

The peasantry impasse: the agriculture of sitiantes of rural neighborhoods in Limeira, São Paulo

El impase del campesinado: la agricultura de sitiantes de barrios rurales en Limeira, São Paulo



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Abstract: In Brazil, since the 1960s, agriculture has undergone significant changes in the technical sphere, due to the adoption of the productive model of modernization, and in the economic sphere, considering the consolidation of agro-industries. These transformations had an impact on peasant agriculture. This article discusses the peasant social organization and presents an analysis of the amendments related to peasant work and agriculture, notably from sitiantes, locals of the rural neighborhoods named Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, city of the state of São Paulo. Rural neighborhoods comprise peasant territorializations and, to a greater extent, are formed by families with close social ties that preserve a shared life. Memory was conceived as a social form elaborated by these subjects and, thus, oral history was considered as a methodology. Therefore, it was noted that technical changes gradually absorbed, such as mechanization and use of chemicals like inputs and pesticides, affected the work on the field, productivity, and health. In addition, processes were initiated to subordinate the production of these peasants to the agro-industries of cotton, orange juice, and sugarcane respectively. This changes have called into question the peasants' way of

life, driving them to articulate forms of recreation and permanence through public policy.

Keywords: Peasant memory, Rural work, Agricultural modernization, Lifestyle.

Resumen: En Brasil, desde la década de 1960, la agricultura experimentó cambios significativos en la esfera técnica a través de la adopción del modelo productivo de modernización y también en la dimensión económica a partir de la consolidación de las agroindustrias. Estas transformaciones tuvieron un impacto en la agricultura campesina. Este artículo analiza la organización social campesina y presenta un análisis de los cambios en el trabajo campesino y la agricultura, especialmente de sitiantes, tipos de campesinos, en los barrios rurales Córrego Bonito Delgado y Frades en Limeira, ciudad del estado de São Paulo. Los barrios rurales comprenden territorializaciones campesinas y, en gran medida, están formados por familias con estrechos lazos sociales que preservan una vida compartida. La memoria fue concebida como una forma social elaborada por estos sujetos, y, por lo tanto, partimos de la historia oral como metodología. Se observó que las transformaciones técnicas absorbidas gradualmente, como la mecanización y el uso de agroquímicos como insumos y pesticidas, afectaron el trabajo de la tierra, la productividad y la salud. Además, los procesos de subordinación de la producción de estos campesinos fueron desencadenados por las agroindustrias del algodón, del jugo de naranja y de la caña de azúcar. Estas mutaciones han puesto en cuestión el estilo de vida de estos campesinos, lo que los impulsa a articular formas de recreación y permanencia a través de políticas públicas.

Palabras clave: Memoria campesina, Trabajo rural, Modernización de la agricultura, Modo de vida.

Introduction

In this text, we aim to discuss the transformations in peasant agriculture, based on the experience of *sitiantes*, peasants living in the rural neighborhoods called Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades, in the municipality of Limeira, state of São Paulo, Brazil. These changes are related to the incorporation, on the part of this social group, of the technical-productive package of the so-called “green revolution” and its impact on work and agricultural production. Such changes also concern the process of subordinating the production of these locals to the principles of the cotton, orange juice, and sugarcane agro-industries.

The significant changes in the agriculture practices carried out by *sitiantes* were triggered by economic policies that have been restructuring the field in Brazil since the 1960s. Within this context, the Brazilian State started promoting the formation of agro-industries as a means for the articulated development between rural and industrial production. Mechanization, the use of chemical inputs, the use of agrochemicals to control diseases and pests, and the development and adoption of modified seeds have integrated the productive model of this economic policy for the field. Likewise, agro-industries holders of commercial and industrial capital ended up dominating the production in the field, from large landowners to peasants, strengthening a process of subordination (DELGADO, 2001; SHIVA, 2003; OLIVEIRA, 2005).

In order to describe and understand the consequences of these determinants regarding the work and the agricultural practices developed by *sitiantes* of the studied rural neighborhoods, our starting point is taking oral history as our research methodology. This methodology is based on interviews conducted with the intention of recording narratives about the human experience (FREITAS, 2006). Moreover, our research is based on the conception of Halbwachs (1990) concerning memory as a social product, as a way of creating and recreating social references that give meaning to existence.

The modernization time has led to profound changes in the daily work and in the agriculture produced by *sitiantes*, such as the expansion and acceleration of agricultural production, with the replacement of artisanal technical devices by the tractor and other mechanized equipment. Inputs started being industrialized and the use of pesticides became part of the chemical control of production, triggering contamination and poisoning.

In the current context, the demands of the agro-industry started guiding the production of these peasants. In addition to traditional crops for own-consumption in small farms and for economic exchanges, such as corn and rice, the production of cotton, orange, and sugarcane was integrated and developed.

In the experience of peasants involved in this study, cotton and orange crops have been weakened by increasingly high production costs, due to the consumption of agrochemicals, the appearance of diseases and pests, and the devaluation of peasant production. Therefore, we verified that, between *sitiantes* of both neighborhoods, there is a process of leasing part of their land to the sugarcane production sector. Due to productive difficulties, this practice has been recurrent as a way of generating income, although conditioned to the precepts of the sugarcane agro-industry.

However, a group of peasants in these neighborhoods has been organizing, with the creation of an association as a means of permanence and recreation of the peasant agriculture through public policy. The Association of Agricultural Producers of Limeira (from Portuguese, *Associação de Produtores Agrícolas de Limeira* – APAL) is linked to the State Program for Hydrographic Microbasins (*Programa Estadual de Microbacias Hidrográficas* – PEMH), which aims, among its objectives, at promoting agricultural production by small farmers, the environmental preservation, and the appropriate management of natural resources (SÃO PAULO, 2010).

Thus, in this article we present the research according to the following sections: in “Methodological perspective,” we theoretically discuss social memory and oral history as a research methodology and describe the investigation steps. Next, in “The Peasantry and the rural neighborhoods,” we deepen the discussion about the lifestyles of peasants and rural neighborhoods as territorial units. In the “Agriculture and its transformations” section, we describe and analyze the main changes in agricultural work and production, according to the *sitiantes*, based on their experiences as peasants. Finally, we present the main findings in the “Final considerations.”

Methodological perspective

The inherence of memory in human experience places it as a mark of the temporalities experienced in a continuous process of re-elaboration. Halbwachs (1990) conceives memory in its social framework. According to the author, the social nature of the being establishes memory as a collective production by which social groups keep the structures that underlie their existence alive. In this sense, individuals are not attached to a passive role, in this interpretation of memory: they are the maintainers, as subjects and in their own way, of collective memory and the social experience to which they are witnesses.

Thus, memory can be conceived as a signification of subjects before their passage through historical time. In addition, there is the inseparable geographical experience. Narratives that elaborate the memory concomitantly have an epistemological and a political content. In this sense, Freitas (2006) argues that oral statements enable the inclusion of ordinary groups as agents of historical narrative, broaden marginalized and forgotten voices, and make individuals and social groups subjects of their own history.

In the scientific field, the meaning of the past and the narrative plurality are key elements for the memory. The use of memory by human and social sciences should not be guided, according to Freitas (2006), by the creation of a fixed and objectivistic reference of the past. Memory is a subjective mark that each subject creates, recreates, and shares. Narrative is an expression of memory through language, an action that keeps the traces of the past alive. Likewise, Ricoeur (1994) believes that time acquires a human dimension through narrative. Human existence gains temporality through it. It is worth mentioning that the exercise of narrative enables the critical elaboration of the history of the present, that is, of the experienced point of the trajectory.

The hypothesis of this study to rely on oral history as a methodology is a challenge that proposes an interdisciplinary overture. That is, taking narratives as the starting point and an epistemological and political driving force that lead to the understanding of social, economic, and territorial processes, with an emphasis on the social experience of the subjects participating in this investigation. Thus, the narrative is the relational axis between the conceptual bases under discussion.

Therefore, the research and field visits were conducted in the

rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades, located in Limeira, state of São Paulo, Brazil. For the general survey, 15 *sitiantes* were selected, 7 men and 8 women, aged between 47 and 87 years, between January and May 2018. This choice was supported by some criteria such as the close link with the neighborhoods, the experience of working in peasant agriculture, and the participation in the social institutions of rural neighborhoods. For this text, we were limited to the use of excerpts from the total of interviews, in order to provide a general panorama of the addressed theme.

The interviews, conducted at each interviewee's residence, were recorded and filmed. Then, we performed the transcription of such interviews, adapting the oral language to written language (ALBERTI, 2005), and also the transcreation, an interpretative process by which the transcribed interview is textualized (CALDAS, 1999). The subjects present in this study agreed to disclose their identities in the studies resulting from the research.¹

The peasantry and rural neighborhoods

The subjects involved in this scientific research recognize themselves as *sitiantes*. It is a peasant identity derived from a rural property, the name of its small farms, the reproduction locus of the peasant way of life. According to Brandão (1995), *sitiantes* are subjects who work and produce, in their own lands, through the central workforce of the family, in line with the mutual action between families that compose a peasant geographical unit.

The reproduction of peasant life comprises an amalgamated social structure between family, land, and work. The meanings of peasant life are reproduced and recreated due to transgenerational social codes, as well as by the know-how that integrates the practice of agriculture, the circulation, and the exchange of its crops. Work, in peasant life, is constituted as a value of its social order. The peasantry, therefore, is configured as a way of life aimed at its reproduction and not towards accumulation: it is a form of family economy based on agriculture (WOORTMANN, 1997; SHANIN, 2008).

In the state of São Paulo, it is common for peasant communities to manifest themselves organized as rural neighborhoods, forms of geographical units. The studies

conducted by Fernandes (1971) and Queiroz (1973) are presented as initial references to the discussions about the social organization and conformation of rural neighborhoods in São Paulo. The authors highlight their social aspects, such as the social cohesion system present between neighboring peasant families and the notion of belonging developed by the very experience of everyday life.

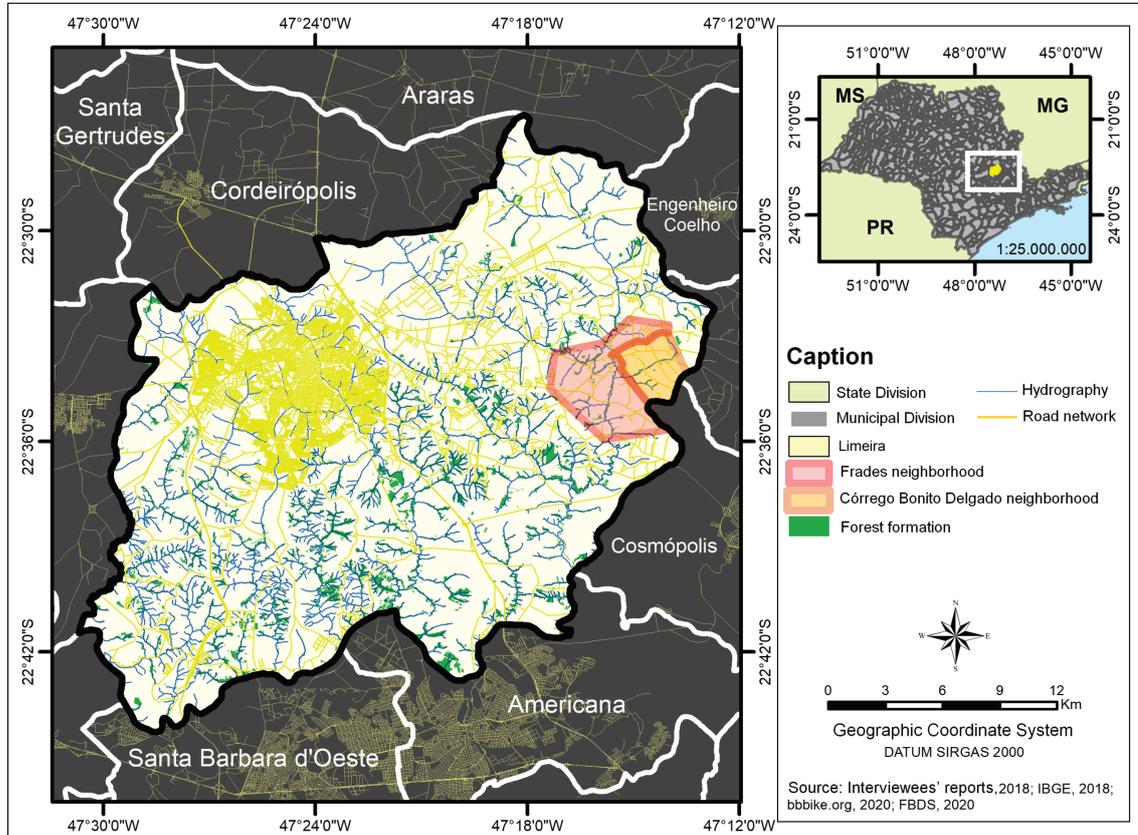
In a geographical perspective, Bombardi (2004) understands rural neighborhoods as territorial units where there is correspondence between families, work, and social life. It is a peasant territorialization that, supported by processes of territorial occupation and social formation, structures a geographical singularity. In practical peasant life, families with close social and consanguineous ties engage via symbolic exchanges of work and gregarious spaces such as the religious community and the rural school. Hence, the process of peasant sociability becomes tangible, giving rural neighborhoods a unique outline.

According to the *sitiantes*, families who settled in the places where, nowadays, are the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades, in Limeira, came from other regions of the state of São Paulo. Our aim was not to exactly locate this process in time, but rather to work with the narratives present in the social life of the peasants. In the following map (Figure 1) we show the location of both neighborhoods. The contours were made based on the reference spots mentioned by the *sitiantes* in the interviews, such as churches, houses, rural properties, roads, and water bodies, consisting of a social cartography articulated between research and empirical knowledge (ALMEIDA, 2018).

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Figure 1 - Location of rural neighborhoods



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Most of the locals involved in this investigation have close blood relations, which is why this study was carried out in both neighborhoods. Thus, one of the peasants formulated narratives about the processes that established the toponymy of the neighborhoods:

This neighborhood was formerly called "Delgado," but it had a different name in the deed. I cannot say what they thought of the river that became known as "Córrego Bonito" [Beautiful Stream]. So, the neighborhood was thus named "Córrego Bonito Delgado," which borders on Artur Nogueira and Cosmópolis. "Delgado" is due to the old headquarters, which had this cliff past my house, and belonged to my great-grandfather, João Delgado. He was the first one who lived here, in this place [...]. The name "Frades" [Friars], from what I have heard, is because, at one time, the place was affected by Yellow Fever. The yellow fever disease,

you know? It is the saddest thing in the world. There was even a place where people who died from it were buried. And there were two friars carrying out a house-to-house mission. These friars died of yellow fever and were buried. (JOSÉ BENEDITO BARBOSA, 2018)

Consanguineous ties between families, the ideal of solidarity, and shared existence are forces that determined the collective order between neighborhoods. In each small farm, in each rural property, families from both neighborhoods engaged in the work on the land, in a different technical context. Agricultural crops were carried out to supply their needs and also constituted items for exchange. This way of life began to change, with the gradual adherence of mechanization and the use of agrochemicals by the peasants, still subordinate to the demands of the agro-industries.

Agriculture and its transformations

From the 1960s onward, changes in technical and productive spheres, as well as the emergence of new agricultural cultivars associated with the demands of agro-industry, caused changes in agriculture (DELGADO, 2001). The Brazilian State articulated this process, by financing the expansion of agro-industry, restructuring agricultural markets, and transposing external technological artifacts as a model of production in the field, centered on mechanization, monoculture, and agrochemicals (ANTONELLO, 2001).

In addition, the demands of agro-industries were characterized by a process of subordination of production in the field. The companies that hold the industrialization and commercialization processes of agricultural products without effective participation in the productive stage in the field started subjugating production. Both capitalist and peasant production models were in force due to the demands of the class that possessed industrial and commercial capital (OLIVEIRA, 2005).

Adherence to this productive paradigm proved to be ambivalent, according to the experience of the studied *sitiantes*. Soil management has accelerated and productivity has expanded. Nevertheless, the excessive use of agrochemicals and the specialization of crops, such as cotton and orange, were harmful to

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their way of life, after an ascent period. As for mechanization, the tractor emerged as a technical savior. Together with other equipment, it allowed the acceleration of soil preparation, planting, and harvesting. It also enabled the expansion of productive areas and broke with the total dependence on nature's cycles for production.

We bought a tractor in 1973. The BCN bank granted a consumer credit, thus facilitating the purchase of agricultural machinery, [to be paid in] five years, with very low interest rates. Everybody bought a new tractor, including us. We bought a Massey 73 and we still have it. Massey Ferguson 73. There were even older models, right? Massey Ferguson exists since the 1950s, but we bought this one and still have it. This made the work easier, it also expanded the areas cultivated by us because my grandmother owned a rural property here, but it was all pasture, how could we manage it? My father had already bought a plot of land too. But then, with the tractor, it made it easier, you know? And also the management itself... The preparation improved, so it made it much easier. There was also the expansion of the orange, then it was even better, let me tell you! We then had resources, it was fantastic, the tractor was the salvation of the crop. (FIRMINO APARECIDO PINTO, 2018)

The productive changes in that context were not uniform, but gradual, as they depended on the availability of financial resources that were often scarce. However, its appropriation took place as an imposed path. The tractor and other agricultural equipment became a symbol of a different time for the peasant work and agriculture. The engine of the tractor started boosting the pace and restructuring the demands of the workforce. Gradually, the engagement of collective physical strength in some stages of the work was being replaced by the use of new agricultural techniques. Weeding was replaced by chemical control of the production, by the use of pesticides, or rather, poisons, according to the peasants' speech.

In the rise of cotton, the locals articulated traditional production processes and mechanisms derived from modernization. "For us to harvest cotton, some used a basquet², others took a big basket like that and had to walk two streets [with it], holding it with both hands while filling it [with cotton]. It was a good time!" (ISABEL RAMONA BARBOSA DELGADO, 2018). Because of its uniqueness, the handling and harvesting of cotton was

manually and collectively carried out. In this cultivation, spraying has become recurrent in the daily work of sitiantes, mainly due to the appearance of diseases and pests.

Spraying was performed in cotton mostly because of the cotton beetle³. The cotton beetle started appearing in the cotton boll⁴ and all of it feel on the field. Then spraying had to be carried out two or three times [a day], so that the cotton beetle would not attack. That was the name of the pest, cotton beetle. It was a little bug, it came straight at the cotton boll, inside the flower, then the flower died and cotton was running out. (JOSÉ BENEDITO BARBOSA, 2018)

According to the peasants, cotton production, which ascended in the 1960s, became unfeasible due to changes in demand, being completely extinguished in the neighborhoods in the late 1980s. The large-scale cultivation of cotton by the sitiantes eventually made this production vulnerable to diseases. The expenditure with inputs and agrochemicals made its continuation unfeasible, a phenomenon associated with the production model aimed at individual intensification of agricultural crops highly dependent on external raw material and that can cause an entire process of ecological deregulation (SHIVA, 2003) . Such phenomenon also took place in citriculture.

The peasants' production of orange concomitantly occurred with the cotton cycle. With the decline of the latter, the orange cultivation was intensified due to the appreciation of the product by the juice agro-industry in the state of São Paulo. Oliveira (2005) considers that the expansion of citriculture took place in the 1970s and 1980s, due to the growing export of orange juice by Brazil, in a context of internationalization of national economic relations.

The orange juice agro-industry in São Paulo, which was the holder of industrial and commercial capital, started demanding the production of raw materials. In such circumstances, sitiantes began to introduce orange production to their lands, directing their workforce to this cultivation. At the beginning, the use of inputs and agrochemicals was irrelevant, even though the orange was already inserted in the "green revolution" logic:

I always tell my kids about the time when I was a child myself, I was ten, fifteen, even when I was twenty years old, you know?

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There was an orange tree from which we could harvest and sell up to thirty orange boxes. All yellowish fruits, with no citrus black spot⁵, there was no disease, it had nothing, there was no spraying, nothing had to be done. The tree was huge, about the size of that tree over there, approximately, but at that time there was very few oranges. (MARGARIDA MILK PAES, 2018)

The locals' production was guided by a specialization process. The centrality of citriculture also promoted changes in the work. Neither the workforce of the *sitiante* family nor the mutual work were enough for the demands of the orange harvest. In this sense, many of them employed an external workforce, usually seasonal workers hired by middlemen. (SILVA, 2008).

The *sitiantes* included in this study have been using the productive model based on the use of agrochemicals for generations. Authors of contemporary studies have demonstrated the harmful effects of these products on human health and the environment. This model disregards the ideal conditions for the integral preservation of health and the environment. All areas of high agricultural production are at risk of intoxication of field workers and environmental contamination (PIGNATI; CALHEIROS; LIMA, 2018).

At the beginning, we used sulfur and the Dithani® fungicide. Then, we started using other pesticides. One of them was called Torque. We had to handle it carefully, but we were kind of... Because nowadays there is a device, but you know how it is, right? No one used it, spraying was carelessly performed. There was no protection, nothing, nothing at all. Oh, it was bad for us. The kids [children] would apply the pesticide and came back with rashes [on their skin]. (ANTÔNIO PAES, 2018)

Citriculture, based on this model, has experienced changes in the market and production in the last decades. Most of the peasants' orange production was directed to the agro-industries of the sector. And these, holders of industrial and commercial capital, submitted peasant production to their interests. Hence, the dynamics of this productive sector started having a direct influence on peasant production:

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The orange crisis is due to the United States, which started producing a lot of orange and then the world crisis... This great country, which used to buy the orange, the juice, the juice was appreciated, right? They do not buy it anymore, period. It is over now, that is it. They think so they can buy, you know? Perhaps it will be better, but what about the pest? Then, we found citrus variegated chlorosis⁶ in the orange, the fruits started rotting, there was rust on the leaves. These pests emerged and it was all over. And there is also this so-called greening⁷, you know? That was the end of orange, nobody could take it. In some places people took good care of the production, but it did not work. Now, this year, it is going to end, because the pesticide does not compensate anymore. You apply the pesticide; then, fifteen days later, the pest comes back again. You cannot control it, right? They killed the plague predator insects, those that devoured the others, that is how it works, am I right? (JOSÉ BENEDITO BARBOSA, 2018)

Thus, according to the peasants' perception, orange production faced crises triggered by productive rearrangements, in a context of globalization of production and consumption. According to Oliveira (2016), in the last few years, North American and Brazilian companies in this sector have been permeated by processes of monopolistic concentration of production and trade, in order to impact the production of orange and to affect the value of production dependent on their trade flows, also considering the worldwide drop in orange juice consumption.

The large agrochemical monopolies also conditioned their production. For Bombardi (2017), such corporations disseminate their products as the only means of maintaining agricultural crops, subordinating agriculture to their interests. The increasingly high expenditure on inputs has made it difficult for *sitiantes* to continue producing orange:

Many people believe that the orange issue is due to greening. Greening happens a lot, and it is very expensive to manage it, you apply pesticide, and then you do it again, and... Diesel oil is even more expensive. There are few people working in the rural property and many of these people do not like applying the pesticide, it is very expensive. (JOÃO PEDRO BARBOSA, 2018)

According to João Pedro, agriculture based on specialized monoculture, in the case of oranges, started struggling with the

emergence of new pests, promoting a progressive expenditure on the application of pesticides. The *sitiantes* also emphasizes the high costs of fuels. Thus, he pinpoints that expenditure on orange production ended up inhibiting its continuity.

Regarding the large volume of pesticides required to maintain this cultivation model, Mander (2002) states that the biological and genetic diversity of soils has been wiped out in the areas of extension of monocultures and by the abandonment of traditional forms of management and diversified production of food, factors that contribute to ecological imbalance and the appearance of mutations of diseases and pests.

Considering all these processes, the peasants' condition was not satisfactory for the effective continuity of peasant agriculture. The economic and productive depreciation caused by the unrestricted adoption of the "green revolution" model and the subordination of their production to the principles of the cotton and orange juice agro-industries led *sitiantes* to lease part of their lands to the sugar-energy sector.

This sector concerns the production of sugarcane and its derivatives such as ethanol, sugar, and bioenergy. Therefore, it is also based on the production of commodities, according to the monoculture model. Currently, large corporations in this sector of agro-industry operate by territorial concentration, either owning or leasing productive lands (OLIVEIRA, 2016). This last mechanism of action has made peasants' lands or part of it available to their interests, according to many reports:

And today, for you to plant an orange seedling it takes, let us suppose, four years so you can start producing. You only have expenditures and not much money, so team prefers leasing for sugarcane, and the old people are tired, you know? And the younger ones do not want to do it, I mean, they do not want to work in the rural property, they want a job, you know? Then, you have to get a job, so you have a thirteenth salary, you have time off, holidays, everything. And there is us, in the rural property... Oh... if you have an orange to apply spray on, even if it is Sunday, you have to do it, whether is a holiday or not, there is always a cow to be taken care of, a pig, this kind of thing. Then, if the person is working, lease eventually occurs. There comes a day when the plant pays you and you do not have to spend diesel oil, you do not have to find a tractor, there is no need. There is no such service, right? His money is guaranteed. (JOÃO PEDRO BARBOSA, 2018)

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New generations have no prospects for continuing working in agriculture, while older generations are succumbing, directing their workforce and land to lease to the sugarcane production sector as an alternative to generate income. The aforementioned report calls into question the relationship between this lack of perspective for peasant agriculture and the increasing centrality of the city, urban-industrial expansion, and paid work. In this perspective, according to Smith (2008), the previously dichotomized field-city relationship under capitalism has been characterized by the subjugation of the field to the industrial technical-productive demands and apparatus.

This industrialization of the field imposes the search for paid work. In some cases, even on the part of land owners, as a way to maintaining an assured income considering the difficulties faced by peasant agriculture or even the insufficiency of resources due to the lease process. Furthermore, this decrease in agriculture ends up broadening the need for obtaining resources, such as food itself, from urban-industrial production, a fact that also contributes to the increase in the costs of maintaining life in the field.

Despite this unfavorable situation, a group of locals in both neighborhoods has been working to create an association as a form of resistance and the possibility of maintaining life in the field. The Association of Agricultural Producers of Limeira (APAL), located in the Frades neighborhood, was created in 2006⁸, together with the then Coordination for Integral Technical Assistance (*Coordenadoria de Assistência Técnica Integral* – CATI), nowadays called Coordination for Sustainable Rural Development (*Coordenadoria de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável* – CDRS). This institutional body in the state of São Paulo supported *sitiantes* for the formation of the association, using resources from the State Program for Hydrographic Microbasins (PEMH).

This program derived from the National Program for Hydrographic Microbasins (*Programa Nacional de Microbacias Hidrográficas* – PNMH). It consists in a public policy that has been developed since the 1980s (NEVES NETO, 2016). The association is anchored in the “Sustainable Rural Development Project – Microbasins II” (*Projeto de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável – Microbacias II*), which is the second phase of the PEMH and aims at promoting family-based agricultural production in rural communities and their access to the consumer market, through the preservation of natural resources (SÃO PAULO, 2010).

Sitiantes who are members of the association see the possibility of

Sitiantes who are members of the association see the possibility of accessing institutional and other regional markets as a result of this initiative. Nevertheless, this group has been facing some problems since its creation. The demands of these envisaged markets fit into the diversified production of food. Decades of orange production, within the monoculture model, has somehow undermined an entire social structure for the production of diverse crops, bringing a conflict to *sitiantes* themselves.

I am not in favor of sugarcane. I would like to produce it, I am still a producer, but some years I spend planting nothing, I do some odd jobs here and there that pay better than small-scale agriculture. The government has been encouraging small producers, it even provides resources, in the case of our association, but how can we start it? Because we got used to the orange, right? The orange took away all our farming skills. I mean, not that much, because we still do it, there are a lot of people doing it. But, in my case, everything was directed to this, to sugarcane. Because my father died, then I had to do it, but I still plant it. I have a piece of land to do so, I plant some cassava, some corn, you know? I have chickens, so I must have corn, I have some cows too. But it has become unfeasible. It is getting worse and worse. I do not know, there must be a major producer out there who has been supplying the market, or making [the production] cheaper, importing something. I know they have been trampling upon the small producer, but we are stubborn, let me tell you! (FIRMINO APARECIDO PINTO, 2018)

This narrative indicates that there are still fractions of the small farms of *sitiantes* in both rural neighborhoods destined for agricultural cultivation, in parallel with the lease process. In the experience previously reported, there is the planting of certain cultivars, such as cassava and corn, which certainly demonstrates the persistence of peasant agriculture and production aimed at reproducing this way of life. These persistence-related foundations, thus, represent the opportunity for the associative organization formed by the peasants.

The conception of the association, on the part of *sitiantes*, is linked to an ideal of resistance concerning their way of life and permanence in their neighborhoods, where their families were raised and where they developed the closest social ties. However, the posed challenges are related to the long period in which the locals specialized in monocultures, suppressing traditional

cultivars and forms of cultivation. We can understand this process as an effect of the production of monoculture of the mind, which, according to Shiva (2003), colonizes agriculture and farmers through the disappearance of local knowledge and practices, at the expense of the dominant models.

Final considerations

The adoption of mechanized productive systems and agrochemical devices promoted rationalized forms of cultivation, the reduction in the use of physical force, and chemical control of peasants' agricultural production in both rural neighborhoods. Still, it allowed for the individualization of production, reducing the forms of cooperation, replacing the technique centered on artisanal practices and intense use of the body as a source of energy for working. In terms of health, lack of information and the indiscriminate use of pesticides have made work vulnerable to poisoning.

The production of cotton and orange, for the agro-industries of the respective sectors, has declined due to the appearance of diseases and pests and, consequently, the increase in the expenditure on external raw materials. The increasing need for the use of pesticides, the high price of fuels for the operation of tractors and use of mechanized technical instruments, and the market dynamics of these agro-industry sectors contributed, according to the peasants' perception, to the adherence to lease fractions of their lands to the sugar-energy sector, as a means of generating income.

The disbelief about the economic feasibility of peasant agriculture and the production difficulties have been directing new generations in the field to look for urban-industrial paid works. However, there are still *sitiantes* who produce other agricultural cultivars, such as cassava and corn, in pieces of their lands, as a way of making peasant agriculture persist. Such persistence and the will to recreate were also observed in the formation of the Association of Agricultural Producers of Limeira, on the part of the peasants. Despite the challenges posed by this initiative, such as relearning diversified agricultural production, this associative organization symbolizes a path of resignification and resistance regarding the peasant way of life.

Notes

1. The interviewees agreed, through an informed consent form, to disclose their identities in publications related to the research "Agriculture and social memory: the work of peasants from the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, State of São Paulo." The processes are in accordance with the guidelines of Plataforma Brasil and can be verified at the website <<http://conselho.saude.gov.br/plataforma-brasil>>, process number 80761817.5.0000.5404.
2. Basket made of bamboo.
3. Cotton beetle: a type of beetle.
4. Fruit of cotton.
5. Disease caused by the *Phyllosticta citricarpa* fungus.
6. Citrus Variegated Chlorosis: disease caused by the *Xylella fastidiosa* bacterium.
7. Disease caused by the *Candidatus Liberibacter* bacterium.
8. Data on the foundation of the Association of Agricultural Producers of Limeira and on its legal registration are available from the following website: <https://www.econodata.com.br/listaempresas/saopaulo/limeira/a/07876835000159associacao-dos-produtores-agricolas-de-limeira-apal>

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Antônio Paes – Statement [Feb. 2018] Interviewer: Tiago Evandro Pinto. Limeira, SP, 2018. 1 digital voice recorder and 1 video camera. Interview granted in the Frades neighborhood to the Research Project “Agriculture and social memory: the work of peasants from the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, State of São Paulo.”

Firmino Aparecido Pinto – Statement [May 2018] Interviewer: Tiago Evandro Pinto. Limeira, SP, 2018. 1 digital voice recorder and 1 video camera. Interview granted in the Córrego Bonito Delgado neighborhood to the Research Project “Agriculture and social memory: the work of peasants from the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, State of São Paulo.”

Isabel Ramona Barbosa Delgado – Statement [Jan. 2018] Interviewer: Tiago Evandro Pinto. Limeira, SP, 2018. 1 digital voice recorder and 1 video camera. Interview granted in the Frades neighborhood to the Research Project “Agriculture and social memory: the work of peasants from the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, State of São Paulo.”

João Pedro Barbosa – Statement [Apr. 2018] Interviewer: Tiago Evandro Pinto. Limeira, SP, 2018. 1 digital voice recorder and 1 video camera. Interview granted in the Frades neighborhood to the Research Project “Agriculture and social memory: the work of peasants from the rural neighborhoods Córrego Bonito Delgado and Frades in Limeira, State of São Paulo.”

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