

Educação e identidade camponesa: reflexões sobre o papel dos sujeitos camponeses e a formação dos diferentes grupos¹

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Resumo

Este texto apresenta reflexões a respeito dos atores sociais que protagonizam o cenário camponês através de sua organização e modo de vida, bem como a circunstância das diferentes fases de cada um, a criança, o jovem, a mulher, o adulto e o idoso camponês, além da contribuição que cada sujeito exerce em relação à dinâmica do campo. O estudo é composto por revisão bibliográfica e levantamento documental, sendo parte desse material oriundo da pesquisa de mestrado. Todas as informações registradas foram analisadas sobre a interpretação do Materialismo histórico-dialético como base filosófica e método de análise. De posse das discussões levantadas torna-se necessário identificar quem são os sujeitos camponeses em sua forma ampla e as contradições que enfrentam no campo, além de retomar breves considerações sobre o respeito ao protagonismo do campo como cumprimento das diretrizes voltadas para a modalidade de Educação do Campo.

Palavras-chave: Cenário camponês. Infância. Mulher camponesa. População camponesa. Velhice no campo.

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Peasant identity and education: exploring the role and formation of peasant social groups

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Abstract

This text reflects on the social actors who play pivotal roles in the peasant landscape through their organization and way of life, examining the different stages of life - childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age - and the unique contributions each group makes to the dynamics of rural life. The study includes a bibliographic review and a documentary survey, part of which stems from master's research. All the recorded information was analyzed using historical-dialectical materialism as both a philosophical foundation and a method of analysis. The discussions emphasize the importance of identifying peasant subjects in their broadest sense, understanding the contradictions they face in rural areas, and considering the respect for rural agency in line with guidelines for Rural Education.

Keywords: Peasant setting. Childhood. Peasant woman. Peasant population. Old age in the rural area.

Educación e identidad campesina: reflexiones sobre el papel de los sujetos campesinos y la formación de diferentes grupos

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Resumen

Este texto presenta reflexiones sobre los actores sociales que desempeñan un papel protagónico en el escenario campesino a través de su organización y modo de vida, así como las circunstancias de las diferentes etapas de cada uno, el niño, el joven, la mujer, el adulto y el anciano campesino, además del aporte que cada sujeto hace con relación a la dinámica del campo. El estudio consta de una revisión bibliográfica y un levantamiento documental, proviniendo parte de este material de la investigación de maestría. Toda la información registrada fue analizada a partir de la interpretación del Materialismo histórico-dialéctico como base filosófica y método de análisis. A partir de las discusiones planteadas, se hace necesario identificar quiénes son los sujetos campesinos en su forma más amplia y las contradicciones que enfrentan en el campo, además de retomar breves consideraciones respecto al protagonismo del campo en el marco de los lineamientos dirigidos a la modalidad de Educación Rural.

Palabras clave: Escena campesina. Infancia. Mujer campesina. Población campesina. Vejez en el campo.

Introduction

Rural Education is a modality that stems from the result of popular struggle and pressure, demanding an educational proposal that, in addition to promoting public and quality education, seeks to highlight the protagonism of the rural population. Its foundations emerge from the needs and interests of peasant communities and the specific characteristics of these social spaces, thus constituting a product of the mobilization/organization and struggle of rural social movements for the recognition of their needs, interests, and specific issues (CALDART, 2002, p. 26; FERNANDES, 2002, p. 98).

Thus, the discussion raised throughout this text is part of the research conducted during the master's program in Teaching of Sciences and Humanities, which focused on rural schools and land settlement formation in the Amazonian context. This research broadly followed the debates within this modality, with topics highlighting discussions ranging from the demands of leadership and social movements' actions within society to the creation of public policies that specifically address rural groups, as well as the ongoing pressure for investment and maintenance of such policies and the opposition to the closure of others related to them.

It is equally essential to reflect on the nuances of rural areas, considering elements related to the organization of peasant movements. Understanding who acts in this scenario is also the guiding thread of this study. To address rural protagonism, it is necessary to identify who the individuals are in each group driving the peasant history of this country. Therefore, based on the experiences gained during the development of the research, the idea emerged to describe a group that aims to answer 'who are the subjects of the rural area?'. This includes reflecting on the social actors that compose and strengthen the peasant struggle, analyzing their characteristics, relationships with the land, the school, and the family context when examined individually.

The text thus aims to address specific peasant groups that establish connections among themselves, considering the scenario they belong to. It is important to highlight that they are interconnected by a predominant factor in this approach: the element of 'work.' This is because, in all contexts, 'work' is characterized as a common action for all peasant subjects, whether directly or indirectly.

The methodological approach used in this work was developed from a quantitative-qualitative approach employed in the research in its original format, characterized by the interest in deepening

and reflecting on the social group constituted by rural subjects and/or peasantry. As stated by Santos et al. (2018), what should guide the analysis is not limited to the form of data collection or the type of data generated, whether quantitative or qualitative, but to what is intended to be known from the phenomenon being studied. This is why the need for a mixed approach is emphasized.

The description provided regarding each group mentioned throughout this text was consolidated with the results obtained during the field research, considering the observations and records made. Through a descriptive and explanatory nature, interviews, bibliographic surveys, and documentary research were used as data collection tools. The data and information collected were analyzed based on what is established in the *Historical-Dialectical Materialism* method, considering the history and experiences of rural men and women, peasant subjects, and subjects of rights.

Who are the subjects of the rural area?

To think about the delineation of the rural subjects, as well as the recognition of peasant identity, it is necessary to reflect on the concept of identity and the construction of the same, considering the specificities of rural life. This definition contributes to the agenda of Rural Education by presenting aspects related to the process of emancipation of peasant subjects, based on the recognition they have regarding their protagonism and their own history.

The concept of identity must be understood from the representation of a culture, resulting from a process of identification that allows individuals to position themselves within the definitions provided by cultural discourses (MORAES, 2019). Such definitions are understood through the use of certain elements, and are also related to speech, thought, and emotions, as these are the agents to which meanings are attributed. It is important to note that throughout the construction of representation and identity, at certain points, meanings are directed toward objects, people, and events, resulting in the interpretive structure formed around something. At other times, meaning is constituted by how these elements are used and integrated into everyday actions. Thus,

identity is formed through social processes, and once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped through social relations. The social processes involved in the formation and conservation of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interaction of the organism, individual consciousness, and social structure react upon the given social structure (BERGER e LUCKMANN, 1985, p. 228)

Understanding how the dynamics involving identity, culture, and representation are organized is essential to grasp the reflection discussed here. First, an analysis of what is understood and presented to the rural school community as forms of identity and culture is necessary. It is important to consider that some schools⁵, even though located in rural areas, offer a curriculum proposal similar to those of urban areas. The participating schools tend to follow the neoliberal logic of the city, where the structure of school curricula is based on strategies that manipulate the masses. This often involves false concerns about the behavior and way of life of peasant groups.

The second point to be considered is how the families themselves understand the concept of identity. If this concept is not addressed in a rural school, and if the logic and concept of land settlements, as well as the history and importance of social movements for society, the construction, survival, and respect for the rights of rural people are disregarded by the communities, then naturally the definition of identity and specificities will become meaningless to them.

The *peasant identity* discussed here is related to the recognition of collective habits, ideals, and principles, as well as political orientation, which is non-partisan. It is a project in search of meaning and the creation of a unique identity, initiated from a shared consciousness of being excluded and dispossessed. This process of identity construction and creation, as Belo and Pedlowski (2014, p. 72) assert, "demands a learning process, with the goal of transmitting values anchored in the principle of solidarity." The fact is that *peasant identity* goes beyond the symbols and stereotypes already ingrained in society, such as the flags and black tarps of the tents. It also manifests through anthems, songs, manifestos, and poetry, as well as any other art or expression that reflects the cry of the rural areas.

The construction of identities can also be thought of collectively, when the role and characterization of rural subjects are perceived and described individually, but without disregarding the contributions they make to the group to which they belong. For this, it is necessary to present, in general, the singularities related to childhood and youth, the figure of the rural woman, the adult and elderly in the rural area, and also the reality between school, teaching, and teachers, thus resulting in an overview and identification of the profile of each individual within the dynamics of rural life.

The characteristics imprinted on each rural subject help shape the concept of collective identity. This concept aims to demonstrate that members of the same collective perceive and recognize the

⁵ This fact reflects a common reality in schools in the interior of the state of Amazonas. The situation is exemplified throughout the field research conducted during the master's program in two rural schools located in land reform settlements.

existence of the social group they belong to, as well as the recognition of other peers who experience the same way of life.

This sense of belonging to the group is fundamental for the integrity and stability of each of its members, thus becoming a component of their identity. At the same time that the members recognize the existence of the collective, which could be a family, association, social class, nation, religion, ethnicity, etc., individuals and groups who do not belong to this collective also recognize its existence. (ROSSATO e PRAXEDES, 2015, p. 64).

The concept of identity, in this way, is not reduced solely to cultural terms, but to the symbolic identification of an individual or social group, where each member recognizes themselves while also being recognized by other subjects both inside and outside the group. Here, it is crucial to confront what could be called the absence of peasant identity⁶, especially when this group is located in the interior regions of the Northern part of the country.

Reflecting on the identity crisis that also affects the construction of rural protagonism is another key element in the agenda for the demands and emancipation of the peasant struggle, considering that settled families still have to deal with the process of exclusion and marginalization silently imposed by the State. In this context, the lack of respect and recognition for *peasant identity* contributes to the creation of a strategy of marginalization and criminalization, where the State ends up attributing to rural peoples, just as it has done and continues to do with Black groups or any other considered "minority," a sense of hatred and shame for belonging to that particular group.

The State's approach regarding respect for *peasant identity* must be understood through two actions. First, by assigning rural subjects the condition of being a minority and marginalized, and second, by attributing to these groups the stereotype of ignorance. In summary, "the State always views the rural population as something to be saved, saved from its ignorance and backwardness, needing to be educated according to a new urban and capitalist paradigm" (ROSSATO and PRAXEDES, 2015, p. 87). Understanding who the rural subjects are is important, not only to preserve the concept of rural identity but because it helps to understand, based on the profile of each individual,

⁶ When addressing the assumptions behind the construction of *peasant identity*, this study also revisits one of the issues discussed at the heart of the research: the lack of *peasant* and *Amazonian identity* in rural areas, particularly in the interior of the state of Amazonas, especially considering that this is a population largely composed of immigrants. The identity crisis of the rural areas is a factor that significantly interferes with the proposal of *Rural Education*. This is because, without a curriculum conception that addresses the specificities of this context and recognizes the profile and protagonism of settled families, the logic and objectives of what was proposed for this mode of education are compromised.

what has been proposed for each subject and what political demands have been thought out and created to serve them.

Childhood and Youth in the Rural Area

When discussing the history of peasant families, the image of struggle with rural men and women is naturally constructed, often sidelining the issues related to the way of life and existence of childhood and youth in rural areas. Therefore, understanding the profile and challenges faced by this first group is also central to discussing the nuances that permeate policies directed toward Rural Education.

In a brief description, the rural child is presented as an immature subject who needs adult care, but experiences situations unimaginable for a city child. From an early age, they are exposed to responsibilities tied to the environment in which they live. The same dynamics are experienced by rural youth, where adolescence is often divided between participating in family agricultural activities, production, and commercialization, and their school life, which is often marked by low academic performance.

Understanding the profile and protagonism of the rural child and youth becomes necessary as a strategic point that reflects on the public policies implemented for the primary audience of *Rural Education*. To do this, it is important to present concepts regarding what society defines as childhood and youth, as well as the formation of these subjects within a peasant education system that should address their specificities without disqualifying or undermining their importance in the construction of the history of peasant families, as portrayed in this research through settled families. Thus, this topic aims to understand the relationship between childhood, youth, and rural life, and describe their protagonism in the daily life of rural communities and the schooling process.

Childhood, according to some perspectives, is considered "a social category in transition in contemporary times, where the notion of childhood is associated with an innocent and fragile world related to children" (RIBEIRO and ABRÃO, 2018, p. 574). It is still questioned as "a preparatory, formative stage, a transition, composed of subjects undergoing historical and social changes" (NASCIMENTO, 2011, p. 39). Or even, "as a historical and social construct, varying according to generations and historical context, as we are in another period of history where change is inevitable, because we are not static beings, and neither is the child" (BEM e SILVA, 2020, p. 725).

It is a fact that childhood is a phase of life with fundamental importance in the social construction process, requiring care, guidance, and support until the completion of its stages,

reflecting the construction and protection of a vulnerable subject. However, this fragile world, incorporated through many definitions, is not compatible with the rural scenario experienced by peasant children, where their history is not drawn or told as something that attends to all the stages of childhood. Instead, it is marked by the accumulation of responsibilities and the weight of survival that begins from the moment of their birth a trajectory summed up by Martins (2011), who points out that in some societies, not even adults have a biography, let alone children.

The discourse presented to society defending the rights of children and adolescents echoes some contradictory and selective points when questioning which child and youth are being discussed the child and adolescent from the city or from the countryside? It is necessary to defend the rights of all children, where their political subjectivities can be considered without reducing them to a subject without identity or belonging to a group on the margins of society. It is not enough to assert what the legislation proposes as a universal right; it is urgent to defend the constitution of rural children as subjects of rights. These are subjects of rights who play, learn, take on leading roles, and live their own history, with their peasant memories being respected. Indeed,

the memories of peasant-children are rare. In this world of rural labor, the child has long been seen as an extra pair of hands, in the fields and in household chores, though even their status as workers has not been acknowledged. Therefore, time does not belong to them either, as the logic of the world of work prevails over the child's time (RAVENNA, 2020, p. 14)

The childhood and youth of the rural areas endure an invisibility in society, where their existence is only recognized among their peers, represented by those who share the same peasant struggle. Thus,

in the realm of social struggle, labor movements have, for many years, worked to document the journey of the collective being, without disregarding individual paths. Even those few who had their lives recorded in biographies or autobiographies may not have had, in those accounts, the importance given to what was particular to their childhood (RAVENNA, 2020, p. 13)

Children and youth in rural areas are born and grow up knowing the life they will lead; it is not a choice, but rather a condition. They are prepared to inherit the lives of their parents, who inherited them from their grandparents, creating a cycle that is prolonged across generations. It can be said, then, that the childhood of the rural areas is far from what is depicted as childhood in the city, without disregarding the way of life of children and youth in peripheral areas. In the routine of

Peasant identity and education: exploring the role and formation of peasant social groups rural children and youth, work, responsibility, and poverty dominate as constants, leaving no room for living childhood through play. The idea of learning through play in this context is almost utopian, to the point of being unimaginable. From this, the importance of school and education as tools for liberation and emancipation from oppressive cycles and conditions emerges.

The routine of a rural child or youth begins very early, even before sunrise, as they start preparing for the journey to school. This journey, depending on the school's location, is made by land, crossing paths and rural roads, or by rivers, when they are from riverside communities. And in this journey, one must deal with precarious school transportation, whether by bus or boat. This routine extends further with helping in domestic chores or agricultural tasks.

The importance of describing this group lies in the fact that these children are part of the dynamics of the settlements, although in the communities studied in this research, this logic differs completely from that of an encampment or settlement led by the MST, for example. However, the cycle that permeates the peasant family remains the same. These are subjects who resist and build together. Considering that,

The life of families in and from rural areas is intertwined with peasant production and the building of their own cultural roots. In this insertion and interaction, children, along with their family members, have their closest interlocutors. It is through these relationships, actions, and experiences with different subjects and aspects that shape their everyday lives (which are largely organized by their parents) that children develop concepts, attitudes, values, and behaviors, learning about themselves, life, and the world around them. In this sense, their families are the first agents of mediation and socialization of knowledge about themselves and the world. As the father of one of the children involved in the study says: "You only learn to do by doing and seeing others do (CALDART, PALUDO e DOLL, 2006, p. 117)

The most spoken language in the rural areas, introduced to peasant children and youth from an early age, is that of resistance and responsibility: resisting and seeking better days. Many families believe that these better days will only come with work, becoming responsible for daily household or agricultural chores. This context of daily struggle compromises dreams during childhood and projects throughout youth, not because of peasant identity, but because "this youth sees the struggle for land as a survival alternative in the countryside, in contrast to migration to the big cities, affirming the desire to establish a life and a family in the rural areas" (RAVENNA, 2020, p. 47).

It is for this group, and all others still involved in this study, that effective public policies are demanded, policies that truly address with dignity what peasant families are claiming: the right to

housing through a small plot of land to live on and cultivate, the right to quality education, and the right to subsistence.

It is within this context that the first stage of human development is outlined childhood which, despite being one of the most important phases of life for the first notions and experiences in the formation of the psychic, social, and motor self, is also a "childhood" of the working class. Moreover, the rural youth also faces many deprivations as they divide the responsibilities of rural and family work with pressures related to their own learning, with the absence of other means of education and culture still standing out.

The peasant woman

As a protagonist of rural life, it is also essential to reflect on the image of the peasant woman, doubly exploited by the hegemony of capital. However, one cannot describe the profile of the rural woman without first addressing the sexual division of labor. The sexual division of labor is a gender issue, where women dedicate most of their time to childcare, domestic tasks, paid work, and social matters, creating an unequal and disparate condition when compared to the male figure.

The understanding of the sexual division of labor is based on the use of biological sexual differences to demarcate economic-social configurations. Thus, the division of tasks between genders over time becomes established as a system of hierarchization and gender segregation. From this understanding, it is clear that gender relations in labor are intertwined with the historical subjugation of women to private spaces and domestic work, accompanied by their deprivation of public work spaces (MENDES, RETTORE e SIQUEIRA, 2018, p.16).

Marx and Engels (2007), through the analysis of struggles between different social classes and a study of how a capitalist and oppressive society operates, located the root of women's oppression in their role within the central family structure in class-based societies. They identified the role of women as biological reproducers, subordinated to a society. This society could be that of bourgeois families, where heirs are reproduced, or proletarian families, where generations of labor force are reproduced to sustain the capitalist system. In light of this organization, Marx and Engels, in their understanding of how class struggle operates, demonstrate that capitalism is incapable of recognizing and putting into practice the valorization and emancipation of women.

The image of women, historically, has been portrayed as something in service to society, synonymous with subservience to the figure of the man, represented as a microstate within the

household. This devaluation of women, constructed by patriarchy throughout history, is described in the work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* through a study by Engels, based on writings left by Marx before his death. Despite a critical analysis of the constitution and organization of the idea of family as a bourgeois and patriarchal strategy, in which the woman,

[...] was degraded, transformed into a servant, a slave to man's lust, a mere instrument of reproduction. This low condition of women, which manifested especially among the Greeks in heroic times, and even more so in classical times, was gradually retouched, disguised, and in certain places, even wrapped in gentler forms, but never, much less, abolished (ENGELS, 2019, p.75).

It is a fact that the unequal division of labor significantly impacts the composition of unequal income, considering that through this organization and systematization, which benefits patriarchal and capitalist society, women's domestic labor remains undervalued and invisible. In addition to sustaining mass reproduction for free, both in terms of reproducing labor force and being responsible for much of the work related to the production of food for self-consumption, this organization is justified by a dualistic and hierarchical system, where women are confined to the domestic and restricted space, while men are designated the public sphere, engaging in political, social, and economic relation. Where,

The modern world-system created a division between productive and reproductive labor, where the former refers to paid work, performed outside the household unit, and carried out by men/fathers/adults. On the other hand, reproductive (or unproductive) labor refers to the "subsistence" activities within the household unit, performed by women/mothers/adults. This division has led to a financial and social devaluation of women's work and institutionalized sexism (KEMPF e WEDIG, 2019, p. 3).

Knowing how the role of women is positioned in a capitalist and patriarchal society, one can then consider the role of women in rural areas. There is a common point regarding how the participation of children/youth and peasant women is viewed. Both, in a society that acts as a judge of values, are described as fragile and delicate beings, but their fragility and delicacy are put aside when they are needed to assist or lead the work and other chores. They thus form lines of labor that are not recognized as formal work, yet without their participation, such activities would not be carried out. In this context, it is clear that women's work, with the help of their children, is marked by the synonym of gratuity and lack of recognition.

The role of women in agricultural work has been minimized, when in reality, their participation is extensive, beyond just economic activities in general. Chayanov (1974) identified the devaluation of women's work when he talks about the indivisibility of income among family

members, which, however, remains under the responsibility of the family head, who in most cases is the father/husband.

Speaking further about the organization of rural labor, the peasant woman carries the multiple workday in rural areas, spending most of her time in the fields and then returning home at the end of the day to take on household and family responsibilities. It is evident that in rural areas, which are largely still tied to traditional land management practices, these gender relations and the exploitation of female labor take on a specific form, considering that the organization of peasant productive units occurs around the family unit, where work in the fields is for everyone children, youth, women, adults, and the elderly.

As Caldart, Paludo, and Doll (2006) assert, there is a process of naturalization, stemming from the very system to which they belong, where the woman acts as the manager of the household, and the man's role is to be the provider for the family. Thus, "although women participate in numerous agricultural activities, the invisibility of their work persists, for while doing the same work as men, they view themselves and are seen as 'just helping'" (CALDART; PALUDO; DOLL, 2006, p. 36).

Women's exploitation happens in any scenario, whether in the city or the countryside. What differentiates the persistence of this patriarchal strategy are the forms of struggle and resistance, discussions made possible by the expansion of the theorization of issues involving the sexual division of labor, gender social relations, and feminism. In the midst of this historical process, the establishment of movements supporting peasant women is essential, especially when in Brazil, the data on oppression, discrimination, and violence against women are terrifying. For this reason, the strengthening of female resistance in rural areas emerges with the rise of the *Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas* (MMC - Brazilian Peasant Women's Movement).

A partir dos anos 1980 com o surgimento de movimentos sociais a partir das lutas populares, se constitui o movimento das mulheres camponesas com objetivos voltados para o reconhecimento e valorização das trabalhadoras rurais, através do reconhecimento da profissão, aposentadoria, salário-maternidade, sindicalização e participação política (Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas, 2004). Além de reafirmar seu posicionamento frente a dois eixos de discussão, a questão de gênero e a de classe, o MMC ainda promove um debate em relação à categoria de camponês, quando no Brasil esse termo já passa a ser substituído pela nomenclatura de agricultura familiar. O movimento estabelece uma discussão sobre a condição do camponês, no qual,

It encompasses the peasant productive unit centered on the family nucleus, which, on one hand, is dedicated to autonomous agricultural and artisanal production, with the aim of meeting the family's self-sufficiency needs, and, on the other hand, sells part of its production to ensure the resources needed to purchase products and services that it does not produce,

the peasant productive unit centered on the family nucleus, which, on one hand, is dedicated to autonomous agricultural and artisanal production aimed at meeting the family's self-sustenance needs, and, on the other hand, commercializes part of its production to ensure the necessary resources to purchase products and services that it does not produce (PALUDO e DARON, 2012, p. 481).

The condition of the peasant woman reignites the discussion about the term *campesinato* used in Brazil for landless or dispossessed families, recognizing that this definition implies a way of life and subsistence as a political act and resistance to oppression in rural areas. Within this framework, the peasant woman is defined as "the one who, in one way or another, produces food and ensures the family's subsistence" (MMC, 2004, p. 3).

The peasant woman is, above all, a figure of resistance, from the devaluation of the work she performs in the fields, which carries the same weight as men's labor but is not given the same value, to the subjection to oppression and violence faced in rural areas. These are voices from, as Paludo and Daron (2012) highlight, small-scale farmers, artisanal fishermen, coconut breakers, extractivists, renters, sharecroppers, riverside dwellers, squatters, day laborers, partners, landless people, settlers, rural wage workers, and indigenous women. It is a fact that the burden placed on the female gender is a condition inherited with double the weight for the rural, poor, and black woman, which brings to mind Sojourner Truth's discourse when she questioned, "Ain't I a Woman?":

Look at me! Look at my arms! I plowed and planted, and gathered the harvest in the barns, and no man could stand in front of me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as any man—if I had the opportunity to do so—and endure the lash too! And ain't I a woman? I bore 13 children and saw most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried with my mother's pain, no one but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (TRUTH, 1851).

At that time, Truth was speaking to Black women, but the message she delivered then still resonates today, invoking the resistance of women who occupy spaces that are considered by classist society as minorities. This marginalized group includes peasant women, Black women, and poor women. The dynamic that exists between capitalism and oppression, in the way they are rooted in a state as an ideological apparatus, contributes to the realization of production relations with precarious

conditions, while reinforcing acts of discrimination against minority groups, especially when these individuals are women, peasant, Black, poor, and from peripheral areas.

The adult and the elderly in the rural area

As subjects of the rural world, both the adult and the elderly represent two extremes within the same scenario. The first embodies the entire workforce used in rural areas, the family responsibility, and the driving force behind peasant activity. The second is presented as a tired and aged body that has dedicated its life to working the land and now seeks a well-deserved rest after all its contributions to the rural life.

This topic aims to analyze the profile of each of the highlighted subjects, presenting their way of life through their work routine and uncertainties, in relation to the resistance they face in maintaining or establishing their identity in the face of oppressive groups, with the state being one of them, in a covert manner. Generally speaking, the adult is tasked with taking on work and later assuming the responsibility and provision for a family, followed by the expectation of retirement in old age—a possible promise of rest and remuneration without employment. In this way, adulthood is closely tied to the sense of duty and responsibility to oneself and to others who constitute their family environment. Therefore,

The adult subject, as a modern conceptual construction of our Western model of civilization, has been defined as one who must be socially responsible for their actions, seeking stability and balance. They have expectations regarding the children (heirs) they will conceive; they imagine themselves as role models, educating children, adolescents, and youth through their behavior, moral principles, and ethics (REICHWALD et al, 2006, p. 51).

Understanding how the formation of the adult subject is constructed involves comprehending their life story, social and cultural context, as well as their insertion in the productive process, while also being sensitive to the life projects and future aspirations of this group. Being an adult in the rural area still,

means being part of a social movement that fights for such a condition, as with rural exodus, unfortunately, the countryside is essentially a place for adults. The youth are disillusioned by the acute crisis that pushes them to the cities, and the demographic decline points to a small number of children. On the other hand, this project of staying in the countryside envisions working the land without pesticides, with native seeds, in harmony with the cosmos (REICHWALD et al, 2006, p. 72).

If the long period accompanying adulthood already brings challenging issues during life in the rural areas, the phase reserved for the elderly is characterized by similar dilemmas. This is because, in old age in the countryside, one encounters the physical exhaustion of a lifetime of labor, where one must question what is envisioned for the aging body after years of physical and mental wear in rural life.

Going through the aging process does not only culminate in the closure of a natural cycle but also in facing challenges. As society debates life expectancy and the growing number of elderly people, questions arise about policies and actions to support this specific group, especially when such concerns are directed toward rural areas.

Understanding that the elderly peasant also plays a crucial role in the construction and organization of life in rural areas is essential for the effectiveness and respect of a peasant identity. Their participation is as important as that of children or youth in the rural context. Therefore, questioning what has been done for this group throughout the trajectory of the peasant and social movements constitutes a way to contribute and,

Giving visibility to the history, memory, and life experiences of elderly subjects involved in movements is crucial. We also seek to understand and attempt to change what is entrenched in our society, where, in many instances, the elderly (or older adults) are seen as "useless," sick, asexual, unattractive, dependent, and unproductive. Therefore, they are not viewed or envisioned as individuals or as human beings in their relationships and daily experiences (MACHADO et al, 2006, p.33).

Including the elderly as protagonists of rural life is about overcoming the fallacy that this age group only pertains to stories and memories that should be preserved as museum pieces. In reality, men and women who have participated in and continue to shape the history of the countryside have much to contribute to the principles of organization and collectivity, which are key to overcoming the oppression and erasure reserved for peasant groups. It is about looking with greater intention and understanding how relationships form and how the new man and the new woman are constructed as human subjects, militants, and leaders of the tactics and strategies of our social and popular movements, who dream of building a society with new values (MACHADO et al., 2006).

Aging is as important a phase as any other that a human being goes through, and just as the previous sections defined the protagonism of each subject, it is crucial to recognize the role of the elderly in shaping the future of rural communities.

So, who is the elderly person in the countryside, and how do they differ from the elderly in the city? The former is defined as someone who has historically had a relationship with the land and, as peasants, seeks to preserve their identity while living a cycle of work and subsistence passed down through generations. On the other hand, the urban elderly generally lead a somewhat more comfortable life, considering that cities offer other resources that help maintain a better quality of life, even though they may still belong to a marginalized group.

The issue of the elderly in rural areas becomes as urgent as the concerns regarding rural youth. This is because, while young people must deal with the absence of educational policies that provide opportunities and perspectives, as they witness the dismantling of the few programs that address these needs, the elderly, although they have reached what is considered "old age" and secured retirement as a constitutional right, still need to remain involved in fieldwork, albeit at a slower pace due to their physically worn bodies.

It becomes apparent that work is a constant in the life of the peasant, starting from childhood through "small chores" to help the family, continuing through youth, intensifying during adulthood between men and women, and extending into old age. Therefore, aging and the relationship with work follow the premise that,

The age at which a person can be considered elderly or in old age is often seen as the stage of life where the work rhythm slows down, with a decline in the ability to work compared to younger individuals. However, this loss refers more specifically to physical capabilities and the level of activity demanded in rural settings. Elderly peasants, both men and women, continue working, but the intensity of their work decreases rather than a complete change in the social roles they perform. Therefore, there is a redistribution of tasks and work, which is in dialogue with the physical conditions they now experience (JAHN, 2018, p. 61).

The issue of old age, when it comes to the rural context, is simply another cycle closing in a particular family, just like other families will have their cycles end, marked by the wear and tear of manual labor that remains unrecognized by society, except within the rural community itself. At this point, the problem raised is based on trying to answer the question, "What measures or programs have been thought out for the peasant who is finishing the work cycle and should now have the minimum comfort and dignity to rest?" The exhaustion and maximization of the "work" culture in the countryside should not be synonymous with peasant life, but rather the understanding that each peasant's body carries stories and experiences that are directly or indirectly dismantled by subservience to the capitalist logic, which fails to recognize marginalized groups' right to have rights.

Final considerations

The neoliberal logic tends to empty or weaken the protagonism of peasant communities, highlighting inequalities or minimizing the implementation of public policies. Discussing and strengthening the recognition of peasant identity and the role that each group plays in the rural context is a strategy to break with such power relations. Moreover, reflecting on the way of life and contradictions faced by rural subjects, when transcribing the reality that each social actor lives, invites the reader to question whether the guidelines directed at the rural population regarding respect for and understanding of the specificities of rural life have truly been consolidated.

To this end, during the composition of this text, in addition to presenting a general description of the profile of each group, historical and political reflections were inferred based on the logic of the formation and conceptualization of peasantry. This dynamic was crucial to understanding the fundamental perspective of describing and analyzing the rural reality, starting with aspects such as way of life, forms of organization, and social relations that these groups establish with the space they inhabit. It is also important to highlight the precise statement about reaffirming peasant identity, where "rural peoples have their own cultural roots, a way of living and working distinct from the urban world, which includes different ways of seeing and relating to the environment, as well as the organization of family, community, work, and education" (CALDART, 2002, p. 11).

The legacy of the peasant struggle and trajectory is sustained through the demand for the strengthening and respect of existing educational policies or those yet to be implemented, but above all, by increasingly discussing and recognizing that the front line of policies that serve the Rural Education modality only exists due to the struggle of its rural subjects. Who are they? Rural children and youth, peasant women, and rural adults and the elderly.

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