

Agrarian issue and peasant reproduction in the contradictions of capital versus labor

Questão agrária e a reprodução camponesa nas contradições capital versus trabalho

Cuestión agraria y la reproducción campesina em las contradicciones capital versus trabajo

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight some contributions of Conceição (1991, 2005, 2007, 2013) to the reading of the Brazilian agrarian issue, emphasizing reflections on the process of peasant reproduction amidst the contradictions of capital advancement in the countryside, the agribusiness expansion in a context of capital productive restructuring on a global level, the transformations in the labor world due to the structural crisis, and the intensification of mobility and precarious working conditions both in the countryside and in cities. The research was conducted based on a bibliographic survey, treatment and analysis of concepts that support the debate on the agrarian issue, utilizing, also, secondary data and readings from other authors, especially in the discussion of methodology. It is concluded that it is essential to bring to light the reflections pointed out by the author, mainly due to the observation of few analyses that address the repercussions of the capital crisis and the restructuring it undergoes to meet the objectives of accumulation, including in the countryside, while, contradictorily, peasant reproduction constitutes itself in a unit of submission and confrontation against this process.

Keywords: Agrarian issue. Peasant reproduction. Capital crisis. Labor mobility.

Resumo

Este artigo objetiva apontar algumas contribuições de Conceição (1991, 2005, 2007, 2013) para a leitura da questão agrária brasileira, enfatizando reflexões sobre o processo de reprodução camponesa nas contradições do avanço do capital no campo, a expansão do agronegócio em um contexto de reestruturação produtiva do capital em nível mundial, as transformações no mundo do trabalho, em decorrência da crise estrutural e a intensificação da mobilidade e da precariedade das condições de trabalho tanto no campo como nas cidades. A pesquisa foi realizada com base em levantamento bibliográfico, tratamento e



análise de conceitos que dão sustentação ao debate da questão agrária, valendo-se, ainda, de dados secundários e leituras de outros autores, sobretudo no debate do método. Conclui-se que se torna imprescindível trazer à tona as reflexões apontadas pela autora, sobretudo pela constatação de que poucas análises trazem os rebatimentos da crise do capital e a reestruturação pela qual esse passa para atender os objetivos da acumulação, inclusive no campo, ao passo que, contraditoriamente, a reprodução camponesa se constitui em uma unidade de submissão e enfrentamento a esse processo.

Palavras-Chave: Questão agrária. Reprodução Camponesa. Crise do capital. Mobilidade do trabalho.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo señalar algunas contribuciones de Conceição (1991, 2005, 2007, 2013) para la lectura de la cuestión agraria brasileña, enfatizando reflexiones sobre el proceso de reproducción campesina em las contradicciones del avance del capital en el campo, la expansión del agronegocio en un contexto de reestructuración productiva del capital a nivel mundial, las transformaciones en el mundo del trabajo, como consecuencia de la crisis estructural y la intensificación de la movilidad y la precariedad de las condiciones de trabajo tanto en el campo como en las ciudades. La investigación se realizó con base en un levantamiento bibliográfico, tratamiento y análisis de conceptos que sustentan el debate sobre la cuestión agraria, valiéndose, además, de datos secundarios y lecturas de otros autores, especialmente en el debate del método. Se concluye que, es imprescindible traer a colación las reflexiones señaladas por la autora, principalmente por la observación de pocos análisis que traen las repercusiones de la crisis del capital y la reestructuración que éste atraviesa para cumplir con los objetivos de acumulación, incluso en el campo, mientras que, contradictoriamente, la reproducción campesina se constituye en una unidad de sumisión y enfrentamiento a este proceso.

Palabras-clave: Cuestión agraria. Reproducción campesina. Crisis del capital. Movilidad del trabajo.

Introduction

This article is theoretical and conceptual in nature, having been developed based on the survey, selection, readings and systematization of works and authors considered central in the debate on the agrarian issue, sometimes submitting the analysis of some to counterpoints by others. Its purpose is to understand the debate on the agrarian issue and the process of peasant reproduction, in the movement of contradictions directed by the capital/labor relationship. To this end, it draws on the contributions brought by Conceição, in the period from 1991 to 2007, as well as establishing a dialogue with other authors who address the process of reproduction of the peasantry in the capitalist mode of production, at different times. Its goal is to provide an understanding of this process in the current reality of the Brazilian countryside, in addition to the contradictions driven by the capital crisis – which places these subjects in a situation of

constant mobility of their labor force, which is understood as a unit of reproduction/subjectation of the Brazilian peasantry.

The methodology of the article was structured in such a way as to provide a comprehensive analysis of the contradictory relations between peasantry and capital in the Brazilian agrarian context. Initially, a bibliographic survey was carried out on the main works and authors that discuss the capitalist mode of production and the agrarian issue, with an emphasis on the theoretical contributions of Conceição. Subsequently, empirical data from field research in different regions of Brazil were selected and systematized, allowing for a deeper understanding of the realities faced by peasants. The qualitative analysis of the data collected made it possible to identify the contradictions and challenges that permeate peasant reproduction, as well as the resistance strategies adopted. This methodological approach, which combines theory and practice, aims to offer a critical and reflective view of the contradictions of the advance of capital in the countryside and its social and economic implications.

The goal of this paper is to point out initially some of Conceição's contributions (1991, 2005, 2007, and 2013) to Brazilian geographical thought and, more specifically, to the Agrarian Issue¹, based on the reflections developed by the author, both in her dissertation, defended in 1991, and in later articles, in which she addressed the agrarian issue, peasantry as a social class, the advance of capital and agribusiness in the Brazilian countryside, and public policies aimed at the countryside – emphasizing the class role assumed by the State in this process – in addition to the difficulties in the reproduction of peasant life and the precariousness and mobility of labor, experienced by these subjects.

In the first instance, the goal of this study is to reflect on peasant reproduction in the process of capital expansion in the countryside, and the current status of the class struggle that constitutes this space, with an emphasis on the forms of expropriation/subjectation/reproduction experienced by this class in the Brazilian

¹ The goal is to highlight the contribution of women researchers to the production of knowledge and critical geographical thought, including Brazil's Northeastern production, as this is also quite centralized in certain areas of the country. This is not intended to encourage fragmentation or deny the important role of researchers of other genders, and even from different parts of Brazil, but rather to highlight readings that are still rarely seen and that we consider relevant. The purpose here is not to produce a "Geography of women" or a "Geography of the Northeast," but simply to bring to light the significant reality of this production, including in the sense of reaffirming critical thought, which is highly present in Brazilian geographical production.

countryside. In a second step, attention is given to understanding the transformations in the countryside, in light of a context of structural crisis, with an emphasis on the critical reading of agribusiness and public policies, implemented by the State.

Mészáros's (2002) contributions to the research are essential in the analysis of the relations between the State, capital and labor, also providing elements for understanding the Brazilian agrarian issue. He conceives of the State as a political entity that acts in favor of the interests of capital, a reality on which Conceição (2013) highlights how public policies can be used to reproduce the conditions necessary for the accumulation of capital. This perspective is crucial to understanding how this State/Capital relationship affects the lives of peasants and directs agrarian policies. Conceição also highlights the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, which manifest themselves in social and economic relations in the countryside, allowing for a critical reflection on the precariousness of peasant living conditions. His analysis reveals the mobility of the peasant labor force, evidencing the constant struggle between subjection and resistance. By integrating these reflections into the debate on peasant reproduction, it offers a solid theoretical basis that enriches the understanding of the complex relationships between the peasantry and capital, contributing to the understanding of contemporary agrarian issues.

In this regard, we are anchored in the reading of the structural crisis of capital, as highlighted by Mészáros (2002), with the aim of understanding the concrete ways in which capital in crisis seeks to extend its tentacles across all spaces – aiming at accumulation, while the countryside, in its specificity, begins to be understood as part of this reality, while also bringing particularities, where the process of reproduction of a peasant class can be understood. In this sense, as the author notes that:

(...) capital is not simply a “material entity,” It is also not (...) a controllable rational “mechanism” (...). (...) but is, ultimately, an uncontrollable form of sociometabolic control. The main reason why this system (...) escapes a significant degree of human control is precisely the fact that it has itself emerged in the course of history as a powerful – indeed, to date, by far the most powerful – **“totalizing” structure of control to which everything else, including human beings, must conform** (...). (...) a system of globally dominant capital, which blindly subjects to the same imperatives the issue of **health and commerce, education and agriculture, art and manufacturing industry**, which relentlessly superimposes its own criteria of viability on everything, from the smallest units of its “microcosm” to the most gigantic transnational corporations (...) (Mészáros, 2002, p. 96, emphasis added).

This is how, according to Mészáros (2002), the expansion of capital, which he subsequently refers to as the overdetermination of a second-order mediation system, overlaps a first-order mediation system – which predominated in the forms of sociability prior to the capital system, but which the latter, due to its capacity to produce surplus, foster the intense transformation of nature and work, corresponds to a specific period of human history, which is characterized by the diffusion of “fetishizing and alienating elements of societal control,” determined by the market in search of guaranteeing profit.

This is a crucial reality for understanding the Brazilian countryside, the way in which it is inserted into the current social and territorial division of labor, especially as a producer of commodities, aimed at feeding the appetite of financial capital – via millionaire operations on the stock exchanges and futures markets, to the detriment of, and in contradiction with, the ways of life of the hundreds and thousands of communities that inhabit their lands of work, but which are also profoundly affected by the capitalist advance over their territories. This understanding puts on the agenda of the day: first, the concrete ways in which the bourgeois State creates the conditions for capital to expand and seek to appropriate these territories, in which the debate on public policies becomes effective; and second, the concrete difficulties of peasant reproduction, especially through the subjection of their labor and their territories.

In order to understand the process of peasant reproduction in a capitalist society, as part of the contradictions of the development of this mode of production, it becomes necessary, in accordance with Conceição’s reading and the research group’s notes, to make a few considerations. The first of these is that we are discussing a peasant who reproduces in/on the margins of capitalist society, based on the production of merchandise; where the land itself and labor also come to be seen as merchandise or the possibility of creating it, on an ever-increasing scale. Thus, this peasantry resists in the countryside, not being configured, broadly speaking, as a subject that is fully expropriated from the land – since, at times, it still controls the land and the instruments of labor, although it also transforms itself.

It is in this process that the author will highlight the increasing ways in which capital seeks to take advantage of this peasant labor, subjecting it in various ways, whether through the spread of industry in the countryside, such as the insertion of machinery and chemical products, increasing its profit margins, fostering dependence,

and ultimately, controlling practically all the effective production by the peasant and his family's labor. It also does so via financial capital, inserting this peasant into a system of indebtedness and dependence – from which it is difficult to escape. To make this process viable, the action of the State is also highlighted – anchored in the State-Capital-Labor tripod (Mészáros, 2002), through which the so-called public policies foster the spread of the credit system in peasant production units.

Second, and in relation to the issues previously raised, it is necessary to emphasize that this peasantry must be understood in the historical process itself that determined its non-disappearance, not as an autonomous subject/class and apart from the contradictions of capital, but rather related to this mode of production. Hence, the author approaches the reflections brought, in Brazil, by Martins (1981) and Oliveira (2001).

Third, understanding this peasantry in the Brazilian countryside today means thinking about their strategies of reproduction in a context of deep crisis of capital and the ways in which it expands in the countryside in search of reproducing value – as well as how and to what extent this peasantry, albeit not expropriated from the land and, apparently, not wage-earning, subjects itself and recreates itself. In this regard, it is relevant to think about the way in which Brazil fits into the social and territorial division of labor, as a major producer of commodities (agricultural and mineral), how capital advances under the personification of agribusiness, and where and in what way it subordinates the peasant, who has also historically presented forms of permanence on the land and resistance – through conflicts and the fight for land.

Nevertheless, in order to reach this understanding, it is necessary to report on who this peasant subject is, how it is reproduced throughout history, and the main theories that seek to explain it, in order to gather the elements to think of how this class is made in the countryside, and in the Brazilian countryside, today, despite all the difficulties. It is based on this principle that, through Conceição's dissertation (1991), we seek to resume this debate, emphasizing the author's contribution to thinking about the peasantry in the contradictions of the advance of capital in the countryside and on labor, including peasant labor. This is the debate that we will bring up next.

The reproduction of a peasant class in the contradictions of the capital versus labor relationship

Considering the debate held by Marx in *Das Kapital* and the approaches established by Conceição (1991) in her Master's thesis, we return here to the discussion on the peasantry as a social class that exists and resists in the countryside, in various parts of the world, as approved by the studies of several authors, including Teodor Shanin (1980, 1993, 2005) and Henri Mendras (1978). In this discussion, it is worth considering what it means to be a peasant and what differentiates this social subject, in time and space, from the working (salaried) class, or even from landowners – who live off the extraction of land income, according to the analysis of social classes developed by Marx (2013).

To this end, it is essential to revisit approaches to the peasantry, emphasizing those that advocate its disappearance, based on Lenin's initial analyses (1982), while establishing a counterpoint with other readings, such as that developed by the Russian Alexander Chayanov (1974), until reaching the most recent studies developed by Teodor Shanin (1980, 2005), Henri Mendras (1978), and others, as well as the reflections of these studies on the peasantry, based on its effective participation (not only in terms of population size, but also in terms of the political role played) in the various Latin American societies and in Brazil specifically, which is the object of study of various Social Sciences researchers, in particular José de Souza Martins, Ariovaldo Umbelino de Oliveira, Alexandrina Luz Conceição, Marta Inez M. Marques, and others. Here, we will focus our analysis on the studies of Conceição (1991), initially, and, later, on more recent analyses by the aforementioned author, such as Conceição (2007 and 2013).

In the various analyses carried out on peasantry, at different historical moments and in a wide variety of places, one must highlight unique worldviews that often point to opposing perspectives in the best-known theories developed. According to Shanin (1993), there are four main analyses on the peasantry: the Marxist tradition of class analysis, which has focused on the peasantry in terms of power relations, i.e., as oppressed and exploited producers in pre-capitalist society, appearing as a vestige of a previous social formation; the second tradition, which considers the social structure of the peasantry as determined by a specific type of economy, the core of which is found in the form of the operation of a fringe family – this was the axis first explained by

Vasil'chakov (1881) and fully developed by Chayanov (1925); the third tradition, which derives from European ethnography and traditional Western anthropology, which tend to consider peasants as representatives of a previous national tradition, preserved as a “cultural backwardness” by the typical inertia of peasant societies; and the fourth tradition, originating from Durkheim’s studies – which divided society into traditional and modern or organic – on the peasantry. We can observe, based on the analysis that points to its disappearance, in light of the full development of the productive forces in capitalism, developed by Vladimir Lenin, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, first published in 1899, to the attempt to counter this approach, developed by the Russian Alexander Chayanov, in *Peasant Farm Organization*, whose proximity to the approach of the Russian populists is clear. In this study, as in other publications, Chayanov defends the permanence of the Russian peasantry, which, due to the more isolated nature of Russia, where the development of capitalism was slower than that seen in European countries and, due to the fact that it had a predominantly peasant population, it would be possible, given these characteristics, to slow down the development of capitalism in the country. With this, he defends his main argument – the peasantry constitutes a specific mode of production, which persists alongside the capitalist mode of production.

Studies on the peasantry have gained new impetus following the analyses developed by Teodor Shanin, given the number of studies he managed to gather on the peasantry in various parts of the world, noting that, even light of certain differences, such communities present a certain cohesion in terms of social organization, forms of land use, and family ties, among other characteristics. Moreover, the author highlights the forms of political pressure exerted by this class, giving indications of the political role played by them in various countries around the world, unlike the analyses in which the peasantry would not have the conditions to play this political role in a significant way, given the dispersion in which they lived. According to Shanin (1980, 1993), even considering the fragility of a large part of peasant communities in terms of political organization, this does not mean that they cannot develop a form of resistance, citing a few examples, such as the movement led by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. Based on these findings, Shanin begins to consider the peasantry as a social class that reproduces itself in the countryside, in time and space.

Based on this debate and constructing explanations to think about the countryside and the Brazilian countryside in the contradictions of the advance of capital, Conceição (1991, 2007, and 2013) also recognizes the reproduction of this social class in the countryside, bringing, however, new contributions to the debate, such as the context of the structural crisis of capital and the ways in which these subjects reproduce themselves, while also being subject to capital. To this end, she reflects on issues related to the struggle for land, the process of rise and criminalization of social movements, the advance of agribusiness and financial capital, reflected in greater difficulties in peasant reproduction, the concentration of land ownership, even in the face of all the peasant struggle for land to work, the loss of land and the fragmentation of the peasant productive unit, and the availability of part of these subjects to the production of value – increasing the reserve army – through the mobility of their labor force. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize, based on to Conceição's analysis, that although they are not salaried workers – in factories, in the countryside, when selling their labor force in other economic sectors, or even when they are unable to achieve instability, due to the precariousness of these relationships and unemployment – this does not mean that these peasants are on the sidelines of the contradictions of this mode of production, nor does it mean that they live with the process of exploitation of significant portions of their labor and income.

Regarding the debate that permeated the reproduction/disappearance of the peasantry in the movement of capital's advance in the countryside, according to Conceição (1991), Lenin's analysis – carried out on the eve of the first Russian Revolution, in 1905-1907, is based on the theoretical axis of the disintegration of the peasantry given the inevitability of the process of capitalism's advance. Thus, when analyzing the Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin (1982, p. 10) highlights the following issues:

On the current economic basis of the Russian revolution, two fundamental paths are objectively possible for its development and outcome. Either the old private land ownership, linked by thousands of ties of serfdom, is preserved and slowly transformed into a purely capitalist establishment, of the junker type, in which case the basis for the definitive transition from the system of payment in labor to capitalism comprises the internal transformation of land ownership based on serfdom – the entire agrarian structure of the State becomes capitalist, preserving feudal traits for a long time – or the old latifundia are destroyed by the revolution, eliminating all traces of serfdom, especially the regime of large landed property. In this case, the basis for the

definitive transition from the system of payment in labor to capitalism is the free development of small peasant properties, which receives a great boost with the expropriation of the latifundia for the benefit of the peasants; the entire structure becomes capitalist, as the disintegration of the peasantry occurs all the more rapidly the more complete the destruction of the traces of serfdom is.

In this sense, according to Lenin, this would create the most favorable conditions for the working class to be able to fulfill its authentic and fundamental task, which is the socialist transformation. For Conceição (1991), Lenin intended to show the development of the social division of labor, which constitutes a crucial element for the formation of an internal market for capitalism; the separation between manufacturing and agriculture, which transforms agriculture into a ‘branch of industry’, with the purpose of production of goods; and the transfer of ownership of the means of production to other hands, comprising their conversion into capital. Thus, according to Lenin, the peasantry would be destroyed, giving rise to two new types of rural population: the rural bourgeoisie or rich peasantry – owners of industrial-commercial establishments, commercial companies, and others – who associate themselves with commercial agriculture; and the rural proletariat – the wage workers. This can be seen from the following statement:

So far, our reference has been to simple commodity production. Let us now turn to capitalist production: We do not have before us simple producers of goods, but, on the one hand, owners of means of production and, on the other, wage workers who sell their labor power. The transformation of the small producer into a wage worker presupposes the loss of his means of production (land, work instruments, workshop, etc.) – that is, it presupposes his “impoverishment” and its “ruin.” It is argued that this ruin “reduces the purchasing power of the population” and “narrows the internal market” for capitalism. (Lenin, 1982, p. 15-16).

Nevertheless, according to Conceição (1991), Lenin would “reclaim his slogans” (p. 14) in later writings such as “To the Rural Poor” and in “The Agrarian Program,” considering that “there was a mistake in believing that capitalist agriculture in Russia was already crystallized” (Conceição, 1991, p. 15), thus proposing the destruction of the latifundia economy through revolutionary means, as a possibility for the development of free capitalism. Conceição (1991) also notes that, in Marxist analysis, several other author\|s had already analyzed the issue of the peasantry, including Marx himself in both “Primitive Accumulation” and “The German Ideology,” as well as Kautsky, who wrote

“The Agrarian Question,” where several approaches were relegated to Lenin’s analysis. We understand that Conceição’s (1991) contribution to this debate, sometimes viewed in a biased way, in which Lenin is read only through a single work, in its first part, is fundamental. Additionally, the author rescues Kautsky’s contribution, which, despite later criticism, brings important reflections within the scope of Marxism to think about the agrarian issue, through the development of capitalism and the reproduction of the peasantry in this process.

Conversely, Russian author Chayanov opposes Lenin, highlighting the maintenance of the peasantry in Russia. According to Conceição (1991, p. 15), “for Chayanov, the goals of capitalist and peasant production are not mutually exclusive. Peasants could enter the market circulation, without, however, causing its disintegration.” Chayanov believes that, in the domestic exploitation unit, purchasing power is limited by the family’s labor force (p. 16) and by fatigue – measured by the intensity of the exploitation of the labor force. This is established by the optimal level, which represents a family’s ability to support labor in relation to agricultural production; therefore, “any excess in the means of production or in the available land, which technically exceeds the optimum, is unacceptable for the family.” In this sense, the family size would arithmetically determine the size of the exploitation unit. Carvalho (2005, p. 18) apud Chayanov (1923) notes that:

(...) the family is the foundation of the peasant enterprise – in its condition of a non-wage economy, since it is both the starting point and the objective of its economic activity. As the only source of labor force, the family is the basis of production, whose purpose is nothing more than guaranteeing its own existence. The peasant unit is, therefore, at the same time a production unit and a consumption unit and simultaneously encompasses the functions of the spheres of production and reproduction in such a way that (...) the family and the relationships that result from it must be the only organizing element of the economy without wage earners.

There was, therefore, no economic dimension that had to be achieved by establishing a specific income, as occurs in a capitalist enterprise, in order for wages to be paid. What the peasant obtains as a return at the end of the economic year cannot be considered as a profit, in the capitalist sense, but this small “surplus” can be seen as a reward for his own work. “This reward appears embodied in the family consumption of goods and services” (Carvalho, 2005, p. 19).

According Chayanov, when the family farm unit enters the market, it loses its qualitative character and becomes interested in quantity. It thus ceases to have a logic focused on the needs of the family and begins to assume the characteristics of production for the interests of the market. Thus, the relationship that begins to characterize the family unit of exploitation is the capitalist one – which begins to be determined by technical advances and by a new division of labor. labor (Conceição, 1991, p. 17).

Based on Chayanov's studies, the family economy was considered a mode of production, which would be revised years later by Shanin (1980), who discussed peasantry as a social class, as opposed to a mode of production, which, therefore, could not be limited to a given period of history, given the complexities that characterize this class. Unlike Lenin, Chayanov believed that, with the advancement of capitalist relations, the peasantry would not disappear but rather change the nature of its exploitation – based on a reorganization of the peasant economy, not requiring the destruction of private property, but rather a system of state regulation; where the peasants would continue to exist, preserving their characteristics.

For Lenin, according to Conceição (1991), however, Chayanov and the populists “subtract the economic essence of the agrarian revolution. The egalitarian character confuses the class struggle. By encouraging the expansion of small properties, he fails to see the bourgeois nature of social relations.” (p. 19).

Also according to the study developed by Conceição (1991), another difference between the analyses of Chayanov and Lenin is that, for the former, the peasant production unit is linked to the history of Russia's social and political organization – the Mir. According to Lenin and the social democrats, the Mir was a community controlled by the rich, who exercised complete control over the economic and social life of peasant families. For this very reason, he highlights the different existing social classes characterized by poor peasants, controlled by rich peasants, which would be absent in the analysis carried out by Chayanov. Regarding this, Conceição (1991, p. 25) adds that:

For Marxist-Leninists, economic development constituted a milestone for the country, while capitalism represented the necessary path, ensuring high productivity. They condemned the Mir for constituting a form of organization of domains. The closed structure of the Mir did not allow the advancement of capitalist enterprises in the countryside. Considering that more than 80% of the population were peasants, Russia was characterized as a poor country

compared to Western countries. Since the family production unit was the main factor delaying industrial development, the disintegration of the natural economy was mandatory.

Lenin believed that by destroying feudal traits and, consequently, advancing capitalist relations of production, it would be possible to move towards the construction of another society – a socialist one, as already mentioned. In Conceição's view, however, "although one agrees that technological advance is an inevitable condition for social improvement, one cannot fail to consider the contradictions generated in this process" (p. 42).

Contrary to Lenin, anarchists considered peasant communities as a symbol of solidarity, an example of the preservation of moral principles, the preservation of human goodness, in the face of the corruption presented by the capitalist system. This is the essence of Chayanov's analysis.

For capital, the disintegration of these subjects – the peasants – would initially be necessary, which would be revised later. This idea was linked by the church itself to the service of capital. Lenin would later revise his analysis, as the peasantry did not disappear, but, in a certain way, was subordinated to capital. Conceição (1991, p.26), analyzing the theories developed by Chayanov and Lenin, highlights that:

While on the one hand, the Leninist agrarian program emphasized the elimination of the family unit of production, underestimating the class character of the peasant and overestimating the working class, on the other hand, the defenders of the permanence of the family unit of production underestimated the differences and the contradictions of classes, reducing the strength of the conflicts and minimizing the political dominance of the landed nobility.

Thus, for the author, Lenin's theory analyzes the historical process of production relations, leading to an approach that is "restricted to the economic, without allowing the revelation of the formation of a region" (p. 44). As for the concept of peasant, this is linked to a conception of production relations, of equity in the feudal mode of production, being defined within the essence of servile relations. Regarding the analysis of the peasant family structure, she considers that it was done dialectically in its relationship with the repressive force of the State, not favoring a more in-depth study of the ways in which class conflicts occur in the countryside; "where the overpowering of

the economic and political mask the essence of the contradictions” (p. 46-47). Regarding this, she highlights that Shanin makes considerable progress on the issue of class conflicts in Russian peasant societies. Regarding the criticisms made by Conceição (1991) to Chayanov, it is highlighted that in the analysis of the family production unit, the class division is annulled – based on the determinant possession and property, therefore, a single category, taking family size as a statistical parameter (p. 49). Thus, “the various performances assumed by the spatial temporality of recombinations between productive forces and production relations are not taken into consideration – the division of labor is considered” (p. 50). The issue of technical improvement is seen only as a consequence – which will have an impact on productivity. Furthermore, production is considered an end, determined by natural laws, i.e., human needs.

In trying to homogenize the right to appropriation, considering the collective ownership of the means of production, with age as a parameter for labor power, Chayanov disregards the heterogeneous conditions of appropriation, in which labor power is not measured by age group, but by the relationship between quantity and quality of the means of production. “These are the elements that will determine the quantum of consumption and production, establishing the framework of differentiation of appropriations” (p. 51). Thus, according to Conceição (1991), by disregarding the dynamic nature of the productive forces, a fatal circumstance is incurred, which is similar to Malthusian theory. Furthermore, for Chayanov, production, distribution and consumption are seen as if they occurred in the limited space of the production unit, “not being seen as elements of a totality” (p. 54); the peasant does not go beyond the limit of his needs, where the relations of production, consumption and circulation are internalized, being thus closed – not unlike Von Thunen’s Theory of the Isolated State (1826). At another point, he considers that peasant exploitation is part of the capitalist system, being part of the totality of the national economy; however, it cannot be considered as a capitalist company, in which the basic difference is in the level of organization of production. Nevertheless, he does not delve into issues such as the impact produced by the market on the peasant economy, given that the analysis revolved around the biological cycle of the family.

Finally, it is important not to forget that we cannot fail to consider: the history of family farming over the centuries of its formation, the weight of the constructed history of the working class and its reintegration, the new dimension of the urban issue, and the division of labor based on the new technological perspective (Conceição, 1991, p. 57).

This persistence of the peasant economy, even in the face of the onslaughts of the market economy, cannot be disregarded and constitutes one of the central aspects for understanding the countryside today.

Based on the reflections by Conceição (1991), in our thesis research (Souza, 2008), we pointed to the perspective of not only understanding the Brazilian countryside, but also, by demystifying some discourses in vogue, visualizing a process of class struggle underway, which is capable of transforming the situation of hundreds and thousands of wage workers and peasants, in the struggle for land and work, or in the struggle to avoid losing their status as peasants. In this sense, we start from the hypothesis of the verification of a process of peasant reproduction in Brazil and its expressions in the Center-South region of the state of Bahia, Brazil. Such a process must be understood based on a deep dive into the totality of social relations existing in the Brazilian countryside, that is, as a singularity in the totality. When affirming that a process of reproduction of the peasantry is taking place, as a social class, it was argued that this can only be understood from the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production in the countryside; and in the specific case of Brazil, based on a contradictory social and historical context through which one can understand not only the recreation of the peasantry, but also its growing subordination to the capitalist mode of production. To this end, it became essential to analyze, first, the social subjects producing the Brazilian agrarian space, their conditions as distinct social classes, with antagonistic interests, and how and when they enter into constant disputes in the territory.

We argue that, despite the various analyses that emphasized the political disarticulation of the peasantry, considering the living conditions and, often, the isolation in which several communities lived, we sought, in light of the dialectical method, based on the contradictions of the development of capital, to highlight elements that pointed to concrete possibilities of articulation of the peasants, and the political role that they played in several societies, particularly in the last decades, expressing, in certain cases, in addition to the need to maintain or conquer a piece of land – aiming to

guarantee peasant production, a confrontation with the dominant classes acting in the countryside, assuming a crucial political role in light of the Bourgeois State and the projects of capital.

The very advancement of capitalist relations and the contradictions arising from the need to expand their projects end up demanding political participation from the peasants. becomes more effective. Although, initially, such articulation is carried out with the aim of maintaining the family land, the interests of capital in making them dependent, subjugated to its interests, as well as the constant threat of losing the land, drive peasants to fight to not lose their condition of social reproduction. Furthermore, peasants who are completely “integrated” into the market see their desires for freedom, even if partial, succumb. The loss of control over work, and its repercussions on the customs and values of the peasant family, has a direct impact on concrete attempts to confront the projects of capital.

After the World War II, the diffusion of technologies used in the countryside, in particular the so-called Green Revolution, became a reality. Furthermore, the discourse of development, as a condition for overcoming backwardness in countries deemed underdeveloped – which, combined with the historical conditions of land concentration (as in the case of Brazil), in addition to the alliances established between capital projects and rentier landowners – leads to a process of increasing expropriation of peasants from their lands, as well as from the lands on which they developed partnership relationships, etc., falling, however, mainly on the dismissal of the wage-earning workforce in the countryside. Living in precarious conditions in the cities, often placed on the margins of the production process, these workers – precarious, informal, unemployed, or marginalized – see in organized social movements concrete possibilities of fighting for a piece of land, in which they are able to guarantee the survival of their family. Nevertheless, the political role of peasants is not limited to the fight for land, but, above all, to remain on the land. To this end, confronting the impositions of the State in line with the projects of capital becomes a reality. In several countries, researchers have begun to analyze the historical contingencies that led the peasantry to promote diverse forms of social organization, the greatest expression of which is land occupation, causing a direct conflict between social classes in the countryside, with their antagonistic interests confronting each other in different territories. It is in this context that the peasant class emerges and acquires greater expression. Among the scholars who

focus on the political role of the peasantry and its performance as a social class in the Brazilian countryside, Oliveira (1998) and Conceição (1991) stand out.

When considering the concept of peasantry today, it is crucial to consider that this class presents differences from one society to another, and even within the same society, living, relating and interacting with non-peasants. The peasantry is a process and necessarily part of a broader social history (Shanin, 2005). This is the issue of the specificity of the patterns of its development, of the significant periods and of the strategic ruptures that concern the peasants (Shanin, 1980).

Further, it is based on this understanding that Conceição, in later publications, individually and alongside her advisees, will deepen the reflections around the understanding of this peasant class in the advancement of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, in a moment of structural crisis, as well as the way in which it is directed towards the Brazilian countryside.

For capital, the expansion of agribusiness represents ways of controlling production in the countryside, with greater difficulty for workers and peasants in remaining on the land, either due to the expansion of industrial machinery that saves labor force (while, at the same time, guaranteeing an increase in labor productivity), by expanding onto peasant lands, through processes of expropriation, or by subjecting their income, when they are forced to produce what the market defines. (...) This is how (...) capital expands in the countryside, particularly in a context of crisis, in which the appropriation of land, resources, and, ultimately, of different spaces can be seen as one of the ways of staying alive, aiming to appropriate the wealth socially produced by labor (Souza and Conceição, 2019, p. 62).

Therefore, the concrete reality of the development of the peasantry in the Brazilian countryside, as part of the irreconcilable contradictions between capital and labor, has allowed us to analyze the reproduction of this class in the countryside, as they begin to suffer more intensely from the processes of expropriation and subjection of their income.

This is the reality that the author considers in several other texts. Here, we will focus on the reflections made in the article *Jovens andarilhos no curto ciclo do capital* (“Young Wanderers in the Short Cycle of Capital”), published in the journal *Okara*, in 2007; in the text *Geografia dos espaços da miséria* (Geography of Spaces of Poverty), published in 2005; in the text *Estado, Capital e a farsa da expansão do agronegócio* (State, Capital and the Farce of Agribusiness Expansion), published in 2013; and in the

article *Avanço do capital e barbárie societal no campo* (Advance of Capital and Societal Barbarity on the Field), published in 2019. In order to seek an understanding of the forms and contradictions of peasant reproduction in the Brazilian countryside based on these reflections, we take on the challenge in the next topic of this article.

Peasant reproduction in the contradictions of the capital versus labor relationship: labor mobility and the rural-urban relationship

Understanding the process of peasant reproduction in the context of a profound capital crisis requires a significant theoretical and methodological effort. First, because, according to Mészáros (2002), in this context of crisis, capital restructures itself and seeks to expand into all spaces, seeking in these and in the labor relations it implements ways to guarantee its expanded reproduction. Second, because, in view of this, it fosters new processes of expropriation and consolidation of precarious forms of labor, often clashing with the logic of peasant reproduction, which, despite being subject to capital, cannot be fully understood as determined by it, and the maintenance of labor on the land, with all its contradictions, is crucial in this understanding. Third, because in the face of this process of crisis and restructuring, agribusiness is advancing in Brazil – and seeking to appropriate peasant lands – in its most diverse expressions (including towards the territories of indigenous and traditional peoples). Conversely, even with this advance of capital in crisis and in constant search for reproduction, peasantry does not disappear, although it changes significantly. It is on this process that we seek to reflect.

This reality allows us to assess and confirm the theory defended by Mészáros (2002), who highlights the expansive, destructive and absolutely inhumane, not to say irrational, nature of the capital system, as it concentrates socially produced wealth, destroys nature and natural resources, but above all, the productive and creative force of labor, converting everything into a commodity. In this process, we highlight the various forms of resistance and experiences of permanence historically implemented by peasant, indigenous, quilombola, riverside, traditional community movements, etc., which, beyond capital, see the countryside as a different way of reproducing life, based on collective values and the recovery of the human condition of the subject, beyond the pure conversion into things, which produce various other things, leading us to defend the countryside as a locus of class conflict (Souza and Conceição, 2019, p. 62/63).

Reflecting on this reality of capital crisis and its impact on the degradation of work, the increasing dismissal of workers – who succumb to unemployment, in its structural dimension, and the impossibility of them reproducing themselves – through the sale of their labor force, the author goes on to point out the expansion of poverty, as a condition for the increasing production of wealth. When addressing the Geography of the spaces of poverty, Conceição (2005) points to the changes that have taken place within the State and the neoliberal conception adopted by it. This rearrangement, which is essential to guarantee the expanded reproduction of capital, fosters poverty and widespread destitution, not as a condition for not achieving modernity, but exploitation, expropriation, and destitution, as a result and a necessary reality of the accumulation process, in which “the exacerbation of profit leads to the concentration of wealth, spatializing the misery that is produced in the perverse relationship between capital and labor” (Conceição, 2005, p. 167).

Conversely, a number of the Geography area and geographers themselves appear not to see this reality, or do so in a superficial manner, restricted to the apparent, which, at most, leads to a Geography of denunciation. In these readings, the explanation is often restricted to the dimension of absolute space and the apparent. As a result, the urban area is read as an “area of concentrated poverty,” resulting mainly from migration (never from expropriation and labor mobility), while the countryside is seen as the very image of poverty, linked to a traditional and underdeveloped economy. Hence, the big question for Geography and geographers is seen as proposing childish and superficial actions – through planning – to promote such development, forgetting that this misery is produced by and a condition for accumulation. The geographic reading indicated unequal spaces that could be corrected in the face of spatial reorganization, through public policies that are consistent with the discourse of change, via regional and local development.

The geographic reading was limited to the perspective of the Theory of Growth and Development Poles, in the applicability of territorial reorganization, via the social and territorial division of labor. The goal was to guarantee the insertion of the region in the capitalist circuit of the world economy [3]. The Welfare State, called to regulate policies those of the public sphere, became the guardian of planning, of territorial ills, in light of the growing scale of local, national and global poverty. (...) In this sense, the reading of the place outside the place of the totality of global capitalist relations was projected, as well as the immanent possibilities of an accumulative crisis of capital, which deliberately pointed to the super

exploitation of labor in order to guarantee super profit (Conceição, 2005, p. 166).

In what follows, the logic of globalization and the dissemination of the neoliberal prescription, supported by the development of science and technology, lead to a resizing where scientists themselves, among these many geographers, inserted in neoliberal desires, who begin to disseminate the solution to social issues through technology, superficiality and efficiency to promote the accumulation process. Inequalities begin to be read, above all, as differences. History is superimposed on the narratives of individuals. There is a denial of class contradictions and unemployment – entrepreneurship and the precariousness of the working subject are presented as structural conditions. And how does this process take place in the countryside?

In a previous article, we drew attention to the need to think about peasant reproduction in the Brazilian countryside, which is carried out in the dialectical movement of subjection/expropriation/reproduction. Therefore, this logic of reproduction and precariousness of the peasants' conditions is also expressed and reflects this moment of capital crisis and the diffusion of financial capital in the countryside. In this process, the peasantry is also denied as a social class, in the interest of reproducing them as a labor force for capital. In its place, public policies, based on the so-called paradigm of agrarian capitalism, begin to spread the concept of family farmer – denying the entire history of struggle and political confrontation through which this class reproduced itself in the Brazilian countryside. Therefore,

(...) even though we agree with the reading based on Marxist theory, regarding the concrete reality of rural communities struggling for work, a fact that intensifies the relationship between the countryside and the city, we must make some considerations: Despite being partially subject to capital, and made available for wage labor, which produces value, the peasant does not completely lose control over his work, which is reproduced in the spaces of struggle for land, in the small plots of land where peasant production is performed, and brings him closer to work in its concrete condition. In turn, subjection to wage labor also brings with it extremely relevant issues highlighted by the research carried out, insofar as this subjection to abstract labor is often the only way for these people to guarantee work in its concrete condition, that is, work that is practiced in small production units. In other words, at the same time that these subjects reaffirm themselves, they partly deny themselves as peasants. (Souza et. al., 2017, p. 83).

In this same article, we draw attention to the processes of expropriation, partial or total loss of land used for work, as well as the mobility of these peasants between the countryside and the city, in which, when they left the land, they placed their bodies at the disposal of the production of value (Gaudemar, 1977; Conceição, 2005).

Thus, Conceição (2007 and 2013) draws attention to the class role of the State and how it creates, as a political entity of capital (Mészáros, 2002), the conditions for it to advance in the countryside (fostering the tripod that supports it: State-Capital-Labor). This criticism of the State and its subordination to capital comes, among other ways, through public policies – through which it guarantees the appropriation of peasant income and expropriation of land used for work, reproducing poverty, while, at the same time, and under such conditions, financial capital finds the right places to foster its accumulation. When analyzing the actions and interventions of the State in the agrarian space, taking as reference research carried out in states in the Northeast of Brazil, via public policies, she highlights that:

What is questioned is whether these constitute ways of guaranteeing the permanence of production and peasant autonomy or whether they are deepening: labor mobility, income and land concentration, and exclusion. Our studies have brought together research that I have been developing, as well as guidance from researchers from the states of Sergipe, Bahia, Pernambuco, and Alagoas. The studies obtained allow us to signal that the State has taken on the role of manager and promoter, implementing agricultural policies that are inscribed in new forms of capitalist expansion of financialization of the economy, with a strong exercise of power and control of labor in favor of capitalist accumulation. By operating in the interests of capital, the State makes the sociometabolic reproductive order of capital viable by managing the control of antagonisms, no longer under the model of the regulatory Welfare State, but rather based on the fetishistic logic of the market (Conceição, 2013, p. 1).

This advance of capital also brings, in addition to the mobility and precariousness of social relations in the countryside – directly affecting the forms of peasant reproduction – the concentration of land ownership, resulting from the appropriation of their lands, spreads agribusiness and, with the production of commodities, also infers in the reduction of food production to supply the domestic market. In Brazil, this situation has worsened since the 2016 coup – which removed a legitimately elected president from office. A coup by the far right, whose strongest arms includes the representatives of the rentier landowners. In this vein, the Jair Bolsonaro

Administration (2019-2022) invested in the process of criminalizing social movements, directly impacting the peasant struggle for land to work, while the few actions that kept them in the countryside are dismantled. The advance of capital, in particular financial capital,² both then and now, leaves a trail of expropriation, representing new challenges for the peasants to remain on the land to work.

This debate was sparked by Conceição (2007), when analyzing the process of mobility of the workforce of young peasants in the Sertão Sergipano region, a situation that is worsened by the spread of public policies aimed at the complete subjection of peasant production to the market, via financial capital.

Without formal registration, young workers are subject to low wages and remain available to the interests of profit. They become included only to be excluded from the world of work. The loss of labor rights and growing unemployment favor the derealization of the being in the condition of subjects subjected to capital, accepting any type of precarious, partial and temporary contract, submitting themselves to the rationality of capital and the logic of the market. In the situation of itinerants, they become wanderers, going where there is work and returning to the field when it runs out (Conceição, 2007, p. 95).

Even so, it is after a tiring period of work (in which many are subjected to degrading conditions, in places that have inadequate shelter, poor food, and other problems, but which are functional to the accumulation of capital in agribusiness), when they return to the land where they work, it is where they reconnect with the countryside, the way of life, and the possibility of resisting on the land. In this odyssey in search of survival, when the little money they earn runs out, they offer their labor force again, in activities in the field or outside of it, at which time they put their arms and muscles at the disposal of the reproduction of capital. This situation, in turn, is made much worse by the criminalization and the profound attacks on social movements that operate in the countryside.

² Financial capital finds in the State the possibility of alliances for the accumulation process. The State imposes a veiled discourse of submission to capital through credit policies, increasing the expropriation of family production and direct wage labor in the areas of agribusiness. Expropriating thousands of peasant families, intensifying unemployment and precarious work while inscribing slave-labor relations. (Conceição, 2013, p. 3).

Therefore, it is concluded that thinking about the peasant today, in the Brazilian countryside, means to recognize this pair of reproduction/subjection/mobility of labor, as a strategy, albeit perverse, of remaining on the land.

Therefore, when we seek to understand who the peasantry (in particular the Brazilian peasantry) is and how it reproduces itself, in a context of capital crisis and social barbarity, considering key issues such as concentration of the land structure, expansion of commodity land, deforestation, land grabbing, and expansion of financial capital, among other issues, it becomes necessary to consider all the contradictions of this process of peasant expropriation/subjection, but also of resistance and reproduction on the land of work. Based on the readings of Conceição (1991, 2005, 2007, 2013) and other research highlighted in this article, it can be concluded that in order for this peasantry to be able to reproduce itself with a minimum of autonomy, it is necessary to question – and even overcome – this form of capital sociability.

Until these conditions are established, however, it is necessary to re-articulate the fight for land, through the resumption of social movements, occupying land, and questioning private property over it – as a way of exploiting the labor of others, in order to guarantee land for those who work it, as well as raising and addressing the debate with the State, in order to seek policies and actions that truly serve its interests. This process aims to ensure that the State can fulfill its function of collecting public lands, historically appropriated by the landowning classes, making them available to those who need to work on them, in addition to promoting a policy that subsidizes the production of food, which reaches the tables of Brazilians in a healthy and cheaper way. It is unacceptable that, in a country that achieves record harvests in commodity production, over 33 million people succumb to hunger and over half of the Brazilian population lives with food insecurity on a daily basis.³

³ Data from the Pennsan Network, released at the end of 2022. Even considering that these numbers fell in subsequent years*, with the defeat of the Bolsonaro Administration, it is unacceptable that this has become a reality, at some point, in a large rural producing country such as Brazil. *Data from the UN report, from the year 2024, indicated that food insecurity fell by 85% in the country. Available at: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/radio/1/noticia/2024/07/24/relatorio-da-onu-aponta-queda-de-85-na-inseguranca-alimentar-no-brasil#:~:text=REP%C3%93RTER%20JANA%C3%8DNA%20ARA%C3%9AJO..inseguran%C3%A7a%20alimentar%20severa%20no%20Brasil>.

Final remarks

This article sought to present some of the contributions of Conceição's thinking on the countryside and the Brazilian peasantry, at different times. The limits of the text are fully understood, given the various contributions made by the author, which could not be covered in only a few pages, although we do believe that it was possible to bring up a number of key points. In bringing a reflection on the process of recreating a peasantry in the capitalist mode of production, the author was not interested in making a decontextualized reading of the current reality. On the contrary, she sought, above all, the elements to, by thinking of it as a social class, reaffirm the need to reflect on the countryside, and the Brazilian countryside, as an expression of the class struggle, with all its contradictions.

Therefore, it only makes sense to discuss the peasantry if it is considered, in its reproduction, as part of the contradictions in which this mode of production reproduces itself. This subject recreates itself but lives with a daily life marked by all the difficulties in the expansion of capital in the countryside: in the direct or indirect expropriation of land and the means of reproducing life; in the concrete forms of dependence on industrial and financial capital; in the criminalization of the processes of struggle for land, inferred from its condition as a class; or in the condemnation of their way of life, when this begins to represent any obstacle to the production of income and value in the countryside.

It is understood, therefore, that the peasantry reproduces itself with all these contradictions, marked by the struggle for existence, the difficulties of remaining on the land, and the mobility of its workforce (or part of its family) as a condition for remaining in the countryside, among other issues.

In the Brazilian countryside, the reproduction of these social subjects faces, reproduces and subordinates itself to agribusiness – in a contradictory dialectical unity, where the possibility of losing the land is always imminent.

This entire process of redefining relations in the countryside, restructuring the mode of production in crisis, falls on the forms of permanence/subordination/expropriation/resistance of the peasantry. To this end, the action of the State is also crucial, such as the dissemination of public policies and the determination to reproduce this subject without the class content that has always represented its actions. Thus, it is

important to reproduce and subordinate peasant subjects, but not the class role and confrontation that they represent – hence the name of this person as a family farmer. And it is the State, through public policy, that fosters this process.

Thus, the contestatory character disappears, while the criminalization and weakening of social movements fighting for land complete the process of total subjection of the peasantry, in its place as a social class. The resumption of the political struggle of the peasantry – through the articulation of social movements and the occupation of land, to “break down the fences of the latifundia” – becomes urgent. From another standpoint, only a profound critique of the sociability of capital, of confrontation and overcoming it, can elevate the subjects to another condition of existence and reproduction, in the countryside and in the cities.

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