

# PIERRE DEFFONTAINES AND THE FRENCH UNIVERSITY MISSIONS IN BRAZIL: GEOPOLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE, CIRCULATION OF SCIENCES AND GEOGRAPHICAL TEACHING (1934-1938)

PIERRE DEFFONTAINES E AS MISSÕES UNIVERSITÁRIAS FRANCESAS  
NO BRASIL: GEOPOLÍTICA DO CONHECIMENTO, CIRCULAÇÃO  
DOS SABERES E ENSINO DA GEOGRAFIA (1934-1938)<sup>1</sup>

PIERRE DEFFONTAINES ET LES MISSIONS UNIVERSITAIRES FRANÇAISES  
AU BRÉSIL : GEOPOLITIQUE DE LA CONNAISSANCE, CIRCULATION  
DES SAVOIRS ET ENSEIGNEMENT DE LA GEOGRAPHIE (1934-1938)

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## Resumo

Esse artigo trata do papel da geografia nas missões universitárias francesas no Brasil nos anos 30, consideradas fundamentais para o desenvolvimento das universidades locais, enfocando especialmente o trabalho do geógrafo Pierre Deffontaines. Cruzando fontes primárias francesas e brasileiras, e comparando os trabalhos existentes sobre esses assuntos produzidos na França e no Brasil por historiadores e por geógrafos, investigamos as redes intelectuais daquela época e sobre os assuntos culturais, políticos e didáticos desse exemplo de circulação internacional do saber. Avaliamos a eficácia, na universidade e na sociedade brasileira, da troca cultural em proveniência da Europa, mas também o enriquecimento da geografia e das ciências humanas a partir das missões universitárias.

Palavras-chave: Pierre Deffontaines, Caio Prado Junior, Pierre Monbeig, Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros, USP, Circulação do saber, Ensino da Geografia.

## Résumé

Cet article analyse le rôle joué par la géographie à l'intérieur des missions universitaires françaises au Brésil des années 1930, considérées fondamentales pour le développement du système éducatif dans ce pays, en se focalisant sur le travail du géographe Pierre Deffontaines. En croisant des sources primaires françaises et brésiliennes et en comparant les travaux existants produits en France et au Brésil, à la fois par des géographes et des historiens, nous interrogeons les documents sur les réseaux intellectuels mis alors en place et sur les enjeux politiques, culturels et didactiques de cet exemple de circulation internationale des savoirs. Il s'agit finalement d'évaluer l'efficacité du transfert culturel en provenance de l'Europe dans l'université et la société brésilienne, ainsi que l'enrichissement qui a pu en résulter pour la géographie et les sciences humaines en France.

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Mots clés: Pierre Deffontaines, Caio Prado Junior, Pierre Monbeig, Association des Géographes Brésiliens, USP, Circulation des savoirs, Enseignement de la Géographie.

### Abstract

This article addresses the role played by Geography within the French university missions in Brazil in the 1930s, considered as fundamental ones for the development of local universities, specially focusing on the work of the geographer Pierre Deffontaines. Crossing French and Brazilian primary sources, and comparing the existing works produced in France and Brazil by historians and geographers, I interrogate the documents of the scientific network at that time and the political, cultural and didactic issues of this example of international circulation of knowledge. My aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of the cultural transfer from Europe to Brazilian University and society, as well as the enrichment of Geography, and Human Sciences from the Universities missions.

Keywords: Pierre Deffontaines, Caio Prado Junior, Pierre Monbeig, Association of Brazilian Geographers, USP, Circulation of knowledge, Teaching of Geography.

### Introduction

In the Geographic discipline construction, the Franco-Brazilian cultural exchanges experiment intense moments, particularly at the time of the French missions which followed USP (University of São Paulo) foundation, in 1934, and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in 1936. The geographers played central role in the institutions. However, there is still a lack of systematic works that cross the French and the Brazilian sources to reconstruct the scientific networks and the circulation contexts of the knowledge at that time. Among the reference works we could mention, by the French side, the work about Pierre Monbeig organized by Hervé Théry and Martine Droulers (Droulers and Théry, 1991) and the successive studies of Droulers (2008) about the intellectual formation of Monbeig. Théry also researched about the practices from the field of Pierre Monbeig, in partnership with other mission members, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (Théry, 2008). The biographic and the bibliographic articles of Delfosse (1998 e 2000) about Pierre Deffontaines and the articles of Huerta (2011 e 2013) about Deffontaines and Brazil are also reference works. Some French historians have taken aspects of these missions from the perspective of diplomatic history (Lefèvre, 1993; Petitjean, 1996; Suppo, 2002) without, however, a specific focus on the geographers work. Until now, it is mainly by the Mexican side (thanks to the characters Marcel and Claude Bataillon), that were produced works of historical and reflexive characters about the scientific networks of French researches in Latin America in the twentieth century (Bataillon, 2008; Hébrard, 2005; Huerta, 1995).

The Brazilian literature, with a lot of French contribution, is the richest in this sense. We can name the studies about Monbeig directed by Heliana Angotti Salgueiro and others (Angotti Salgueiro, 2002, 2006; Custódio et al, 2009) and the works of the historians about the AGB - Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros (Heidemann et al, 2008). The founder of AGB in 1934, and the first geography chair at USP, Pierre Deffontaines (1894-1978) was replaced in the year of 1935 for Pierre Monbeig (1907-1987) which, until that moment was the most famous representative of the French geography in Brazil, such as Vidal de la Blache, which kept the interest of the Brazilian researchers.(Haesbaert et al, 2012).

In any case, Deffontaines came back to Brazil in order to work in the French mission in Rio de Janeiro, where he taught from 1936 to 1938. The diplomatic files of Paris contain many unpublished documents about his works in Brazil, while his preserved letters in IEB (Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros) were recently published for Heidemann et al (2008). Because of these reasons Deffontaines was chosen, for his complex and little known figure, to give a first contribution to a reconstruction work of the political and scientific paths of the circulation of knowledge, basing in the French and Brazilian primary sources.

We saved as theoretical references the literature of the historians that considered the *Histoire croisée* as a way to go beyond the “national schools” studies, to focus on the circulation of knowledge (Espagne, 1999; Werner e Zimmermann, 2004). Which were the roles and the importance of Deffontaines as a geographic method vector and as an inspiring person of the look at Brazil by the Brazilians themselves? What was the insertion of the French mission in the Brazilian political and social context of that time and what was the influence of this context? We will try to respond these questions reconstructing through files, the cultural and historic context of these missions. It will be considered unpublished reports of Deffontaines about his teaching in Brazil to know which notion about the geography teaching was on the basis of the mission. Besides this, it will be underlined his attentions dedicated to the “geopolitics of knowledge” in other countries of South America and it will be highlighted his role in the AGB foundation in order to understand better the scientific and social challenges of this association.

## The missions in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro: political and cultural context

From the institutional point of view, the French geographers interest in Brazil is much older, going back at least to the beginning of the third republic, when Émile Levasseur (1828-1911) dedicated to Brazil an illustrated work to an universal exhibition in 1889 (Levasseur, 1889). In the occasion he corresponded with the barons Rio Branco and Ramiz Galvão. Considering his files, Levasseur received Ramiz in 1873 in Paris, and invited the Brazilian to “speak about the issues of the science which the two were engaged” (Rio de Janeiro, 1873).

Nevertheless, the first famous French geographer that visited Brazil in 1893 and whose works were translated is Élisée Reclus (1830-1905). As an opponent of the slavery and the empire Reclus was received in a triumphal way in the Society of Geography of Rio de Janeiro, in the Brazilian Institute of Geography, in the Brazilian Institute of Geography and History and in the Brazilian Academy of letters (Cardoso, 2013; Miyahiro, 2011). The chapter about Brazil and its *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* was translated by Rio Branco and Ramiz. This is also explained by the fact that Reclus is not noticed in Brazil as a colonialist geographer, and his sincere admiration to Brazilian society as a laboratory of miscegenation that according to him should end racism, impresses positively, in a way that the Brazilian diplomacy uses his geography and his advising to the controversial bordering with Argentina, France and Great Britain (Ferretti, 2013; 2014).

In the following years other geographer, Pierre Denis, traveled across Latin America to do a thesis about Argentina. The geographer also wrote a monograph about Brazil that for a long time will be a reference to the French speakers about the country. However, his new occupations in the Society of Nations, and afterwards, in França Livre of De Gaulle, ended his academic career (Claval, 2012; Oulmont, 2012; Velut, 2009). At the time of the missions of 1934 the principal center of French activities in Brazil is São Paulo, where the progressive bourgeoisie from the “group of Avenida São João”, encouraged by Júlio Mesquita Filho, advocated the foreign presence in the new university. The doctor Georges Dumas, already lived in the capital of São Paulo, so it has started, according to Lefèvre (1993):

An intense and effective action to make the human and the social sciences chairs to be entrusted to French Professors. Because of this, he follows his friend Teodoro Augusto Ramos in Rome, responsible to recruit the professors of the new University in Europe, and he can

impose six French professors upon the fifteen professors pointed, by the side of a Spanish and a Portuguese. Four Italians and three German shared specially the natural sciences chairs. (Lefèvre, 1993, p. 25).

A central issue identified in the French correspondence is the attempts to contrast the influence of the Italian and German professors. A true Geopolitics of knowledge has developed in the mission. The Historian Lefèvre speaks about Deffontaines, who arrived to São Paulo in May 1934:

Besides his own publications in the Brazilian magazines he already thinks in the considerable source that Brazil constituted to the French audience. The geographer discovers Brazil and makes it to be discovered by the Brazilians and the French people. However, he does neglect neither his teaching mission nor the direction of the Geographic Department: in the end of 1934 he had already orientated eleven dissertations or small theses of local geography apart from the courses and public conferences. (Lefèvre, 1993, p. 26).

In the following year, the return of Deffontaines to France forces Dumas and the Director of the *Service des Œuvres Françaises à l'Étranger* (SOFÉ), Jean Marx, to recruit new professors. Because of a lack of experienced staff he needed to value the source of the young professors of the Secondary School. The choices were good if we consider that were nominated Fernand Braudel, Claude Lévi-Strausse Pierre Monbeig (all still unknown) besides the philosophers Jean Magüe and the Literature Professor Pierre Hourcade. In his theses about the French cultural policies in Brazil, Hugo Rogélio Suppo considers these first professors as the “ambassadors-professors” from France. Suppo (2002) affirms that:

the University Professors sent since 1934 in Brazil have extra-university activities as principal tasks. They are involved in a context of a war of influence. About the highlighted French professors in the United States of America the SOFE refers to ‘a militia ready to serve, yet insufficiently used’ (Suppo, 2002, p. 144-145).

Deffontaines just came back to Brazil in 1936, this time to participate of the other French mission in the Federal University of Rio, while his chair at USP is occupied since 1935 for Pierre Monbeig. This situation seems to bother the “mission boss”, the Sociologist Pierre Arbousse-Bastide, who does not sympathize a lot with the geographers. In his report in the end of 1935, in a note entitled “Caso Deffontaines”, Arbousse-Bastide

accuses the geographer of putting the mission in a difficult situation in front of the Brazilians. Referring to his incapacity of building a stable situation, Arbousse-Bastide calls Deffontaines of “beginner”.

At the moment of leaving São Paulo last year Deffontaines, who had noticeable success in the city, said he did not want to come back in 1935 but in 1936. His friends from São Paulo counted on him and when the newspapers announced his nomination in Rio they became skeptics or disappointed. On the other hand, if Deffontaines came to São Paulo the situation would be delicate because he would come back not to start but to continuous: therefore, Deffontaines is, mainly, a beginner. But, above all, he would meet Monbeig, also a Human Geography Professor (...) we had a lot of problems in the last year to not hope for a more peaceful year in 1936. Finally, I ask myself if it would not be better (having as an unique goal the efficiency of the mission) if Deffontaines stayed in Rio and came to give some lectures in São Paulo. The sharing is impossible, São Paulo would not accept but frequent visits would be welcome — despite the disappointment of Deffontaines friends. At the complex situation I did not want to advise Deffontaines (...), who should assume all responsibility for his decision, whatever it is. (Paris, 1935).

In any case, the quality of the scientific production in Rio was not lesser, for by Deffontaines side worked professors such as the Historian Henri Hauser (1866-1946). However, the most conservative environment of the capital imposes some problems in the relations between the Institutions and the University and between the University and the foreign professors. Deffontaines also deplors that the new college seems to be more interested in invest in natural sciences and engineering than in the human geography (Lefèvre, 1993, p. 31).

According to the documents kept in the diplomatic files, the arrival of the second group of professors in São Paulo in 1935 established new conflicts with Arbousse-Bastide, who was bothered with the behavior of Fernand Braudel. The conflict between them started at the same day of the landing of the ship historian *Massilia* (April 3). In confidential note sent to Jean Marx, in July 1935, Arbousse writes to Braudel:

It is declared in disagreement with everything that had been done. He contested the legitimation of my collective functions pointing that Dumas had told him nothing and if he had known about the existence of someone similar to a “mission boss” among his future colleagues he would not have come. (...) He questioned the salaries (...) affirming he is 42 years old (he is 32 years old), he says he is

from Paris and also that he is more experience in the function than me. He did not accept the little salary difference between his younger colleagues and him. (Paris, 20 February 1937)

23. II. 37  
**J. Poirier**  
 Marselha le 20  
 février 1937  
 01907  
 Cher Monsieur,  
 Voulez-vous avoir l'amabilité  
 de Paris au voyage à São Paulo  
 — Madame Braudel de M. —  
 pour Jacques Braudel <sup>Tiaret (Olan)</sup> ~~un certificat~~  
 dont elle a besoin, et de savoir que  
 je suis professeur à l'université  
 de São Paulo  
 Avec mon bon souvenir de  
 vous prie d'agréer, cher Monsieur,  
 l'assurance de ma haute estime  
 respectueusement à vous  
 +  
 Tiaret F. Braudel

Figure 1 – Letter from F. Braudel a J. Poirier, 20 February 1937, announced his departure from Marselha

Source: Paris, 20 February 1937.

In the files, besides the amount of correspondence related to economic claims of the professors (detail: Braudel can obtain a salary that exceeds the salary of Arbousse-Bastide, but not without offending him), we identified tensions within the French mission which can be explained by the contrast between strong personalities and by the political turbulence that France and Brazil crossed simultaneously and it could not happen without impact — despite all official recommendations to keep “neutrality”. One example shows this situation. The fieldwork projects of the young Lévi-Strauss (he arrived with Braudel in São Paulo)



Monbeig, who does not seem to participate directly of the internal controversies, despite being sympathetic to Braudel and Lévi-Strauss (Suppo, 2002, p. 172), wrote, then, ironically that the students could complain to Mr. Vargas about any inconvenience. “I fear that the political events modify my plans. It is necessary to wait patiently: if the project does not take place the disappointed students can always complain to the President Vargas.” (Paris, 15 November 1937)

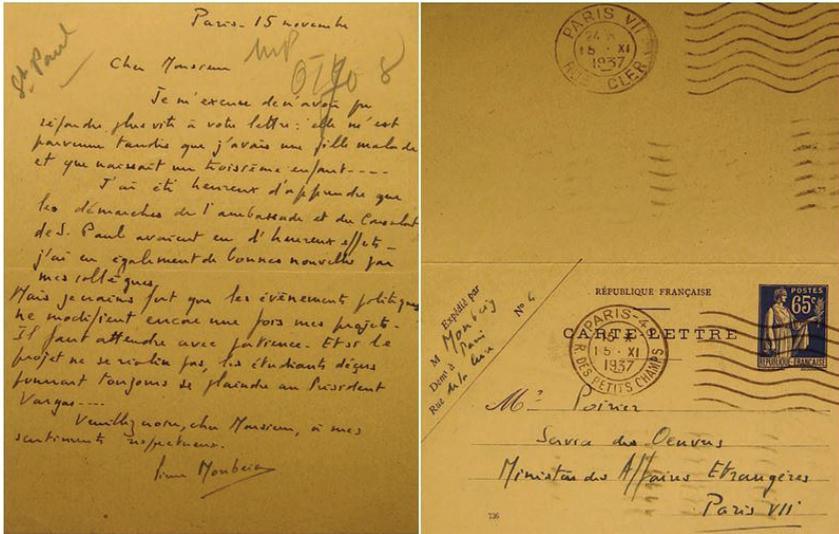


Figure 3 – Letter from P. Monbeig a J. Poirier, 15 November 1937, making use of irony with Getúlio Vargas

Source: Paris, Archives diplomatiques, Dossiers des Postes, Dossier 443.

The one who takes an explicit position is Henri Hauser in Rio de Janeiro. In the previous year he protested against the exclusion of the former Rector Afrânio Peixoto (considered too progressive), reporting

a real vacancy of obscurantism. The two rectors that our University progressively dismissed were replaced by a polite but incompetent man, fearful in front of authorities (especially in front of the mayor, head of Federal District) and at an intimidated public opinion that confuses every manifestation of independent thought with the Soviet communism. (Paris, August 1936)

Hauser, such as Deffontaines, considers very important the search for an opening toward the Brazilian civil society, even if the conditions in Rio de Janeiro seem to be more difficult than in São Paulo. According to the historian, if the Brazilians “show themselves very sensitive to the news we bring such as methods and work objects, all efforts were made to remove from our chairs the educated audience. With regard to enrollment in our so-called public courses, barriers were built to discourage even strong determined ones”. (Paris, 7 août 1936). By the way, after the victory of the left in the French elections a distrust of the foreign professors began to affect the liberals from São Paulo who once sympathized with them. The newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* accuses France of “providing to the world examples of mental anarchy” (Suppo, 2002, p. 174). Also the French diplomatic and scientific body is evenly divided politically. The “Communist Conspiracy” of 1935, a military rebellion with relatively restricted proportions, is the subject of paranoid comments of the French ambassador Hermite, who in the document called “Insurreição comunista”, seems to see in everywhere bloodthirsty rebels willing to massacre honest people and their families.

These people worry with refuge places where they could house their women and children in case of new alert. Other concerns affect the command supporters: what will be the mood of the army and teaching staff of which the youth depend on [?] Among the officers there is a great malaise. Nobody knows with whom they can talk, in the fear of living by the side of clandestine insurgents — especially among sergeants and soldiers, where the proportion of communist elements reaches an average of one-seventh. In many barracks the bedrooms are lit all night, with fear of a resumption of the criminal aggressions too easy to occur in the evening shadow [...] The generals who unanimously supported the government require from President Vargas exemplary punishment to the guilty ones (Paris, 7 December 1935)

According to our sources the teaching staff worried less with these events than with those of 10 November 1937. It is important to stress that recently the Brazilian Geographer José Borzacchiello da Silva wondered how much colonial prejudice there was (including the influence of the colonial Geography and the tropical Geography) in the approaches of the French geographers on Brazil (Silva, 2012). If such problems can be clarified only by specific researches one might mention the testimony of

Arbousse-Bastide revealing that “here the French people are reproached for exile with difficulty and for not sympathizing with the problems of foreign and Latin America in particular. It is feared that the French people come only as tourists, as curious” (Suppo, 2002, p. 167). Furthermore, the USP group teaches all the classes and gives all the lectures in French, for only Hourcade speaks Portuguese (Ibid., p. 168). It is meaningful a note wrote by the Economist René Courtin to Dumas and Marx about the professors salary. In the note he questioned why an *agrégé*, in the mission, earned “the same salary of the colleagues who teach in France and do not have a colonial *agrégé* treatment.” (Paris, 5 September 1937). The existence of the problem shows that the French view on Brazil at that time does not diverge from Eurocentric prejudices against countries they consider backward and that are seen as conquest territories— if not political, at least intellectual.

In any case, Braudel and Lévi-Strauss were substituted in 1938 for Roger Bastide and Jean Gagé and, following other French Anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, will work in Brazil. In the geography, after Deffontaines and Monbeig, pass by Brazilian universities in the following decades Maurice Le Lannou, Roger Dion, Pierre Gourou, Michel Rochefort, Jean Tricart, Bernard Kayser, Jean Demangeot, Paul Claval, Hervé Théry and many others.

For many of them, including Braudel (Paris, 1999; Gemelli, 1995; Ribeiro, 2008), the Brazilian period was very important in shaping their scientific ideas. We can affirm that Brazil was a central place to the development of the Human Sciences in France. We still have to evaluate well the influence of these groups of professors from different subjects in establishing the interdisciplinary courses in France — represented by institutions as the IHEAL and the EHESS (Angotti Salgueiro, 2006).

In order to provide only one example of the capabilities of this systematic study of “Archeology of knowledge” we reproduced a handwritten note of Pierre Monbeig, from 1950, kept in the file of IEB. This is about an interdisciplinary project work about the mentalities, which Lucien Febvre should also participate, and it was clearly influenced by the directions of the historians *Annalistes*.

Geography and mentalities.

- 1) Notion of mentality. The floor will be given to an anthropologist, an ethnographer and a historian.

- 2) The role of the facts of the mentality in the development of landscapes.  
Rural landscape and mentalities: Dion.  
Urban landscape and mentalities: Aufrère.
- 3) The role of mentality facts on the behavior of social groups.  
Demogeography and mentalities: Ariés.  
Religious Geography: Le Braz.
- 4) Geography mentalities.  
Geography of psychological behavior: Abel Châtelain.  
The problem of national psychologies: A. Siegfried.  
Conclusion: L. Febvre.(São Paulo-IEB, 1950)

We do not know the reasons such an important work has not been accomplished, yet deepen the investigations about these interdisciplinary networks is a stimulating challenge which will provide unexpected answers about the circulation of knowledge and the factory of knowledge.

### Deffontaines and the Geography teaching

Pierre Deffontaines, author of the theses *Leshommes et leurs travaux dans les pays de la Moyenne Garonne, Agenais et bas Quercy, guided* by Albert Demangeon, has a journey considered as atypical in the post-Vidalian school. Firstly, for his mobility and cosmopolitanism. Professor in the Universities of Lille and Montpellier, Pierre Deffontaines did not stay much time in these institutions. To Philippe Pinchemel, “from 1944 to 1967, the essential activities of Deffontaines happened abroad, in Spain, as the Director of the French Institute of Barcelona since 1939 until 1964, In Brazil, where he founded the chairs of Geography of São Paulo (1934) and Rio de Janeiro (1936), and in Canada, where he founded the Institute of Geography of the University Laval of Québec” (Pinchemel, 2011, p. 263).

What seems quite unique is that the Deffontaines stays abroad were not restrict, as occurred with other Europeans scholars, to brief *outremer* researchers financed by the metropolis and published in its language. Deffontaines is a cultural organizer empathic who created local institutions with people he met in the place. Pierre Deffontaines is not a simple external observer but an actor who tries to interact with the dynamic of the local society.

Another feature of the work of Pierre Deffontaines is the social approach, and under certain aspects, also cultural, interested in the work

of societies on earth for its transformation. This fact seems to be inspired by his adherence to social Catholicism, which contributed to move him away of the realistic paradigm of “*plain-pieddu monde* (right of the world)” post-vidalian (Orain, 2009), dominant and hostile to reflective trends and social Geography mainly represented by Camille Vallaux and Jean Brunhes. As observes Delfosse (2000), it is at this last one that Deffontaines inspires himself. According to Pinchemel, Deffontaines

Occupies a specific place in the French Geography for his narrow association with the work and range of Jean Brunhes. He develops geographical thought noticeably on the fringes of the French University school evidalian, but a thought and a work that marked deeply several readers and had great influence [...] Deffontaines belongs to a family of intellectual spiritualists who found in their jobs, in the observation of reality and in the everyday materiality the reasons of their faith and convictions. He invites the reader to share his enthusiasm, to admire the surface of the Earth in the diversity of its landscapes, especially the human landscapes. The men have the responsibility of the “geographical direction of earth”, task that requires “permanent elevation of the human wisdom” [...] He was, in the best terms, a humanist geographer *avant la lettre*, precursor of the current trends, with a literary talent and a seduction not always found in the contemporary texts. (Pinchemel, 2011, p. 263).

Like that, Deffontaines would be closer to concepts as “geograficidade” intrinsic to the human being addressed by Eric Dardel (1953) than to the geographical realism. As Antoine Huerta points out, Deffontaines inserts in the construction of the national imaginary in which he participates in the construction of the Brazilian identity, with his own instruments of cultural Geography, where “it is possible to see the assumptions of the developed ethnography after the *cultural turn*” (Huerta, 2011). Differently from Diversamente de Huerta, we do not believe that Deffontaines does a “cultural geography before time” (Ibid.), because it is not possible to ignore the contribution of Carl Sauer and the School of Berkeley, already known at the French missions time (Mitchell, 2000). What cannot be denied, however, is the originality of Deffontaines in relation to French Geography then. At the mention of Philippe Pinchemel the “seduction of the reader” we find a central point of his method: in particular, the importance that the geographer attaches to the Geography teaching, which he considers a real proselytism. In Brazil, this pedagogical

commitment is evident at the same time in his writings, institutional files and in the testimony of his former students.

The Deffontaines publications that aimed to apply in Brazil the regional methodology of French human Geography are translated to Portuguese and also circulated outside of the academic sphere (Deffontaines, 1940; Delfosse, 2000). It is possible to consider him a cultural translator that is interested in Brazilian civil society to convince it of the geography utility in the practical trades and cultural construction. If Deffontaines explicitly claims his strangeness in relation to the politics, his approach is social and in a broad sense, citizen. Among his students Caio Prado Jr. witnessed the charisma and strength characteristic of the French geographer conviction. Although they both worked together only in a single semester, in an interview, in 1978, quoted by Manuel Seabra Prado Jr., already an elderly man, reminded of Deffontaines as the one who made him love Geography and made it essential to its formation.

Geography was what opened my perspective and has been with the Deffontaines- the greatest professor I met in my life. And I met many professors in my life, but none like this: Deffontaines by far beat everyone. Not that he thus had erudition, he had not. But, because he was a man who lived the issue. To all who watched him, his courses were entertainment, it was pleasant. Firstly, for his enthusiasm. He had a love (by geography) and he even has today: he is alive, sick, but still working. Great professor, right? A professor is not one who knows many things [...] Teaching has a whole communication. (Heidemann et al. 2008, p. 48).

The communication seems to be a central concern for Deffontaines that, as evidenced by his bibliography, wrote more often in a popular way than in the academic way, like the guide books and educational publications - without, however, resign to express his ideas about human geography. As evidenced by his reports on their teaching at USP and in Rio de Janeiro, kept in diplomatic archives (Paris, 15 novembre 1934), his goals were to train future Brazilian teachers and subsequently stimulate exploration and knowledge of the interior. This implies a practical field work according to the technical then established in France (Baudelle et al, 2001). Deffontaines, as several colleagues (including Monbeig [Angotti Salgueiro, 2006; Théry, 2008]), used field notes, which he used to record the excursions with notes and drawings (Huerta, 2009). Public conferences, which always take place with the “crowded rooms,” the

strong presence of listeners in the courses (Suppo 2002, p. 288) and his commitment to building a geography library demonstrate a pro-active educational approach beyond the academic field in which geography is an instrument for operating on the culture and society.

### AGB and politics: creating networks

An important collateral effect of the French university mission at USP was the constitution, on 17 September 1934, in the house of Deffontaines, of the Brazilian Geographers Association (AGB). The AGB, which now makes conferences with up to seven thousand registered (Zibechi, 2012), was founded by four members: Deffontaines, Caio Prado Junior, Rubens Borba de Moraes and Luiz Flores de Moraes Rego. Deffontaines is the only “professional” geographer. Of course, the AGB is closely linked to geography chair of USP, and this association aims to be an extension in order to penetrate the Brazilian society. To Deffontaines, the university is not enough: he wants to talk to the whole society.

It should be highlighted that the collaborator and principal assistant of Deffontaines, both in college and in the AGB is Caio Prado Jr. From a wealthy family and a member of the Communist Party since 1932, Caio Prado Jr. has traveled widely and was the author of books on Brazil and the Soviet Union. In this context, Manoel Seabra asks himself how to explain his interests in geography and concludes that the decisive element of this choice, besides the Deffontaines charisma, was that “unlike the available History courses, in disciplines and in geographic activities there were more possibilities to deal with current reality” (Heidemann et al, 2008, p. 49).

Here geography as a strategic discipline. But we also believe that we must consider the interest in international networks beginning to settle at university and perhaps the opportunities of political propaganda offered by the university environment. If we consider all these factors, we understand it because AGB is also frequented by people with similar motivations, but of opposite political mark, as Major Mario Travassos, which made communication on 17 June 1935 and will be then, to the degree of general, a representative of Brazilian military geopolitics quite committed to dictatorships (Vlach, 2003). It is also highlighted the allegedly “neutral” feature of these associations, making them meeting places of different people.

The AGB and its magazine, *Geography*, receive the constant collaboration of French professors, including Arrousse-Bastide and Lévi-Strauss. After the departure of Deffontaines, is Caio Prado Jr. who takes on for a while the function of secretary and indispensable person of the association. The correspondence between them, preserved in part in IEB files, is one of the main sources to know the functioning of AGB in its early years. In the first letter that Deffontaines sends to Caio Prado Jr. (the prospect of returning to São Paulo in 1936), the French geographer mentions one of the main points of his program: “starts a beautiful work, already very advanced in France, about the major regional studies, as my thesis.” (AGB, December 10, 1934). The Deffontaines project is clear: what he expects of those bright young people is that they start an extensive program of “coverage” of Brazil through the regional monographs. If on the one hand, it is a very problematic attempt to transpose the classic model of the French regional monograph on the other hand, the example does not seem casual. Deffontaines refers to his own thesis, so a relatively unique product for his interest in the social realities. For his part, Prado Jr. is interested in the regionalization of the state of São Paulo under the angle of its economic districts, which also looks like a unique approach compared to the French geography of the time. Deffontaines intended to participate of this work in a little more classic way.

It touches me a lot to see the active way that you assumed, with passion, our initiative. Thanks to all, and especially you. In the ship I worked seriously in Brazil I finished the study I had told you, named *Ensaio de Divisões Regionais do estado de São Paulo, Regiões e Paisagens*. (AGB, 27 December 1934)

*Brasil* is, clearly, the essay *Human Geography of Brazil* (Deffontaines, 1940), while the article “Regiões e Paisagens” will be published at the same time in *Geografia* and in the *Annales de Géographie* (Delfosse, 2000). Deffontaines approves the decision of Caio Prado Jr. to involve in AGB the explorer Jean Vellard, which he appreciates for his studies of the regions of Goiás and Mato Grosso useful for regional research program. In the same letter, Deffontaines shows that seven months in Brazil were enough to empathize with the language and culture, as he writes in Portuguese, words such as “saudade”. (AGB, March 1, 1935). In the following letter, Deffontaines asks his correspondent what was the reception in Brazil of his article about regions and landscapes. Demonstrating not to share the

arrogant look of imperialism, Deffontaines is the look of a humanist who wants to learn first. “I would like to know the repercussions of my study, especially in regional teaching of secondary courses. Make me understand the criticism.”(AGB, October 2, 1935). At the same time, Deffontaines affirms that he does not accept to move to Rio de Janeiro in 1936, wishing to return to USP: “I would not accept to return to Brazil except with the express condition not to abandon my work in São Paulo. I think there are many possibilities to be with you next year and I am delighted ” (AGB, 2 Octobre 1935).

The most intense letter is the one from 1 January 1936, when Deffontaines knows by the newspapers that Caio Prado is arrested for reason of repression which was followed by the Conspiracy.

I am very concerned about the future of your scientific activity. You know it was a little me who found you and I have for you special consideration. I fear that your political activity will obstruct your scientific work. I always considered politics, whatever it is, a great element of decadence. So I am very alarmed about you! Reassure me. (AGB, 1 March 1935)

The necessity to be reserved and the concern to keep distance from the political course taken by his student mix to the affection and esteem for Caio Prado Jr. In this long letter, which takes the stamp of Brazilian censorship, Deffontaines states still resist moving to Rio de Janeiro. We believe that he also accepted because he knows that in São Paulo, in the face of repression and without his best disciple, would be even more difficult to start.

It is important to highlight that the apolitical feature of Deffontaines is very relative. His disapproval to the militancy of Prado Jr. and his approval in 1939 to the position of Director of the French Institution of Barcelona while Spain has just fallen under the Franco tyranny and the Catalan capital watched its population fleeing to France (Peace, 1993), it was suggested his indifference or, worse, his complacency by these repressions. However, according Delfosse, he manifests his antifascist thoughts and almost militant, when, in 1942, Deffontaines

refuses to join the Vichy government. With all his French Institute of Barcelona teaching staff, he is hunted by the Spanish police under the consul general orders of Vichy. He organizes then, with the help of the Catalans, a new French Institute together with the

Algiers government. Such institute lives illegally for a year and a half under the name ANEIE (National Association of Foreign Language Learners) and can no longer be called the French Institute. Bonds are built with Catalan intellectuals: if they help Deffontaines to deceive the Vichy government supported by Franco, he assists the Catalans overwhelmed by the fascist regime. The French Institute of Barcelona has become an island of freedom of expression. The existing French books collaborated to distract the Franco censorship (Delfosse, 1998, p. 152).

Deffontaines, since 1936 until 1938, kept following the AGB. His “cultural diplomacy” activities in Argentina and in Chile reported on his memorial confirm the relativism of his intended “apolitical feature”. Caio Prado Jr., finally, will be one of the protagonists in the history of Brazil in the twentieth century. Communist deputy since 1945 and original Marxist interpreter, still haunted by the 1964 dictatorship, publish until the 80s, works of History, Sociology, Economics and Geography, such as *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo*, which make him one of the most famous Brazilian intellectuals (Secco, 2008). We believe that his formation as a geographer was not casual in his path.

## Conclusion

In the words of geography historians such as David Livingstone, finding science is critical to their understanding (Livingstone, 2013). Therefore, we can think that the University of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro were simultaneously places of building the Brazilian university geography and important places for the development of French geography. Places (institutions) less peripheral in relation to Paris than you might think, despite the long distance. If the first diplomatic purpose of the university missions was to move away Brazil from cultural influence of the Rome-Berlin axis, it can be said that the operation was successful and that geography played a central role, forming protagonists in the History of Brazil as Caio Prado Jr. and important intellectuals as Aroldo de Azevedo and Aziz Ab'Sabe.

We believe we have demonstrated the central role of Deffontaines in the Franco-Brazilian cultural exchanges, for his researches, his international networks and his teaching, even if his work in Brazil was a little “overshadowed” by the notoriety of Pierre Monbeig. It should be

highlighted that if Monbeig speaks about “the interest of continuing the French advertising in Brazil” (Paris, February 2, 1938), Deffontaines speaks about “creating in public opinion a movement in favor of geography” (Paris, November 15, 1934 ) - which is not the same thing. Here we find the same difference between an institutional geography and critical geography. If in the French university missions in Brazil these aspects coexist, in every way it is still important to deepen the research on the circulation of knowledge between France and Brazil and, more generally, between Europe and Latin America to clarify the reciprocal influences.

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