

Enredos, memórias e trajetórias nos estudos rurais: Entrevista com Marilda Aparecida de Menezes

Plots, memories and trajectories in rural studies: Interview with Marilda Aparecida de Menezes

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The proposal of this dossier, which is part of volume 30 (2025) of the *Revista de História Regional* (Regional History Journal), is to reflect upon the multiple dimensions of the so-called “rural world” in its historical and social expressions. Therefore, from diverse theoretical and methodological focuses, we provide the readers with an inspiring dialogue that occurred in late 2024 in a videoconference with Marilda Aparecida de Menezes. She is recognized as one of the main references in studies on the Brazilian rural environment, her trajectory is deeply marked by the investigation of relationships between peasantry, family, work, and migrations – themes that, more than academic objects, are in the core of her intellectual and political commitment.

Marilda Menezes’ academic education is not separated from her personal life. She was born in 1956 in the ABC Paulista region – an urban-industrial center known for its intense manufacturing sector and the relevance of union movements in the 1970s and 1980s –, she was brought up in an environment of remarkable social transformations, mainly due to the arrival of northeastern migrants. Her father was a shoemaker, who had migrated seeking opportunities, and her mother was from São Paulo. Marilda was shaped by the crossing of distinct worlds, namely, the urban industrial and the northeastern rural, whose presence was constant around her.

When she was still an adolescent, she entered the formal job market, reconciling her studies and a job in a context of strong political repression.

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In the 1970s, she started the social sciences undergraduate course at the Faculdade de Filosofia e Letras da Fundação Santo André (Philosophy and Language College of Santo Andre Foundation), where she already showed interest in themes linked to social inequalities. Her first experience in research occurred in an adult literacy project in the periphery of Santo André, where the students were mostly migrants coming from the *Sertão* of Paraíba. From then on, her interest in understanding the migration meanings increased greatly.

Such path led her to the Rural Sociology Master's Program of the Federal University of Paraíba, where she resumed her contact with some families she had met in São Paulo. With analytical and ethical sensitiveness, she developed research that shed light on the links between spatial displacements, family relationships, and workforce reproduction, in an attempt to draw attention to the perspective of those involved. Her investigative posture, aligned with interpretivist currents rejects simplifying dualisms and is based on a dialectical reading of the social action.¹

In addition to her solid academic trajectory, Marilda's action was also relevant in spaces dedicated to the defense of migrants' rights. She worked at the Centro de Estudos Migratórios (Center of Migratory Studies) and took part in the creation of the Serviço Pastoral dos Migrantes (Migrants' Pastoral Service), linked to the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (National Conference of Bishops of Brazil), where she occupied positions of leadership and the editorial organization. Such experiences contributed to the development of her doctoral research, carried out at Manchester University, which supported by a rigorous empirical and theoretical background, investigated the types of everyday resistance by temporary rural workers involved in the harvest of sugar cane in the northeastern *Zona da Mata*².

Her thesis, later adapted and published, became reference to the critical analysis of those subjects' life and work conditions, thus opposing the literature that presented them as merely passive beings suffering exploitation. By drawing attention to their everyday resistance, she proposed new ways of understanding the peasants' agency in adverse contexts.

¹ MENEZES, Marilda Aparecida de. *Da Paraíba pra São Paulo e de São Paulo pra Paraíba: migração, família e reprodução da força de trabalho*. Dissertation (Rural Sociology Master's Program), João Pessoa: Universidade Federal da Paraíba - UFPB, 1985.

² MENEZES, Marilda Aparecida de. *Peasant-migrant workers: social networks and practices of resistance*. Thesis (Social Sciences Doctoral Program). Manchester: University of Manchester, 1997.

Retired professor of the Federal University of Campina Grande, Marilda Menezes remains active in teaching and research, working in the graduate programs of the Federal University of ABC and the State University of Campinas. Her trajectory expresses literally the interconnections between life, critical reflection, and commitment with those that are historically silenced.

The interview presented in this article keeps the spontaneous pace of a conversation and offers the reader an intellectual trajectory crossed by memory, critique, and the committed listening of subjects in the Brazilian rural area. Unlike her previous experiences, in which she is the one holding the recording device and asking questions, in this article she is the interviewee. The report we present here is not different from the interviews collected by the social scientist over the four decades of research with migrant-peasants, settlers, northeastern men and women of different ages and generations. Her interview invites us to dive into her intellectual trajectory and become involved in the understanding of the marks of her sensitivity. There we can see more than her kindness and sensitive look of her analyses, her ethical and political commitment.

The interview presented here, occurred in the afternoon of November 13, 2024, online, using the platform Google Meet. Marilda was in João Pessoa, Paraíba, while I was in Cândido de Abreu, Paraná. The singing of the cicadas on the jaboticaba tree next to my window sometimes made this interview almost inaudible. First, the interview focuses on understanding better her academic trajectory, her dedication to migration studies, and how she entered this field at a time, in the 1980s, when the emphasis on macrostructures guided them.

Her report allows us to understand a series of tensions, on the one hand, the marks of Marxism and the migration macrostructural perspective reference that appeared in her initial works, such as her dissertation, derived from her education and reading in the 1980s. On the other hand, in a very shy way, her first steps towards analyses that also looked into subjectivity, perceptions, and the several dimensions of social and cultural aspects that are also part of the individuals' trajectories.

Next, focusing on this dossier's proposal, we asked Menezes about her research trajectory and debates about the "rural world" and how she lived, analyzed and debated its transformations and relationships in her studies on migrations. At this point, the researcher historicizes her rich academic production, giving it historical and sociological meaning, and presenting the central themes addressed by her and other colleagues, the networks she

was and is still inserted in, and she details her research agenda for over four decades.

Still focusing on the rural theme, Menezes tells us how she used the theoretical reference by the anthropologist and political scientist James C. Scott, mainly his notion of everyday resistance, to reflect upon the strategies developed by migrant rural workers either in productive or in reproductive spaces. The interviewee takes into account the studies of that author, using his notion not as a general theory of resistance, but rather as an interpretation of types of resistance, that is, the notion can only be theorized in its specificity, in the observation of what happens every day, regarding the most specific aspects of social relationships.

Finally, Menezes ends the interview speaking briefly about her recent studies and future projects. The researcher is still dedicated to migration studies, her projects/research, in addition to addressing the memory theme and following trajectories, she has revisited spaces and met people she had not seen for a while.

We thank Marilda Menezes for sharing and inspiring us with her trajectory.

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Interview

Bruno César Pereira (BCP): Good afternoon, Professor Menezes. First, I would like to thank you for having accepted our invitation. It is always a pleasure and a learning opportunity listening to you.

Marilda Aparecida de Menezes (MAM): Good afternoon, Bruno. I thank you for the invitation.

BCP: Professor Menezes, your academic trajectory is marked by your dedication to migration studies. Professor Moraes Silva³, your colleague and friend, quoting Professor Heleieth Saffioti, said: “we do not choose the object, the object chooses us”, for believing that these two things go together, I mean, the object chooses us as much as we choose the object⁴. In your case, how did you enter this field of studies, that is, the choice for the migration theme?

³ Maria Aparecida de Moraes Silva, sociologist, Permanent Professor in the Sociology Graduate Program of the Federal University of São Carlos.

⁴ Ver: PEREIRA, Bruno César. Na contramão do memoricídio: ‘Vozes e Memórias’ de vidas talhadas com as mãos: entrevista com Maria Aparecida de Moraes Silva. *Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 32 n. 1, 2024.

MAM: Well, this is an excellent motto, because, in fact, I've talked about it sometimes, I'm the daughter of a man from Sergipe, my father left Sergipe in the early 1950s. With his family, they went to Southern Bahia, in Itabuna, and two of his sisters stayed there, since they got married in that city. I don't know how long he and his parents lived there. Sometime later, still in 1950, he decided to go alone to Rio de Janeiro, and sometime later, his mother, father and the younger siblings, a boy and girl, migrated to São Paulo. They met my father in Rio de Janeiro. He used to tell a story, which we could never confirm whether it was real, or he had imagined it. He used to say that he met his family through the radio news, he was kind of lost from them. My mother is from the interior of São Paulo. Well, since I'm the daughter of a man from Sergipe, I was brought up in a neighborhood with northeastern features in the region of ABC paulista⁵, in São Caetano do Sul. In that neighborhood, the interactions I had throughout my childhood, the schools I attended, were highly marked by people who had come from the northeast of the country. Only a long time later I understood it, when I started to dedicate my studies to migration. In fact, I don't know exactly what marked more my involvement with the migration theme, whether it was the real-life experiences that I had in that environment of northeastern migrants, or whether it was my family origin, but I believe that what marked me decisively was an experiment I took part in the late 1970s, soon after I graduated, it involved the use of the adults' literacy method developed by Paulo Freire. There was a group of friends involved in the context of that movement in the late 1970s in the ABC, in the reorganization of the union movement, reorganization of dweller's movements, the so-called Society of the Friends of the Neighborhood, Mothers' clubs, and the beginning of the formation of the Worker's Party (PT in Brazil), which came true in 1980-1981. I took part in the adults' literacy movement in 1979, I had already finished my undergraduate course in 1978, and the individuals we worked literacy with, or better, using Freire's terms, the group with which we carried out the literacy experiment lived on the banks of a small river, in extreme vulnerability. They were migrants coming basically from three municipalities of the Alto Sertão of Paraíba. I got really involved with them, the course organization was preceded by a quite intense dialogue with the individuals, to know their lexicon, life conditions, and their profession. Then, we would get there with a packet to implement the course, which in fact was based on and inspired by Paulo Freire's proposal. It was

⁵ Metropolitan region of the state of São Paulo, Brazil, known as ABC Paulista, for grouping three large municipalities, namely, Santo André, São Bernardo and São Caetano do Sul.

a literacy experiment linked to their everyday life, listening to and sharing their living in that community. Soon after, I had the opportunity to come to Paraíba, then I got highly motivated to study the Northeast-São Paulo migration, linked to that interest in understanding my own history, which was reawakened and intensified by the interactions with that group of migrants. As a coincidence, just by chance, my partner, who was my boyfriend at the time got a job in Campina Grande, he came here to teach. Therefore, soon after that experiment with the literacy course, I decided to move to Paraíba too. I applied for the master's program, and what moved me most at the time was to develop research starting with that group.

Then, Heleieth's motto is very correct, and it is also quite close to Wright Mills's perspective, when she talks about the inseparability of one's life and production, life and work, life and research object, in that marvelous text that is on the appendix of *The Sociological Imagination*, "On intellectual craftsmanship"⁶. Wright Mills explains that when referring to social sciences, the objects choose us, that is, we are crossed by those themes, and we pick them. In our themes and object research, we are always seeking to understand ourselves. I feel a bit strange when, for example, we see researchers defining research objects that integrate their own projects, but that have no relationship with their life trajectories, their family, political or other belongings. I ask myself how do they build up meanings in research focusing on themes that do not cross their own life stories? I sometimes think 'oh gosh, I never leave this theme', I put it aside for a while and then come back, leave it and come back, it seems there is always something to be found out, things to research. For example, since I entered UFABC focusing on domestic migration, are realized that there are few students and colleagues dedicating their studies to this theme, but the majority of studies is on international migration and the refugee theme. However, these are social groups that keep close proximity with domestic groups that we study in Brazil. So, I kind of get surprised... I say, someday I will change my research theme [giggling], but I don't think so, I always go and come back [giggling]. It is something I cannot get distanced from, then I think it is something that, in fact, is strongly inserted in me. Both Heleieth with her idea, and Wright Mills, for me, are quite assertive, and the theme of migrations, mainly northeastern ones, picked me and has marked my whole research trajectory.

⁶ MILLS, Wright. "Do artesanato intelectual". In: MILLS, Wright. *Imaginação Sociológica*. Trad. Waltensir Dutra. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores. p. 211-244.

BCP: Taking this statement as a starting point, which emphasizes that migrations became the great theme of your research agenda, it seems interesting to highlight that your work, without disregarding the importance of statistical data and structural migration contexts, shows a sensitive look at trajectories and subjectivities. Therefore, I would like you to talk briefly about how your entrance into the migration study field occurred at that time, the 1980s, when the macrostructure emphasis guided migration studies?

MAM: This is a very good question. The macrostructural perspective was the mainstream of the research on the theme in the 1980s. Including my education at the master's course level in the Rural Sociology Master's Program was strongly marked by macrostructural perspectives and Marxism. Marxism not according to Thompson's view, which I incorporated in the 1990s. On the one hand, it was excellent in my qualification, because at that time it took us three years to finish the master's course. Then, we had practically one year and a half to complete the subjects, which was very good, because that was a type of education that was invaluable throughout my whole life, and it was extremely important for me. For example, in the master's course, we had subjects that read the whole *Capital*, all books, all volumes. There were also other Marxist authors such as Kautsky, Lenin, Stalin, and some would teach about Gramsci, which was also a renovation in terms of the more orthodox Marxism. In addition, that period was also marked by a discussion of Rural Sociology, Agrarian Studies, and the Marxist Macrostructural perspective. What I feel that was highly decisive to go beyond the macrostructural perspective, although it is still strongly noticeable in my dissertation⁷, was the ethnographic research, the interviews I carried out with male and female family farmers in the *Sertão* of Paraíba and the *ABC Paulista*. Today I even reviewed some parts of the dissertation, I have not read it for a while, that is, forty years, since I presented it in 1985, it is almost forty years [giggling], I separated some excerpts in which I saw the macrostructural influence. Of course, I was highly aware of that, our theoretical and methodological background is marked by the time when we write, so, when reviewing some ideas, I saw how strong the presence of the macrostructural perspective was, but at the same time, I identified already in the dissertation introduction the existing tension, which resulted from the power and richness of the things people told me in both the interviews and informal conversations. Then, for

⁷ MENEZES, Marilda Aparecida de. *Da Paraíba pra São Paulo e de São Paulo pra Paraíba: migração, família e reprodução da força de trabalho*. Dissertation (Rural Sociology Master's Program), João Pessoa: Universidade Federal da Paraíba - UFPB, 1985.

example, I would like to highlight here a piece of the introduction where the macrostructural mark was really strong, where it reads: 'migration is not a phenomenon determined by individual reasons and wishes, it is rather a social process determined by life and work conditions in the original place and the destination', this short statement shows me that I was reaffirming the macrostructural perspective, and I was afraid of saying that individual reasons also mattered. Another idea that was quite strong there was the 'capitalism development', as in the statement: "the concrete life and work conditions were determined by capitalism development". I would not say that today, because capitalism development is a generalized and abstract view, what is capitalism development? Today, I can say concretely how it occurs, what is happening locally, etc. In fact, my text carried the marks and influences of the education I had been exposed to when studying the subjects, and when reading what was current at the time. At the same time, those families' reports had their relevance, but I wrote: 'The families' reports are a fragmented and impartial representation of reality', I feel surprised by that, I think: "Gosh, structural references made it impossible for me to understand the value of those reports". However, I was attentive and sensitive to the importance of the individuals' reports in the analytical construction. Thus, in the dissertation text, after that statement, I wrote: "when the reports are presented in articulation with the theoretical reference and the history of the regions of study, they become a type of expression of the relevant social process, in this articulation, I realized how ideological aspects such as the workers' views, expectations and dreams are intertwined with economic and social aspects, so that the resulting combination allows the understanding of the workers' submission to the capital determination". Can you see? There is a tension there, on the one hand, I was attentive, I was sensitive to notice people, how they elaborated their life and work conditions, but, on the other hand the *capital determination* idea was also speaking quite loudly. I never published the dissertation, many times I looked at it and thought: should I publish it or not? [giggling] It is very hard, publishing it the way it is... because I changed my theoretical-methodological perspective a lot, I also thought about including some footnotes or even developing a work analyzing my own text, showing the ambivalences, the references that were in tension, but, anyway, what I mean is: there was certain predominance of the macrostructural reference.

But what saved me at that point, in the 1980s, was that I could develop very thorough research, with long field time. There was no articulated oral history methodology as we have today regarding forums and debates. Not even was

the term 'oral history methodology' used then, but, when reviewing the way I developed the research, I was already inclined with certain sensitivity to the field and this helped me a lot. My field research took time, with lots of trips to the *Sertão* of Paraíba and the *ABC paulista*. I had 65 hours of recordings, I transcribed the interviews, so there was no way you would not be touched, feel those narratives, they allowed me to distance myself and in a certain way question the macrostructural perspective.

However, in the period between 1980 and 1985, when I developed the research, there was not an oral history theoretical background, which promoted an epistemological reflection on the meanings of the narratives, or the interview process, the social interaction between researchers and their interlocutors. I think that the sensitivity of the attentive listening guided my interactions with those men and women. Since that research in the 1980s, I fell in love with field work and interviews with women and men, farmers and factory workers. I have already explained it in the introduction of a book⁸. It is also important to point out that it was research with field workers in a period, the 1980s, when they were extremely open to those coming from the outside, those who came from universities, I met a context where those people were highly welcoming and generous.

Now, talking about it, I would say that it was not only the way of researching, the research methodology, but the meeting, being with those people, the interaction, the trust, and the dialogue. Clearly, there were social class and gender differences, many were men, but even so, there was a kind of interaction that favored the listening and the effort to understand their perceptions and ways of thinking. Now we call it subjectivities, but at that time we used more the notions of perceptions and representations. Then, I would say that this was our long and thorough research methodology, with a lot of comings and goings, in a slow construction in interaction with those men and women, such interaction was woven in affection, trust, and respect that enabled me to question the macrostructural influence and visualize, that is, realize where individuals are placed, the ways men and women, in Thompson's terms, deal with such objective-structural conditions. But this perspective is a later elaboration, because in the 1980s I had no access to perspectives such as Thompson's. The reference of that time was really focused, as I said before,

⁸ Menezes, Marilda Aparecida de & Santos Junior, Jaime. *Tecendo vidas e sonhos. História oral de agricultores (as) do Sertão Paraibano e Trabalhadores (as) do ABC Paulista*. São Paulo: Paco Editorial, Campinas Grande: Ed.UEPB, 2023.

on the perspective of the capitalism movement in the field, and I, also, was influenced by the economic anthropology, mainly by Claude Meillassoux in a book called *Mujeres, graneros y capitales*⁹, (women, barns, and capital) I don't know if it was translated into Portuguese, I read from the Spanish version, it is a book where he addresses the conditions of work force reproduction in domestic societies. From that book, he develops a perspective in which migration can be explained as displacement of areas where the workforce is produced for the capitalism, then these areas are practically understood as reproducers of workforce. This is another term that appears quite often in my work in the 1980s and which I question later, because it is complicated to treat migration territories as reproducers of workforce, because people are not only workforce, they have a history that is much broader and more diverse than mere workforce. I don't want to further this discussion here, what I mean is that we can use the notion of workforce to talk about the workforce sale, but people are not only that, their lives, their way of thinking, their religious practices, ways of socializing and education, their organization in families, all that is not reduced to the workforce notion. There are many other social and cultural dimensions shaping individuals, both women and men.

I think it's something like that, how these perspectives and subjectivities, the perceptions, appear in my work from the beginning, although (giggling) always in tension, very timidly, due to the force of the macrostructural perspective.

Another thing that I would like to comment, thinking about your question that highlights my approach to trajectories, we had a board at the *Encontro Nacional da Associação Brasileira dos Estudos de Trabalho* (National Meeting of the Brazilian Association for Work Studies), here in João Pessoa, and the proposal of that board was to think the trajectory notion in our studies, I prepared a report showing exactly that I did not use the trajectory notion in the 1980s it didn't even circulate practically as a notion in our academic environment. But the way I researched, chasing the several migrations, their comings and goings and studying people's lives throughout their work trajectories, both the migration paths, and their various work experiences, both in the field and in the city, was in a certain way a study of trajectories. However, we did not use that notion, it was more a research practice that understood that origin and destination connections are inseparable. One thing that I noticed

⁹ Meillassoux, Claude. *Mujeres, graneros y capitales*. Trad. Ricardo Pozas Horcasitas & Oscar del Barco. Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 1999.

is that there was no linearity, for example, in terms of work trajectory, in the 1980s, the individual was a resident or leaseholder, became an assistant in civil construction, entered the industry, was dismissed, became unemployed, bought a bar, went back to industry, left again, and went back to the field, that is, there was no linearity. People's lives are not a linear sequence in which individuals move from one phase to another without returning, in fact, there are displacements in these trajectories. I was reflecting on the notion of trajectory, according to Pierre Bourdieu, but somehow I ended up studying migration itineraries and work trajectories. This was an idea that built up in the research. Currently, I want to think more about the trajectory notion and its applications in research.

BCP: Taking into account this dossier's central theme, "*Rural world, diverse lives*", and, in dialogue with your intellectual trajectory in the Sociology field, I would like to ask you to say something about your research trajectory and debates on the rural world, mainly with rural workers.

MAM: An issue that has permeated my research trajectory and since I was always dedicated to studies on farmers, migrating peasants, who go to cities or move in the field according to the cycle of crops, is that by studying this category of workers, I am also dialoguing with the great debates that were and are still held on the agrarian issue in Brazil and the fate of peasantry. I have not promoted a theoretical debate on proletarianization or peasantry in the 1980s, I provoked this debate later, in the 1990s. In my doctoral thesis, the research showed that there is no linear path from the peasant to the proletarian. There was this strong idea in the migration studies of the 1970s, which discussed rural exodus, that is, a movement of definite abandonment of the field and moving into cities, which provoked emptying of rural spaces and growth of cities and was an irreversible process.

The research I have developed using the methodology of following the trajectory of women and men is also multi-situated, in several territories, and has shown us that this process is much more complex. Therefore, I have challenged this idea of transition from peasant into proletarian as a linear process. Even if I have not entered in a direct debate with the theorists that have discussed this issue, neither the foreigners such as Marx, Kautsky, Lenin and others, nor the contemporary or Brazilian ones such as Shanin, Ianni, Caio Prado Jr., my research, in a certain way, has questioned views that defend this linear, irreversible, and definitive transition. Undoubtedly, within this group of workers, there is one part that become paid employees, but, even

so, at a certain point in their lives they might go back to the field and work the land, some kind of plant, a vegetable garden, a survival means. I've seen several cases of workers from the metallurgical industry of the *ABC paulista* who retired and went back to their small properties here in the *Sertão* of Paraíba. This can be verified when following their trajectories for a long time, not limited by some time frame.

This is a first thesis that we shared, not only me, I am very close to the view of researchers who dedicated their work to research in northeastern Brazil, such as Afrânio Garcia Jr., Klaas Woortmann, Ellen Woortmann, and professor Maria Aparecida de Moraes, whose research showed that migrations not always mean proletarianization of peasants, but many times represent possibilities, it is a strategy of peasantry reproduction. For example, Afrânio's book, *O Sul: caminho do roçado*¹⁰ (*The South: the path to cultivated land*), where this is brilliantly analyzed. Afrânio developed his research in the late 1980s at the *Brejo Paraibano*. In my research in the 1990s, which resulted in the book *Redes e Enredos nas trilhas dos migrantes*¹¹ (*Networks and Plots in the migrants' tracks*), I have a direct dialogue with Afrânio and reach conclusions very close to his, and those by Parry Scott, anthropologist for the Federal University of Pernambuco, who also showed how migration can be a peasantry reproduction strategy. So, the first point that I think crosses our research is that it dialogues with key themes in agrarian reform, discussion on peasantry and rural workers.

We could also talk about other crossings, for example, we could address migrants' experiences and possibilities of reconverting such trajectories via rural settlements, the land fight experiences, camps and land achievements along with the settlers' conditions. We have been following a transformation that occurred in *Brejo Paraibano*, where everybody worked for the Santa Maria plant, which owned around four thousand hectares of sugar cane and employed from four hundred to five hundred locals. The plant went bankrupt in the early 1990s, they were all paid employees and when the plant closed they started a movement for the workers' rights and, later on, it became an expropriation fight and their right to remain on that land, the right to have a piece of land for every family, and finally, they managed to achieve that. They were workers who depended on the salary they received; thus, they were

¹⁰ GARCIA JR., Afrânio Raul. *O Sul: caminho da roçado - estratégias de reprodução camponesa e transformação social*. São Paulo: Marco Zero, 1989.

¹¹ MENEZES, Marilda Aparecida de. *Redes e Enredos nas Trilhas dos Migrantes: um estudo de famílias de camponeses-migrantes*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará/João Pessoa: Ed. UFPB, 2002.

subject to the plant owner, suddenly, they transformed their own condition, they gained autonomy in their own terms, that is, they were freed from that subjection and earned their own piece of land.

In addition, for example, we can see countless situations of camp members who became settlers, they were workers by the side of the street in the periphery of cities, who had a trajectory of migrations and displacements. If we look into it in terms of generations, many times, those are individuals who have experienced migration with their parents, they are always in movement, either due to lack of employment or because there is no land to work on, and many are already in an urban condition, in the peripheries, and then go back to the field. In São Paulo, there is a series of experiences of settlers who returned to the field after having worked for some time in cities and lived in the periphery of cities. This also shows, for instance, how this process is not irreversible, from the point of view of both the strategies built up by workers and small farmers, and that of political struggles, social movements, and fights for land or rights. I think this is very important, then, I call attention to those achievements that are permeated by strategies of men and women, families, or are mediated and articulated in social movements. Both experiences reestablish a way of life that is linked to the land. However, this does not mean that we are always talking about a possibility of '*recampesinização*', that is strengthening and reviving peasant agriculture in full, of course, there is no doubt about paid work and proletarianization, there are numbers showing that clearly, but I want to show that this process is more complex. There are also drawbacks, different routes, and other displacements in terms of trajectory, which question that thesis of definitive proletarianization.

Thinking about rural world themes, I have been thinking, for example, over four decades, from the 1980s onwards, I am talking from my reference, which is Paraíba, migration studies were very few, at that time, I was the only one, other people were looking into rural unionism and land conflicts. In São Paulo, we already saw a group of female researchers, namely, Maria Aparecida de Moraes, Maria Conceição D'Incão, Vera Botta Ferrante, among others, who focused on the sugar cane workers' issues. In the 1990s, with social struggles, camps, fight for land, and the creation of settlements, we saw an explosion of studies focusing on the agrarian reform, camps, and settlements, and this was a strong benchmark at that time. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the government changes, we saw a huge increase in research focusing on public policies and territory policies. Regarding public policies, I would like

to call attention to the importance of *Bolsa Família* (a family support program created by the federal government) and Rural Retirement, as two fundamental public policies that guaranteed income to families living in the rural area, for example, in *Alto Sertão*, which I have followed for forty years. There was a big and noticeable change when compared to the early 1980s and what we see currently. When I investigated the 1980-1984 period, there was a serious drought, and what kind of public policy was there? There was de *Frente de Emergência* (Emergency front), which employed men to build roads, dams in private properties, do some rebuilding in the municipality, but the salary was much lower than the minimum wage and it was very hard to manage to apply for it, because the candidates were screened by the local politics controllers, like councilmen, mayors, etc.. Then, many would be rejected, my research recorded lots of reports about it. That is what I saw, I saw poverty in the 1980s during the drought there was poverty and famine, precisely. I arrived at people's homes and saw on top of a wooden stove, a pan filled up with transparent water and just some beans inside, and that is what they had for lunch. This changed completely after the public policies, the rural workers' achievement of the right to retire, and with the *Bolsa Família*. Then, today we live another reality in the rural area of Paraíba, where there is poverty, but I cannot say that famine can be found so easily now, because those policies, in fact, have the fundamental effect of alleviating the basic needs of those families. Well, then in the 2000s, there was this boom in public policies and an increase in the research on these issues which continues until today.

BCP: It is interesting how your trajectory and research agenda, in a way, followed the studies and themes related to the rural world of that time.

MAM: Yes, but it is partial. There were other themes that permeated Rural Social Sciences in the last four decades. There are female and male researchers that already did this register of the history of research themes. A good way of furthering this understanding would be an analysis of journals such as *Raízes* (Roots), *Sociedade e Agricultura* (Society and Agriculture), *Agrária* (Agrarian) and *Cadernos CERU* (CERU notes) and I am quite sure that there are very good works telling the history of those themes. I did a lot of that in my trajectory. Apart from the migration studies that are intertwined with studies on the rural theme, I would like to emphasize that I dedicated several years to studying settlements in Paraíba, with studies coordinated by professor Moacir Palmeira and other professors in the Development, Agriculture and Society Social Sciences Graduate Program, one study on the impacts of settlements, which

was developed worldwide. We covered several regions of Paraíba, Pernambuco and Alagoas. The Brejo research, which I referred to as the plant area that was expropriated after bankruptcy. Another research group that is very precious to me, in terms of the discussion on trajectories which are also linked to rural life, refers to memory research, childhood memories, field women's memories, which I have not published much of, I need to publish more. Those are very rich narratives of rural women, who are between seventy and ninety years old now. This is a study developed in the 2000s, aligned with the work on memories as register of experience, register of the way they think their life and work ways, but not as a register of experience, because the focus is on memory, it is a point of view, an interpretation of the past, it is the way people narrate their life experiences in the past from the present. It is not exactly about the past, but rather about the way they remember and narrate it, this is something that has called my attention lately, and for some years. This is basically what I have dedicated my work to recently.

BCP: A point that draws attention in your studies is the highlight of small everyday resistance strategies by rural workers. Your discussions are based on James C. Scott's consideration, however, not exactly as a general theory of resistance, but rather as an interpretation of forms of resistance, that is, the notion of resistance can only be theorized in its specificity, when observing what happens every day, in the most specific aspects of social relationships. Could you please, say something about how this reference is used, mainly in your studies with rural workers?

MAM: My first access to Scott's work was when I was developing the doctoral program, I always say that I met Scott at the *John Rylands University Library*, the library located in the Manchester University. It had a wonderful search system. Even nowadays we don't have such a good system here. You would enter keywords such as resistance, union organization, sugar cane workers, for example, and you would get two hundred, three hundred, our four hundred references immediately. If you inserted one keyword, you'd get all that, everything was catalogued, articles, books, and if there was such material in India but not in the library, they would order it, because at the time, the material was not digital, I did the doctorate course between 1994 and 1997. It was by chance, while I was searching, I met Scott and started to read and all that was surely about what I had been concerned with and reflecting on regarding sugar cane workers, the Pernambuco case, which was my research at that time. One of the most intriguing things for me was how the union

movement saw those workers that came from other places. Since the 1980s I've taken part in the Migrants' Pastoral. Initially, it was called migration studies, and I took part as a researcher from 1984 to 1988. At that time, we founded *Travessia*¹² and I also participated in the initial organization of the Migrants' Pastoral services and when I returned to Paraíba in 1988, I was linked to the movement as a voluntary pastoral agent following those groups of migrants. In the countless times I went to the sugar cane plantations of Pernambuco and talked to workers either on the plantation site, their homes, or the spaces where they were accommodated in the *Agreste Paraibano*, I felt that they were not oblivious, that they went there and only wanted to work, that they did not join the union's proposals and mobilization. The Federação dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Pernambuco (Federation of Rural Workers of Pernambuco) is known for being a very active institution. In fact, all unions in that region are known to be very active in the fight for their rights since the 1960s. When I met Scott, I immediately thought "that's it, this is what I'm looking for", a theoretical perspective that allowed me to see that those workers were aware, and that was great. I started to dedicate my time to the work with Scott, I incorporated a lot of that in my dissertation case. I am going to tell you how his work supported my thesis and then how I incorporated him into other works.

In the doctorate thesis, incorporating Scott was fundamental for the ethnographic work of observation of everyday life in the lodge. In fact, the work was not directly developed by me, because I could not stay in the lodge, like living and sleeping there. There were two hundred men. On Sundays, the person who co-authored the research with me from its initial phase, an agent from the migrants' pastoral and then continued helping me in the research, under my guidance, used to stay there, write diaries and send them to me. I did ethnography in dialogue with him, rather than being there all the time, because women could not stay there. But Scott helped a lot, because the perspective he proposed depended a lot on the way we developed the research. He opened our eyes to questions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Then, it was about observing their everyday lives and who talked to whom, the spaces they would occupy to talk about certain things, away from the managers, the leisure space where they would go to try to escape that control of their lives in the lodge, the jokes that people told in a dubious language to be able to communicate in an environment of extreme surveillance and

¹² Menezes refers to *Travessia: revista do migrante*, available at: <<https://revistatravessia.com.br>>.

several other examples that I sought to work on the thesis, and later on presented in the book. Scott's perspective was decisive in our research practice, in the way we observed that routine, the spaces, the work, the accommodation, and the sociability of the workers on sugar cane plantations in the *Mata Norte* of Pernambuco. Well, I think you have already noticed that there is no concept of everyday resistance, as you mentioned in your question. For James Scott, resistance might be developed in symbols, language, practices, but those are just starting points, you must say what symbols, practices and languages these are [giggling]. In my view, what I understand is that it is much more a methodological resource. James Scott is showing us, rather than defining it, a methodological way to observe everyday resistance and it all depends on how you research, how you interpret what is observed in the field. It is not worth writing in the introduction of our work something like "everyday resistance according to Scott", it might not even be necessary to cite him, what we really must do is to practice and in doing research, seek such everyday resistance, according to Thompson, we must show historical evidence. Of course, Thompson is a historian, and he works with the idea of historical evidence, while Scott is an anthropologist and political scientist. The latter works effectively with the idea of existence in the way people live their everyday lives, but it can also be understood as historical evidence, because according to Thompson, he is referring to evidence from past times, he works with documents from registry offices, old poems, criminal processes, such as in *Whigs and Hunters*¹³. Regarding Scott, at least in his biggest research, which is in the book *Weapons of the Weak*¹⁴, there is an anthropological and ethnographic study founded on extensive field work, in daily interaction with community members. Then, I say that this is not a concept, and my studies are supported by Thompson's perspective, the way he understands concepts. For Thompson, concept is not a model that you apply to reality, or something that you cite and is already sufficient to support your work. He defines it as a set of expectancies. Then, for example, if we get the concept of moral economy, we have to show with historical evidence what moral economy is for that group that we are researching, what their values, solidarity references, notions of coexistence are shared and that we can use to support our notion of moral economy. For example, if you are working on a solidary commerce

¹³ THOMPSON, Edward Palmer. *Senhores e caçadores: a origem da lei negra*. Trad. Denise Bottmann. Rio de Janeiro: Paz & Terra, 1987.

¹⁴ SCOTT, James C. *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

experiment, because there are some people working in solidary economy and bringing Thompson to this discussion, it is not only the name solidarity, you have to show that people are really developing some economic activity that can be understood through the notion of moral economy, then, they are involved in an exchange, a market exchange, but also supported by values, reciprocity rules, mutual respect, and shared ideas, then, all that must be shown. Then, resuming Thompson's idea that concept is not a model a priori, and also how he works the notion of class, it is not a priori, class is a set of expectations, it is constituted in the doing, in the everyday action of men and women, then, in truth, class is the result of this action of how men and women live, think about their lives, develop actions, and fight. As regards Scott, I would say that it is very important to understand this notion of everyday resistance as methodological resources for both research and interpretation, the way we develop our analyses. In addition, it is a notion that he built up in the book *Weapons of the Weak*, an ethnographic study of 1985, but he develops it in a more systematic way in the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* of 1990¹⁵, where he presents some other notions that unfold from the resistance notion. In that book, he proposes the notion of hidden discourse and public discourse as unfolding of the resistance notion, but again, the public and hidden discourse notions can also be a methodological guide, it must be founded in empirical evidence, that is, what situations, events, languages, practices, symbols we could understand as hidden discourse. I cannot say that the public discourse is simpler, but it is a bit easier to observe, because you work with events that are publicly visible such as a strike. You can see who is speaking and who is not, who the leaders and what the actions are. But, in a sabotage action of starting a fire in the sugar cane plantation, for example, this is hidden discourse, that is, it is done in such a way that the authors cannot be identified. It is a strategy used to protect those that planned and carried out the real action. Then, it becomes difficult to study, this is a quite complicated methodological issue in the concept of everyday resistance. Those practices, symbols, and languages that refer to hidden discourses are not easily identified. For this reason, we have to observed between lines, what *is not said*, because that is the authors' protection zone. Then, as researchers, we must respect such expressions that are invisible and might put other people's lives at risk. One example, I remember now, and I only recognize it now after I met James Scott's work, but I didn't see it back in the 1980s. When

¹⁵ SCOTT, James C. *Los dominados y el arte de la resistencia: discursos ocultos*. Cidade do México: Ediciones Era, 1990.

I reread the interviews of that time, it was very common to see locals that were in a condition of subjects to the land owner, and I asked them whether ‘their boss was a good person’, in fact I did not ask it like that, because it is a quite limiting question, I used to ask “what is your boss like?”, they would say: “no, mine is very good, mine is great, but the other’s...”, they then talked about three or four bosses that were really cruel [giggling]. In other words, this was a disguised way of talking about their own boss, just referring to others [giggling], or even using the indefinite third person: “it is said, it is heard” all indefinite, when they knew who the author was, who was talked about, but they could not identify the authorship, then they changed to the indefinite, in a disguised language. When rereading the interviews I carried out in the 1980s, there were many of those narratives, using dissimulated language was very common as a resistance practice. But I did not analyze it at that time, because I did not have this look that seeks to understand the meanings of disguised language. The narrative, what and how women and men reported, was understood as an expression of the reality they lived. Then, the notions of hidden and public discourses can be fruitful tools in the advancement of understanding resistance ways, in the terms proposed by James Scott in the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Another thing that I would like to say about that, briefly, is that this notion was highly questioned in the academic world, mainly in agrarian studies. When Scott launched the book in 1985, the critique was immediate and quite polemic. There was even a seminar promoted by *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, in England, which called a group of people involved in African studies, Asian researchers, and many Europeans to discuss the book, and they published a journal issue to discuss the book in a more critical way. So, there were stricter criticism and authors with a more orthodox Marxist view, whose perspectives were centered on social macrostructures, and others that thought that Scott’s perspective was novel and promising. Therefore, the perspective he proposed was highly polemic at the time and he had to answer to the critique, in the same issue of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, launched in 1986, there is an article in which Scott tries to answer some of the critique, one of them was that he was simplifying the notion of resistance and if disguised language was resistance, what was resistance in fact? They also affirmed that the real meaning of resistance would be lost, in more political terms. James Scott answered by challenging the critique and saying “I don’t establish hierarchy between what is real and unreal resistance, for me they are all types of resistance”; that is, for him they were differentiated forms, then it was not

about creating a hierarchy, or saying that one has political character and another reinforces domination and power. Those more structural perspectives were included in this challenge and when he went deeper saying that he was not proposing hierarchical differentiations, but rather how differentiated forms must be thought in terms of their efficacy and effect, in each specific domination situation. Then, you could ask: “but effectively, do these micro-resistances in the workplace, either the sugar cane plantation or the factory, have any efficacy? To answer this question, one must examine how people deal with domination relationships, so that one can identify events, languages, actions, and practices that might be interpreted as resistance. The social category that James Scott dedicated to during his research trajectory was the peasants in southeastern Asia, but several authors have used the everyday resistance notion to understand diverse categories of workers, as well as in women studies.

BCP: Finally, could you comment on your current research and your future projects?

MAM: As I said before, I’ve been involved with this memory issue for some time now. In the early 2000s, I spent some years working with childhood and youth memories of peasant women, but I’ve published very little. When I entered UFABC in 2013, I took part in a project coordinated by Professor José Sérgio Leite Lopes from the National Museum, which was an inter-institutional project involving the Federal University of ABC, the University of São Paulo, the National Museum, the Federal University of Paraíba and the Federal University of Campina Grande. It was a project focused on memories of strikes, both by workers in the metallurgical industry and sugar cane plantations, which resulted in a book¹⁶. In the last ten years, I have dedicated to memory issues focusing on rural workers, small farmers, by both those migrating to metropolitan regions and those moving to the sugar cane plantations in São Paulo and Pernambuco, and also memories of those who took part in social struggles, the Peasant Leagues, which also resulted in a book¹⁷, originated from a seminar that we held in 2006, linked to a project coordinated by Professor Moacir Palmeira, which was called *Memória Camponesa* (Peasant Memory).

¹⁶ LOPES, José Sérgio Leite & HEREDIA, Beatriz (Orgs.). *Movimentos cruzados, histórias específicas*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. UFRJ, 2019.

¹⁷ TARGINO, Ivan; MENEZES, Marilda; MOREIRA, Emilia; IENO NETO, Genaro; MARIANO NETO & BELARMINO; Porfírio, Waldir. *Memória camponesa: as ligas camponesas na Paraíba*. João Pessoa: UFPB/BS-CCTA, 2024.

This memory work I intend to develop is my new project, one that I started to develop last year, and I'll continue with it. It is a memory work using a methodology that we call "duration". I'm going back to the research territories after some time, then I went back to the *Sertão* after 30 years, and I tried to meet some of those people again, and I did it. I also interviewed new people that also took part in that same migration movement in the 1970s. And now, I'm returning to the *Agreste da Paraíba* and I already found several families that had taken part in my doctoral research in the 1990s. Then, my new research is with those families, to register their memories and trajectories since the 1990s, since the time they used to cut sugar cane, most of them already retired. I also intend to analyze the trajectory of their children's generation, mainly their education trajectories, because I have observed that with the increase in the offer of higher education in state and federal institutions in Paraíba, there are better opportunities for the small farmers' and sugar cane workers' children. I've already met several of them that graduated, they are teachers and other professionals, then I'm very interested in working with the trajectories of sugar cane workers of the 1990s, but also with that of their offsprings, to observe the changes and continuities in their trajectories. We can see that with education changes there are transformations, but there are also continuities, that is, children that continue to work in the field, dedicating their lives to planting, and my concern is to discuss the notion of trajectory with several perspectives. One idea that guides me is the intertwining of individuals' and social trajectories. Undoubtedly, Bourdieu is correct in his text *The Biographical Illusion*¹⁸, but I also want to understand and show that there are differentiations in such social trajectories, there are singularities, they are permeated by objective conditions, by possibilities of local employment or in other places, access to education, access to public policies. They are crossed by those structural and objective conditions, but they are also crossed by subjects' actions, women's and men's actions, who are determined to enter the university, become teachers, lawyers, and despite adverse conditions, they fight to change the linearity of their trajectories, and as Daniel Bertaux points out, transform social fates. This is the research I want to dedicate to in the next years.

BCP: Thank you for the interview, Professor Menezes!

¹⁸ BOURDIEU, Pierre. A ilusão biográfica. In: FERREIRA, Marieta de Moraes & AMADO, Janaína. *Usos e abusos da História Oral*. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2006. p. 183-191.

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