A large percentage of the population residing there was linked to the train, like Antonio, her father. He worked in the foundry, starting his working day at 7 a.m. until 5 p.m., with a short break between 11:30 and 12, thus organizing the rhythms of the home around salaried work.

The 1930s meant essential changes in the city and in the neighborhood's morphology and dynamics due to the deconcentration of the popular sectors of the traditional areas and the creation of new neighborhoods¹⁵, meaning not only a demographic alteration but also changes in the forms of Buenos Aires's sociability. The double link between immigration and work constituted one of the identifying characteristics of sociability, articulating, on the one hand, the organization of the daily and weekly shift around attendance at work and Sunday rest; and on the other, the overlapping of traditions and stories derived from the presence of immigrants of different origins. Z. says that her neighborhood:

It was populated by people from many parts of Europe, mostly immigrants with numerous families (Italians, Spanish, Armenians, etc.) of humble conditions. They worked from dawn to dusk in any job that allowed them to support their children and family. So on Sunday, as it was a rest day, they would meet at the house of some of them and there between songs, dances, games, they would remind the distant homeland.

In these spaces of sociability, there were different activities for boys and girls. Z. mentions that:

The little ones (who were in large numbers) played in the street and formed groups; the men played football with a ball made of rags, inserted in a sock which lasted very little according to the fierceness of the game, causing fights and screams. The girls played with charming figurines. There were animals, flowers, fruits, costumes, etc. We spent hours playing, trying to win those we liked the most.

Activities that put skill and physical strength into play, "fierceness," as a sign of masculinity, were reserved for the boys. At the same time, there were other activities involving beauty, softness, and calm for the girls. Mentioning football is particularly significant since in these years, sports practice begins to spread as a characteristic element of the porteño popular sectors (González Leandri, 2001). Football acted and will act not only as an element of leisure and popular identification but as a node of solid intensity in the configuration of identities differentiating features between the masculine and feminine.

In 1930, there was a considerable expansion of primary schools due to different policies developed by the national State and the provincial states. There is abundant literature from the history of education that analyses this enlargement, among which we find the sanction of the national law 1420 of common, free and compulsory education in 1884. This one is highlighted (Puiggrós, 1998; Tedesco, 1986; Filmus, 1996, among

¹⁵ Such deconcentration had been happening continuously since the beginning of the century. To the more traditional neighborhoods -San Telmo, Barracas, La Boca, San Cristóbal, Balvanera, and the North- that at the end of the century surrounded the Center, a first periphery was added, already visible around 1910: Almagro, Caballito, Flores, Belgrano, the lower Belgrano, Palermo or Villa Crespo" (González Leandri, 2001, p. 214).

others). This law also stipulated that mandatory education was for boys and girls, although this did not necessarily imply coeducation. This expansion process was not homogeneous in territorial terms, nor was it free from tensions and debates about the system's directions, both politically and pedagogically. The development of these aspects exceeds what is covered on this paper¹⁶.

Z. developed her schooling between 1932 and 1937 at school No. 9 "José María Torres," dependent on School District No. 20 of the Federal Capital. In her stories, she writes: *"The happiest years were when I started elementary school [...] We had classes every day except Sunday. My school was a three-floor building, with large classrooms, huge yards, where a large number of students played"*.

The school is located at 420 Larrazábal street in Capital Federal, Liniers neighborhood, and began operating in 1928 as a school for girls - although it admitted boys up to the third grade. As Z. recalls, the building had three floors and more than 1,200 m² of patios and green spaces, those huge patios that Z. remembers.¹⁷ According to the reports of the Secretary of Education of the School District No. 20 of the City of Buenos Aires, in "the humble neighborhood, the School was known as" The Faculty "according to the oral testimony of former neighbors"

As we delve into Z.'s class notebook, we can identify some elements of the school culture that bring us closer to her daily life. It operates as an organizer of homework, as analysed by Gvirtz (1997), a pattern that, around 1930, was not alien to the polemics between Scholanovism, traditional school, bureaucracy and efficiency, thus emerging the class notebook as an eclectic instrument. Among these characteristic elements, we can highlight the chronological organization -the internal order follows the order of the class days and the school day- and the individuality -one notebook per student, one student per notebook.

Regarding content, one of the subjects present in it becomes relevant for our study: Home Education¹⁸. Although this subject does not occupy a central space in the notebook such as geography or mathematics, the three entries that can be found in that school year make specific and very explicit references to the training of a young lady or future woman. Throughout its pages, we can find a first entry entitled "Women in the home, in society and in the country", the second one "Women in the home," and the third one "Domestic accounting."

These kids are not interpellated as "girls and schoolchildren" but as future women. This does not give importance to their present lives but to the future women they will become. The three entries talk about women and refer to their place. Firstly, "the lady of the house" at home is closely related to raising children.¹⁹ Regarding the characteristics that these 'ladies of the house' should have, the texts stand out: "reserved, demure, modest, dignified, chaste and sober, educated without pedantry." What is more, it is specified that in order to become those women, they should learn "to sew, to mend, to take care of

¹⁶ The consultation of the pedagogical publications that circulated in those years is extremely interesting to illustrate the debates. In particular, the Magazine "La Obra," disseminator of the ideals of the new school. An approximation can be seen in the book mentioned above by Puiggrós (1998). On the other hand, and also in opposition to the prevailing positivism in the educational system, spiritualism emerges that, at times articulated with the principles of Catholicism, will gain ground in public education and teacher training (Pinkasz and Pitelli, 1993; Southwell, 1997).

¹⁷ For the history of the construction of the public school as a place in Buenos Aires, see the work of Montenegro (2012).

¹⁸ Article 6 of Law 1420 established within the minimum mandatory instruction for girls "handwork and notions of domestic economy" and for boys "knowledge of the simplest military exercises and evolutions, and in campaigns, notions of agriculture and livestock. "

¹⁹ In the entry entitled "The woman in the home" we can read: "In all spheres of life, women occupy a prominent place, but undoubtedly it is the home, the place where they belong par excellence."

children, to dress decently, to cook, to be kind, to respect old-aged people, to be cheerful at heart, to be active," as well as to have an accounting book "in which the daily entries and exits are recorded." These ideal prescriptions combine a domestic asceticism with the requirements of modern and capitalist life within the framework of the full expansion of wage-earning society.

"El Forjador", the book in a girl's schooling experience.

The book that Z. used in her last school year is "El Forjador." Reading text for higher grades", which began to be published in the early 1930s by the Ángel Estrada and company, and it was written by Luis Arenas, an elementary and secondary school teacher who participated in another great educational publication of innovative material: La Obra Magazine. Thus the book presents characteristics of new school and images and representations of the time that are particularly visible when recovering the genre as a key to reading.

It has already been explained that State regulation allowed the generation of a national publishing industry dedicated explicitly to reading books. It also led to its delimitation and renewal, defining it as a support material, a transmisor of teaching content, and an effective mediator of the different state policies that permeated the educational system and pedagogical movements. Some innovations came from the pedagogical renewal movements that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and expanded in the first postwar period. According to Escolano (2006), in the Spanish case, the irruption of "Escolanovism," new school, influenced - during the 1920s and 1930s - the renewal of the school manual concerning the selection of contents, the interpellation of the subject, retracing the static and stereotyped roles and their passivity in front of the text of the traditional format and new textual plots that influenced the layout, the forms of verbal and iconic expression, among others.

This influence was not total, nor did it lead to a complete renovation of the pedagogical materials, but it did generate transformations in two senses, according to Escolano (2006). On the one hand, partial changes to the interior of classic manuals and books, making the rigid current canons more flexible, but without transforming their fundamental structure. On the other hand, the appearance of new textual genres that adopted the principles of the new school to the printed book, which, however, found its limitations. The new school movement being fundamentally anti-bookish, the proposed adaptations generated "a bastard and artificial metamorphosis of the New Education" (p.339), surviving those innovations that best adapted to the codes of the "empirical culture of the school" (p.340), that is, to the profession of teachers and the written and unwritten rules that circulate there.

In the case of El Forjador, it is possible to identify Escolano's argument. As previously stated, its author was a contributor to *La Obra Magazine*, an expression of the New School movement in Argentina, founded in 1921. It was constituted as a space for debate for the transformation of the traditional school, providing teachers with didactic elements to renew their pedagogical practice. Luis Arenas was the administrator of the magazine in its early years. Some of his articles were primarily dedicated to pointing out requirements to improve school books and contributed to his task of teaching reading and promoting reading. Far from dismissing the literary culture, from "La Obra," it is highlighted as an object, "which favors the approach of children to the book and collaborates in the formation of readers" (Sardi, 2008, p. 133). Arenas refers there to criteria such as the gradation of the contents, pleasant readings with clear language and according to age, typography and type of paper that favor reading, as well as an attractive presentation that stimulates appropriation by the child with attractive illustrations that give rise to emotion and feeling (Sardi, op. cit.).

In "El Forjador," it is possible to identify these criteria with its most unique characteristic: having differentiated editions for boys and girls. Although the latter will

occupy a specific section, it is necessary to introduce it to point out some issues in the book that its own author points out as "new" in this publication. From the beginning, it is presented in a renewed way compared to other contemporary texts with two letters addressed to the teachers and the students who are designated as "Colleague" and "Friend Reader" placing the subjects in a direct interaction that dismantles the stereotypes of other publications.

The author first addresses the teacher to highlight aspects of their work, which he defines as a "new book" with readings primarily written for children. There, he alludes to the aesthetic renovation that he proposes by interrogating them with the question: "Don't you think, like me, colleague, that the moment has come for the divorce between didactics and aesthetics to end?" (p.11). Concerning this, the most significant innovation of the book when compared to others of the time is the incorporation of illustrations that accompany the readings. Some already had plates and colors; however, "El Forjador" incorporates the figure of the illustrator who composes their work, especially for the books. Their illustrations were in charge of Juan Hohmann, a Uruguayan painter, draftsman and lithographer, living in Argentina since 1883, who participated in the Argentine press.

Coming back to the differentiated editions for "boys" and "girls," Arenas refers to this as "an old desire" of teachers for which he incorporates different content based on gender in the section devoted to the "formation of the moral world of the child" (Arena, 1934, p. 11). As Linares (2002) warns, reading books at the beginning of the century used to have gender discrimination based basically on the biological laws of the time; in this particular case, the differentiation contributes to a differentiated "moral" formation. In this way, the book maintains a similar format, aesthetics and organization in both editions, but with different titles in one of its parts, "Senda Frágosa" in the edition for men and "Gracia Plena" in the edition for women.

Regarding the "artisan culture" of teachers, enables its mediation in the circulation and appropriation of the book's proposal:

I have composed a reference book, to the extent of current possibilities, the demands of the new school in its efforts to unify educational work, but I have also taken into account, and very especially, our present school reality (Arena, 1939, p. 12).

The author proposes teachers to use it as a means for their task, giving them a central role as interlocutors of the work through interpellations such as "judge you, Colleague." (...) "Each teacher will act as they believe it is more convenient" (...) "The quality of a work instrument depends a lot on who handles it; and I trust your didactic expertise" (pp.11-12). The author addresses the teachers directly as peers; he does not position himself from the role of expert but rather tries to place them at the center of the work of the book. The same happens with the male and female students he tries to reach with a letter addressed to them. This strategy brings back the proposals of the New School regarding positioning boys and girls as subjects of learning at the center of the educational process and the need to articulate the pedagogical proposition to their interests and needs.

Beyond these innovations, the analysis of the general contents of the work is not included in this paper. However, we can identify that, although there is an inclination to the pedagogical renewal movement, this influence, in terms of Escolano (2006), is more linked to methodology than doctrine. El Forjador presents some variations to the traditional text model. However, these are equally consistent with the gender stereotypes already present in the schooling experiences of infants, particularly girls. In the next section, we shall return to the ways in which these stereotypes are expressed in both versions.

Friend reader: comparison and analysis of reading books from a gender perspective.

El Forjador classifies the books for both boys and girls into three sections that have the main part of the stories. Firstly, those that have to do with the construction of the homeland, its past, its "men" (not its women); secondly, there is a space for nature, and finally, it emphasizes the creation of the moral world of the learners.

As we have previously mentioned, one of the central points of the difference between the versions for boys and girls is the importance that "moral training" has in the schooling of one and the other.

The aspects linked to morality in the male version revolve around a quality that becomes the axis of all the stories: heroism, which is condensed into expressions such as "*being a hero,*" "*heroic acts,*" "*learning by the strokes*", "*heroes as archetypes*" (referring to the heroes as the archetype of man). However, this condition of the male hero is not only linked to force, the military and the use of arms, but fundamentally to male morality: "*heroes are not only those who show more vigor and more ability. To these qualities, we must add the moral conditions: chivalry, fortitude, self-control, modesty, tolerance, generosity*" (Arena, 1934, p. 318). Good treatment and kindness were feminine characteristics that drew attention to the hardness and coldness of the masculine: "*what is strange is that being a military man trained in the austerity of the life of the barracks, he is so kind*" (op. cit, p. 133).

On the other hand, in the female version of the book, moral gifts are linked to the construction of femininity, associated with the duties as "daughters and disciples" and the activity of caring for others:

Friend reader: in El Forjador's readings you will not find impeccable heroines, judicious, obedient girls, who go out of their way to please their parents, their teachers, who never stop fulfilling their duties as daughters and disciples, who always help the weak, they lavish good words, they practice charity (...) you know that these gifts are the golden key that opens the hearts of our fellow men (Arena, 1939, p.5).

In the reading for girls, heroism is also referred to, but from the point of view of the valuation of men, the heroines for girls are those of the classic and traditional tales: "*Cinderella, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, heroines of our childhood*" (op. cit, p. 317). The heroic quality in the female version is associated in all cases with the masculinity and ability of the man, which are manifested in expressions such as:

Look reader how our hero treats his mount" (...) "how much virility (...) he faces death without hesitating to save the life of a fellow man" (p. 311), "as you see reader, heroism does not reside only in the handling of weapons (op. cit, p.312).

The words that appear remarkably in the children's version and that are repeated in the stories and images have to do with *courage, bravery, skill, robustness, value, heroism, feat, rusticity, muscles, adventure, danger, strength, military, "men and brutes,"* greatness, wild impulse, but above all they have to do with high moral qualities: *firmness, security, not cowardice, character, dignity, agility*. The metaphors in this version circulate between the figures of the "*condor wings*" and the "*strong and long-suffering carob tree,*" and the images that are presented are associated with strength and work. Therefore in the male version, unlike the feminine one, the edition is for men and not for children.

On the other hand, in the version for girls, the words associated with the feminine relate to *tenderness, anguish, domesticity, care, salvation, sadness, pain, death, punishment or reward*. The metaphors that are built there are associated with the arrival of spring, with the connection of the rose with the feminine, and with its origin with the earth. The rose as a figure in the stories is always linked to *"forgiveness, affection, tenderness, self-denial"* (Arena, 1934, p. 215).

Domesticity as the place of women in the social imaginary is reflected in expressions such as *"the girls looked like pygmy chickens with a pompadour"* (op. Cit, p. 72), *"their wives and daughters stayed at home"* (op. cit, p. 146), *"the perfect married one"* (Arena, 1939, p. 317). Moreover, it is associated with feelings such as tenderness and sadness: *"the women looked anguished," "tender and cuddly like a girl"* (Arena, 1934, p. 191), *"the water sings, as it runs, next to the sleeping willows, its tender verses, with a woman's accent"* (op. Cit, p. 216), *"sadder than a woman"* (op. cit, p. 239). In the case of children, feelings do not have a place, and virtue is associated with coldness:

I want to propose the exercise of an excellent virtue: never cry, dry the source of your crying forever. On this path, you will go very far, so far that you will be amazed at having walked so much one day. Do not think that by this, you have hardened with wickedness. On the contrary, you will never have a more just and fair love for men. Never cry, even if your flesh opens; never cry even if your bones break. Never cry like even if the heaven falls on you (op. cit., p.255).

For this reason, in the male version, there are pages about the vices that endanger the morality of man, for example, alcohol as one of his great enemies, associated with masculinity, being a man, and immorality.

In both versions, there is a very marked use of metaphors to emphasize masculine or feminine qualities, and they are used in the stories. In the case of reading for children, there is a story about a condor and a calandra lark in which the condor is associated with flight and performance, and the calandra lark is *"worried about the chicks in the nest"* (op. cit., p.100).

The feminine qualities are located in a place of ambiguity since they are not only associated with the cute, the beautiful, the tender, the sad, but also with death or punishment/reward. One of the stories in the male version is called "The Three Grim Reapers," in which the female image of the Parcae is described. The three grim reapers are *"three decrepit, ugly and unsympathetic women,"* however "others associate death (and therefore to women) to *youth and beauty*" (op. cit., p. 283).

In the version for children, the woman is a reward: *"a maiden as a reward"* (op. Cit., P. 295), whereas in the version for girls, the threat of punishment is introduced, associated with the fulfillment of the "should be" of the woman:

Greed, feminine curiosity, punishment for wanting to evade the designs of the Gods?" (Arena, 1939, p. 319), "reader friend, beware of the minor fan of offense (...) do not break the vase in which the delicate flower of some sincere friendship is kept fresh (op. cit., p.318).

Another element linked to the feminine is motherhood and the inevitable suffering related to it and the male's salvation. One of the stories that is common in both versions is called "The mother of the hero," where the woman appears in her place as "the mother of," caring for the hero, saving him from death. Love there is linked to grief and to harm:

"reflect upon the torture of that poor mother, who must deny her son to save him from death" (op. cit., p. 313).

Finally, in the "Farewell" segment of the children's book, there is a poem called "Adiós Campanita," referring to the school bell and the school's daily life. There, in the last pages, what is masculine or feminine is reinforced: robustness in boys and softness and joy in girls: "of robust boys and pink girls, who come joyfully to the chimes" (Arena, 1934, p.307).

Final reflections: contributions to understanding girls' schooling

Z.'s school period ended in 1937. In recognition of her excellent performance, she was chosen by the teacher to give the farewell speech to the graduates, a speech that 70 years later she still remembers and recites by heart, "*The time has come to leave you. Our work for the year is accomplished. We are the white squad that leaves with the bitterness of the farewell (...)*". Z. states that she would have wanted to continue studying, but she was unable to do so:

Although my dream was to study and become a teacher, I couldn't do it. The reasons my parents gave me were that the best thing for me was to devote myself to being a good housewife and mother when the time came. Although my father was an intelligent and affectionate man with his family, he said that women had to be prepared to be housewives because all the weight of the home fell on them, according to the common beliefs in those times.

Despite her excellent grades and being distinguished as the best student in her class, Z. could not continue her higher studies. Perhaps her family, like many others, wondered why a young lady who was brought up to start a family and take care of her home would want to continue studying. Throughout the analysis, we have recovered elements present in this girl's schooling experience, which allow us to understand her destiny and generate new questions, evidencing, as already expressed, that no device can be understood as a coherent and seamless unit.

On the one hand, it is possible to observe in the family's decision the relationship between the feminine ideal linked to the bourgeois imaginary and her role in the service of the construction of the homeland and its connection with the Christian ideal that had managed to re-establish itself in this historical context. God, Country, and Home mark the three vertices of a triangle where women will have that place of defenders, caretakers of the "base" of society, the pillar on which the growth of a nation is based, especially a Catholic Nation.

The analysis of her reading book showed that, within the framework of the pedagogical debates of the time, the impulses for pedagogical renewal were taking place within a political context with conservative, nationalist and Catholic tendencies. "El Forjador" gave her a reading experience that appealed to her as a subject of learning and as a child in particular terms. However, in the very unresolved tension in which Escolanovism was expressed in Argentina, the resulting pedagogical innovations had a more methodological impact than in a renewal of school contents where the students' patriotic and moral education stand out. Thus, although it is proposed to speak to real girls, "*you will not find impeccable heroines, judicious, obedient girls, who go out of their way to please their parents, their teachers, who never stop fulfilling their duties as daughters and disciples,*" it ends up reproducing the representations of the feminine ideal of the time and morality associated with it: the good, the tender, the beautiful, the docile; assigning her a role in the domestic and in the care to which it is necessary to obey.

However, on the other hand, it is worth asking why Z. would want to continue studying if her school experience had transmitted another role to her. In the first place, because the devices show a complexity that escapes clear understanding. And, secondly, because within that schooling experience, there are contradictory tendencies. Precisely, she wanted to study to be a teacher, probably the only female role - other than that of mother and wife - that the girls knew except for religious life and, therefore, an aspiration for those who desired to continue studying. This role was not incompatible with the feminine ideal of the time since teaching was an eminently feminine profession.

In this way, Z. finished her schooling experience with the mandate that had been transmitted to her in her school and in her family: to prepare for her destiny as a mother, wife, and housewife. According to the majority, this mandate was incompatible with continuing her studies but did not prevent her from projecting herself outside of it.

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