

## **Walter Benjamin and the meaning of experience: cordel literature in the valorization of peasant culture**

*Walter Benjamin e o sentido da experiência: a literatura de cordel na valorização da cultura camponesa*

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The article problematizes the crisis of experience and the decline of narrative in capitalist modernity, taking as its theoretical axis the philosophical critique of progress and instrumental rationality. Starting from the diagnosis according to which the capitalist mode of production produces the emptying of transmissible experiences and the disaggregation of the communitarian meaning of our way of life, the historical devaluation of the figure of the narrator and its effects on peasant cultural practices are analyzed. The objective is to investigate to what extent Cordel Literature, as a form of popular art, can be understood philosophically as a cultural asset capable of preserving oral tradition and reactivating silenced collective memories. Methodologically, it is a bibliographic research based on Benjamin's thought, mobilizing the categories of experience (*Erfahrung*), experience (*Erlebnis*), narrative and memory. It is argued that Cordel Literature has a critical potential by operating against the linear idea of progress, preserving stories of peasant struggle and resistance and tensioning the processes of impoverishment of experience in contemporary capitalist society.

**KEYWORDS:** Walter Benjamin; Cordel Literature; Experience; Experience; Narrative; Memory.

### **RESUMO:**

O artigo problematiza a crise da experiência e o declínio da narrativa na modernidade capitalista, tomando como eixo teórico a crítica filosófica ao progresso e à racionalidade instrumental. Partindo do diagnóstico segundo o qual o modo de produção capitalista produz o esvaziamento das experiências transmissíveis e a desagregação do sentido comunitário do nosso modo de vida, analisa-se a desvalorização histórica da figura do narrador e seus efeitos sobre as práticas culturais camponesas. O objetivo consiste em investigar em que medida a Literatura de Cordel, enquanto forma de arte popular, pode ser compreendida

filosoficamente como um bem cultural capaz de preservar a tradição oral e reativar memórias coletivas silenciadas. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica fundamentada no pensamento benjaminiano, mobilizando as categorias de experiência (*Erfahrung*), vivência (*Erlebnis*), narrativa e memória. Sustenta-se que a Literatura de Cordel possui um potencial crítico ao operar a contrapelo da ideia linear de progresso, conservando histórias de luta e resistência camponesa e tensionando os processos de empobrecimento da experiência na sociedade capitalista contemporânea.

**PALAVRAS CHAVES:** Walter Benjamin; Literatura de Cordel; Experiência; Vivência; Narrativa; Memória.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In peasant contexts marked by the centrality of oral culture, narrative experiences have historically occupied a fundamental formative place. Childhood memories, often associated with stories told by older people in community gatherings, constitute a privileged field for understanding the power of narrative as a way of transmitting experience. In these situations, the stories not only informed, but created images, awakened meanings and produced a type of knowledge deeply rooted in everyday life, capable of mobilizing affections, imagination and cultural belonging.

The narratives transmitted by these traditional figures of storytelling — grandmothers, mothers, masters of orality — were radically different from the information conveyed by books, digital media, or social networks. These were stories crossed by lived experience, elaborated in a context in which oral culture was socially valued and recognized as a legitimate form of knowledge. This narrative formation contributed to the construction of an awareness of what is socially and existentially significant, anchored in memory, listening and collective sharing.

Within peasant culture, such stories constitute an essential part of social identity. Oral narratives, whether true or fictional, have always played the role of articulating past, present and future, allowing new generations to recognize themselves in the experiences of their ancestors. The transmission of this knowledge, often mediated by formal and informal educational practices, expressed the commitment to preserve beliefs, traditions and cultural values as structuring elements of collective identity.

In this sense, the work of educators committed to valuing popular culture played a decisive role in maintaining these practices. School activities focused on northeastern culture, oral literature, dances, cordels and folkloric manifestations have long been spaces of cultural resistance and strengthening of collective memory. However, the progressive distancing of these central figures — whether due to retirement or institutional transformations — resulted in the gradual weakening of these practices, both in the school space and in the community sphere.

What was once presented as an experience shared by entire communities has become restricted to small family circles. Narrators, cordelistas and folklorists, once recognized as mediators of collective

memory, are progressively deprived of social conditions to exercise the act of narrating. This phenomenon is not limited to local or regional contexts, but expresses a broader trend of erosion of cultural practices based on orality in contemporary societies.

Such a process is directly related to the transformations imposed by the way of life of modern capitalist society. With the advance of productivist rationality and the exclusive valorization of technical-scientific forms of knowledge, oral narratives have been losing symbolic strength and epistemological status. The conversation circles in the late afternoon, the tales shared in community spaces and the narrative experiences linked to everyday life were being displaced by accelerated, fragmented and instrumental forms of communication.

Although technical progress is an unavoidable element of modernity, this work sustains the need to rethink contemporary ways of life without disregarding traditional and popular forms of cultural production. Narrative, as a form of apprehension and understanding of the world, constitutes an essential dimension of human experience that cannot be reduced or discarded in the name of a linear and progressive conception of history. With the advent of modern science, much knowledge based on experience and collective memory has lost legitimacy, contributing to the impoverishment of transmissible experiences in the present time.

It is in this context that the central problem of this article emerges: the so-called "poverty of transmissible experiences" and the consequent loss of the link between individuals and their cultural traditions. Based on Walter Benjamin's philosophical framework, the investigation takes as central conceptual categories the notions of experience, experience, narrative and memory, articulating them with the analysis of a peasant cultural asset of the northeastern culture: Cordel Literature. It is based on the hypothesis that this popular aesthetic production can contribute to the rescue and valorization of oral culture, operating against the grain of modern capitalist progress.

In the face of the progressive emptying of human experiences and the distancing from cultural tradition, the following question arises: how can the oral narratives of peasant culture be strengthened in contemporary times? Can Cordel Literature be understood as a cultural production capable of preserving ancestral knowledge and collective experiences centered on orality? Such questions guide the aesthetic-philosophical path developed throughout this work.

Methodologically, the research adopts a hermeneutic approach, inspired by the Gadamerian proposal, with emphasis on critical-reflective analysis. As Oliveira (2014, p. 21) points out, hermeneutics is not limited to the rescue of the past, but updates the ways of apprehending the truth in the present. It is, therefore, an eminently theoretical research, developed from the reading and interpretation of philosophical texts and studies on Cordel Literature, within the scope of a bibliographic investigation.

The texts *Experience and Poverty*, *The Narrator* and *On the Concept of History* constitute the theoretical core of Benjamin's reflection mobilized in this article. In them, the philosopher analyzes the impoverishment of experience, the crisis of the act of narrating and the criticism of the bourgeois and progressive conception of history, pointing to the need to think about memory and narrative from the perspective of the "vanquished of history". These essays offer the conceptual basis for the interpretation of Cordel Literature as a memorial document and aesthetic expression of peasant experiences silenced by official historiography.

In order to systematize the exposition, the article is organized in two moments. In the first, Benjamin's critique of modern capitalist society is presented, having as analytical axes the concepts of experience and memory, as well as the theory of narrative and the centrality of memory. In the second moment, Cordel Literature is discussed as a popular cultural production linked to peasant culture, analyzing its potential as a form of resistance and as a memorial record of the experiences of struggle and survival in the countryside.

As a final exercise of reflection, an essayistic analysis of the cordel *The curse of pesticides or what agribusiness does*, by Rogaciano Oliveira and Gigi Castro, is carried out, seeking to highlight how this aesthetic production expresses narratives of peasant resistance in the face of contemporary attempts to delegitimize popular culture. Finally, final considerations are presented that do not intend to end the debate, but to open paths for the valorization of the knowledge and traditions of peasant oral culture, which still persists and resists the imperatives of modern capitalist progress.

## 2. THE DANGERS OF PROGRESS FOR ORAL CULTURE: BENJAMIN'S CRITIQUE OF MODERN CAPITALIST SOCIETY

The art of "exchanging experiences", to use a recurrent expression in Walter Benjamin's vocabulary, that is, the ability to share life in a communal way, is progressively distanced from the predominant model of existence in modern capitalist society. Such distance is not restricted to large urban centers, but also reaches rural contexts, historically marked by collective practices of sociability and transmission of experience. The intensification of work routines, physical exhaustion and the growing psychic illness have contributed to the weakening of social bonds and, consequently, to the corrosion of the community sense of living in society.

In this context, it is essential to understand the reasons why individual experiences tend to overlap with collective experiences within the capitalist social paradigm. The centrality given to productivity, efficiency and individual performance produces a way of life that fragments time, accelerates experience and makes it difficult to transmit. As a result, cultural practices sustained by orality — which depend on

listening, presence, and temporal continuity — come to be devalued or marginalized.

This process directly affects cultural traditions that persist through oral culture, consisting of narratives, tales, proverbs, and stories passed down between generations. Such practices, common in peasant contexts, have always played a central role in cultural formation, by articulating memory, experience and collective belonging. However, under the logic of capitalist progress, these traditional ways of narrating and sharing experience come to be seen as remnants of a past that has supposedly been overcome, losing legitimacy in the face of modern forms of information and communication.

Benjamin's critique allows us to understand that this replacement of shared experience by isolated experiences does not represent a simple civilizational advance, but rather an impoverishment of human experience. By dissolving the spaces of encounter and narrative, modern capitalist society compromises the material and symbolic conditions that make the transmission of experience possible, putting at risk the continuity of oral culture and collective forms of understanding the world.

## 2.1 EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIENCE IN BENJAMIN'S THOUGHT

In the essay *The Narrator: Considerations on Nicolai Leskov* (1994), the German philosopher Walter Benjamin diagnosed the decline of the art of narration as an effect of the replacement of shareable experience (*Erfahrung*) by immediate and fragmentary experiences (*Erlebnis*). For the author, the narrative emerges from accumulated and transmissible experiences, rooted in memory and community life. When such experiences give way to isolated experiences, the ability to communicate lasting meanings and transmit knowledge is weakened. This transformation compromises not only the narrative as an aesthetic form, but also its social and formative function. The hegemony of experience, characteristic of capitalist modernity, intensifies the fragmentation of collective memory and deepens the disconnection between individuals and their cultural traditions. In this sense, the opposition between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* constitutes a fundamental analytical key to understanding the impoverishment of experience and the decline of narrative practices in modern society.

The art of narration is on the verge of extinction. People who know how to narrate properly are increasingly rare [...] it is as if we were deprived that seemed safe and infallible to us: the faculty of exchanging experiences [...] because there have never been experiences more radically demoralized than the strategic experience of trench warfare, the economic experience of inflation, the experience of the body of material war, and the ethical experience of rulers. (Benjamin, 1987, p. 197-198).

Oral storytelling is what helps keep us closer to our culture and tradition, to family and friends. It is for this reason that Franco asserts that, in *The Narrator: Considerations on the Work of Nicholas Leskov*,

Walter Benjamin demonstrates how the ability to have experiences and, consequently, to narrate them, is in clear decline (Franco, 2015, p. 71).

In Benjamin's perspective, the historical, social and cultural process constitutes the material basis for the formation of thought about the world, the perception of the reality that surrounds us, as well as the strengthening of identity from the cultural point of view. However, the intersubjective relationship with culture has increasingly lost strength, as individuals come to be guided by the bourgeois values of modern capitalist society – centered on profit and the preservation of the individual – since "modern capitalist bourgeois society has reduced us all to a situation of extreme cultural poverty" (Rebuá, 2017, p. 25). It is no coincidence that Michael Löwy (2019, p. 24), in dialogue with Benjamin's reflections, pointed out that "capitalism is the ruin of being, it replaces being with having, qualities with mercantile quantities, it replaces human relations with monetary ones, moral or cultural values with the only value that counts, money".

Thus, a gradual rupture of the ties with the cultural tradition that forged the processes of social formation is observed. The memory of collective experiences has been constantly weakened, forgotten and silenced. If, in pre-capitalist societies, oral culture was fundamental to the process of transmitting the cultural values of a given community, today, with the advent of capitalist industrial society, the art of storytelling has become increasingly scarce and obsolete, due to the decline of communicable and transmissible experiences.

The way of life characteristic of modern society produces a material and symbolic devaluation of the cultural tradition centered on narrative, to the extent that it subordinates forms of knowledge to the logic of utility, efficiency and measurement. In this context, the knowledge transmitted orally, based on shared experience, memory and historical continuity, is considered insufficient or irrelevant in the face of the criteria for validating scientific-technical knowledge. Narrative, which once played a central role in cultural formation and in the practical orientation of life, is progressively displaced to a marginal position within modern rationality.

As a consequence, the wealth of knowledge and cultural practices transmitted through stories loses its epistemological status, since this ancestral knowledge is no longer recognized and legitimized as a valid form of knowledge. It is a process that not only impoverishes the cultural horizon of modern societies, but also breaks the links between experience, memory and tradition, compromising the intergenerational transmission of the shared meanings of social life. This line of reasoning can be confirmed in the following quotation:

The decline of experience is generally due to the loss of the sense of a kind of ancient, ancestral wisdom. This is certainly one of the factors that Benjamin points out as responsible for the

process of degradation of experience, in other words, the growing devaluation of tradition – that is, the depersonalization of culture and the sinking of ethical and moral values –, the desubstantiation of time and history – by virtue of the new means of capitalist production and communication –, as well as the emergence of narrative genres that were previously conservative, among them, the bourgeois novel and journalistic information. For Benjamin, such socio-cultural conditions consist of the blow of modern life over tradition, a life in which interest in the closer, the easiest and the immediate reigns (Pereira, 2006, p. 64).

The ancestors — grandparents and great-grandparents — had their own deeply rich cultural narrative; The stories told there aroused reflections on the meaning of life, so that, in the past, such narrators were recognized as bearers of a singular wisdom. With the advent of capitalist modernization, technological innovations and the constant precariousness of the work routine, however, the weakening of peoples' narratives is observed. These are stories that do not appear in the main sources of official historiography, but that remained alive because they were transmitted from generation to generation through orality. The figure of the elder, for example, gradually lost its epistemic authority as the bearer of ancestral wisdom, due to the constant rupture caused by the advance of modern technological knowledge.

For this reason, the figure of the narrator has been suffering a historical, cultural and social setback, resulting from a central dilemma of modern society: the preponderance of individual experience over collective experiences. It is no coincidence that Walter Benjamin pointed out that "it is a matter of honor to confess our poverty today. We must admit it: this poverty of experience is not only manifested on the private level, but on the level of all humanity. It thus becomes a kind of new barbarism" (Benjamin, 2013, p. 86).

It is relevant to underline the subtlety of the concept of barbarism presented by Benjamin in his reflections on the emptying of experience and the gradual loss of the ability to narrate, developed in the texts *Experience and poverty* and *The narrator*. Barbarism is not only manifested in the actions of terror of totalitarian regimes from a political point of view, such as the persecution of enemies – it is worth remembering that Benjamin, a Jew, lived through the period of wars and was persecuted by German fascism – but also in the imposition of a model of life that erases and silences other forms of history organized outside the parameters of the "bourgeois myth" of economic and social progress.

It is noteworthy that Benjamin's recognition of the atrophy of the ability to exchange experiences is directly linked to his critique of the idea of progress. As the author himself pointed out: "the idea of a progress of humanity in history is inseparable from its march within an empty and homogeneous time. The critique of the idea of progress is based on the critique of the idea of this march" (Benjamin, 1993, p. 229).

Any and all forms of social organization that escape this logic of industrial progress, present especially in large urban centers, tend to be considered "savage" or "barbaric", since individuals are evaluated exclusively from the prism of the progress of modern society. In this sense, barbarism can also be understood as forgetfulness of tradition, as Silva points out when he states that, according to Benjamin, it is enough to observe the accelerated pace of life imposed by modern capitalism and the speed of the productive process of industrial work to verify human misery and the loss of the cultural heritage of tradition (Silva, 2014, p. 119).

When it comes to peasant communities, the idea of progress proves to be particularly challenging, as it is not always beneficial to peasants. Capitalism tends to invest only in what generates immediate returns and, as a result, the countryside and its workers suffer the consequences. Concerns about capitalist strategies, their impacts on employment, income, land productivity and peasant subsistence are among the main factors that drive migration to the cities or staying in the countryside under constant conditions of resistance and survival. The trials of change, the pain of alienation, the trauma of separation and emigration, as well as the desire for acceptance and integration into the dominant society, rapidly weaken the preservation of traditions, culture and orality.

The act of narrating and, consequently, the ability to exchange experiences, has become increasingly rare in contemporary societies, due to the assumptions of the *modus operandi* of the working class. Humanity has become so modeled and scripted that individuals are no longer able to narrate their own stories, like the soldiers of the Second World War who returned mute from the battlefield, no richer, but poorer in communicable experience, as Benjamin observes (1987, p. 198).

In this context of modern capitalist society, centered on the mechanical and strenuous reproduction of work, individuals, like soldiers at war, lose the ability to tell good stories. This is because the act of narrating requires time and the presence of gathered listeners, conditions that the fast pace of contemporary work no longer allows. Unlike artisanal work carried out calmly and generally in groups, current work is characterized by haste and isolation (Silva, 2008, p. 01).

From this line of reasoning, it becomes possible to understand more clearly the Benjaminian conceptual distinction between Experience (*Erfahrung*) and Experience (*Erlebnis*). Unlike an authentic and full experience, founded on tradition, narration and community, the experience is centered on the individual, on consciousness and on isolated perception (Mateus, 2014, p. 05). Benjamin conceived the experience as traditional knowledge transmitted from generation to generation, which began to wither with modernity (Lima; Baptista, 2013, p. 451).

Experiences only make sense to the extent that they are reported, remembered, and continued through stories transmitted orally. For this reason, the ability to exchange experiences — that is, to tell

good stories capable of transmitting the knowledge of a tradition — has been historically atrophied, as individuals have lost the very possibility of having experiences (Guimarães, 2019, p. 125). In modernity, says Freitas (2014, p. 74), there is no experience to be shared, but only experiences that keep the consciousness in a constant state of alert in the face of daily shocks. The experience is consolidated within modern capitalist society, where most individuals no longer have the conditions to experience the world fully.

While *Erlebnis* corresponds to the experience of the lonely and isolated individual, *Erfahrung* springs from an artisanal and communitarian way of relating to life (Guimarães, 2019, p. 113). Thus, experience highlights human interdependence as a condition proper to the social animal (Mateus, 2014, p. 02), while experience expresses the isolation characteristic of modernity, dominated by successive aesthetic, political, and cultural clashes (Ibidem).

In pre-capitalist societies, the act of narrating has always played a fundamental role in transmitting and updating culture for future generations. In contemporary capitalist society, however, critically reflecting on the weakening of the culture of the popular classes — especially the peasant class — must be understood as a continuous act of struggle and resistance. Although industrialization, the exploitation of human labor, and the submission of science and technology to the values of capital have weakened traditional knowledge and practices centered on narrative, indigenous peoples and peasant communities continue to find ways to resist the collapse of their memory and tradition.

It is therefore necessary to rehabilitate narratives as a form of experience and to value the means by which these groups resist the logic of capitalist progress, placing narrative at the center of the cultural process. Popular peasant aesthetic production, such as cordel literature, presents itself as a way of documenting and perpetuating the histories, struggles and resistances of rural peoples, whose tradition remains rooted in oral culture, even if it is crossed by constant shocks. This aspect of the cordels, in their form and content, will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this work.

In view of these preliminary reflections on modern capitalist society, in the light of the concepts of experience and experience, it is necessary to deepen the relationship between narrative and memory in the strengthening of transmissible experiences. Walter Benjamin understood narrative not only as a means of communicating information, but as a space in which multiple layers of reality come into contact and articulate. By narrating, one does not simply transmit content, but shares a way of understanding and inhabiting the world, anchored in collective experience and tradition.

Memory, in this sense, does not preserve experience as something fixed or crystallized; on the contrary, it allows different experiences to interpenetrate, update and continuously transform themselves in the process of construction and reconfiguration of the social imaginary. It is precisely this dynamic

dimension of memory that gives the narrative its formative power, allowing experiences from the past to acquire new meanings in the present and guide future practices. From this perspective, it becomes possible to move on to the analysis of the concrete ways in which narrative operates as a mediation between experience, memory and culture, which leads directly to the next topic of this investigation.

## 2.2 NARRATIVE AND MEMORY IN WALTER BENJAMIN

Through the concepts of experience and living experience presented above, the association that Walter Benjamin established between experience and cultural tradition gains centrality in his philosophical reflection, as it is through the habit of telling stories that it becomes possible to transmit and update knowledge, ancestral cultures and forms of life reproduced in the very act of narrating. In the crisis of transmissible experiences, a result of modern capitalist society and the mode of work imposed by it, as already mentioned, there is a progressive loss of the ability to narrate and, with it, the forgetting of collective memories, ancestries and cultural traditions. The experience tends to be reduced to a subjective and commodified experience, in which individuals live in silence or are silenced.

However, as the German philosopher pointed out, it is precisely in the articulation between narrative and memory that the possibility of reconnecting with ancestral traditions, affirming cultural identity and valuing oral tradition opens up. Thus, it can be seen that, through the narrative,

[...] We reconcile ourselves with the common world – with the objects around us, with our historical condition and our bonds of belonging – and it is through it that we constitute ourselves as political subjects. It is through narrative, finally, that we honor and give meaning to our existence linked to each other, dead and living. The loss of experience is neither a fatalistic nor nostalgic diagnosis, I believe, but rather a contemporary condition that makes us live the narrative as a ruin and transformative power (Ferreira, 2019, p. 126).

Orality, in this perspective, presents a transformative power, because, through the act of narrating, a mobilization movement is created capable of encouraging individuals to claim their roots, cultivate and value their descendants, their culture and their cultural identity. When a story arouses attention and fascination — such as the tales transmitted by the elders — it becomes easier for the subjects to be inserted into a shared cultural tradition. In this way, thinking about ways to rehabilitate the narrative makes it possible to give visibility to the voices of subjects and groups whose knowledge is no longer legitimized, as well as to fairly recognize the ancestral wisdom of cultural traditions that remain against the current of capital's progress. The rehabilitation of the narrative can, therefore, be understood as an effectively transformative power.

The act of narrating goes beyond the advice and proverbs transmitted by the elders and wisest, since this exchange of experiences not only reaffirms traditions and customs, but also enables the collective construction of new knowledge and reflections on ways of life. Repositioning the debate on

narrative, in a capitalist society that tends to empty or suppress the act of storytelling, means bringing the voice of historically oppressed groups to the social and political field. In this sense, Walter Benjamin pointed out, in *On the Concept of History*, the need to rethink history from the perspective of the "vanquished". In thesis VIII of this essay, the German philosopher stated that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of exception in which we live is actually the general rule. We need to build a concept of history that corresponds to this truth" (Benjamin, 1994, p. 226).

Following this line of reasoning, the ways of life of cultures that still remain anchored in oral tradition — such as native peoples and peasant communities — show that ancestral culture can assume a critical and transgressive character in the face of the dominant logic of capitalist progress. In these traditions, the narrative operates as a form of symbolic resistance, as it preserves experiences, memories, and knowledge that escape the criteria of official historiography and modern instrumental rationality. It is precisely at this point that Benjamin's reflection on history gains critical density, by shifting the gaze to the silenced experiences and to those who were historically excluded from the triumphalist accounts of progress.

Telling stories has always been the art of telling them anew, and it is lost when the stories are no longer preserved. It is lost because no one else spins or weaves while listening to the story. The more the listener forgets himself, the more deeply what is heard is engraved on him. When the rhythm of work takes hold of him, he listens to the stories in such a way that he spontaneously acquires the gift of narrating them. Thus was woven the net in which the narrative gift is kept. And so this network is unraveling today on all sides, after having been woven, millennia ago, around the oldest forms of manual labor (Benjamin, 1987, p. 205).

The example presented by Benjamin's philosophy, according to which memory is constructed, metaphorically, as the manual weaving of a network, is particularly representative for interpreting the world of life in tension with the capitalist mode of production. Just as the work of producing the network was progressively industrialized, social life, by detaching itself from this artisanal finish, became mechanized. When one allows oneself to be bewitched by the siren song of progress, without assessing the risks and debris left by this narrative, one runs the risk of breaking ties with one's own roots, thus contributing to the dilution of cultural and social traditions. Hence the importance of insisting on valuing the figure of the narrator, so that many good storytellers continue to emerge. Walter Benjamin presented, in his text *The Narrator*, two distinct types of narrators, based on equally different ways of experiencing the world. Such forms are personified in the figures of the traveling sailor and the sedentary peasant, as we can confirm in the excerpt below.

The experience that passes from person to person is the source that all the narrators have resorted to. [...] The figure of the narrator only becomes fully tangible if we keep these two groups in mind. "Those who travel have a lot to tell", say the people, and with that they imagine the narrator as someone who comes from afar. But we also listen with pleasure to the man who has honestly earned his living without leaving his country and who knows its stories and

traditions. [...] In fact, these two lifestyles produced in a certain way their respective families of narrators. Each of them has preserved, over the centuries, its own characteristics. [...] The real extent of the narrative realm, in all its historical scope, can only be understood if we take into account the interpenetration of these two archaic types. (Benjamin, 1987, p. 198-199).

The narrator has the possibility of being in constant movement, having his memories continuously remodeled through the experiences lived. Such a condition does not depend exclusively on geographical displacement: both those who travel through different places, coming into contact with multiple cultures and ways of life, and those who remain rooted in their community from birth, can accumulate significant and transmissible experiences. These two forms of existence — displacement and permanence — are distinct but equally legitimate ways of acquiring wisdom.

These perspectives, although different, are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, both enable the construction of knowledge rooted in experience and memory, capable of being shared through reporting, narration and life history. It is in this sense that the narrator, whether traveling or sedentary, plays the role of mediator between what is lived and transmitted, between individual experience and collective wisdom.

The knowledge and wisdom thus constituted are transmitted from generation to generation through the act of telling stories, the communication of moral lessons and the sharing of experiences that affect the listener, expanding their reflection on life. In these narratives — inexhaustible sources of ancestral wisdom — emotions, memories, transformations, struggles, and resistance are intertwined. It is a form of symbolic resistance that prevents the culture and tradition of the vanquished from being completely erased, keeping them in a constant process of remembrance.

Whether individuals marked by continuous displacement or prolonged stay in the same place, both have stories to narrate and, therefore, can be considered rich in transmissible experiences. However, to the extent that peasant culture also undergoes the transformations imposed by the way of life of modern capitalist society, the weakening of cultural practices centered on narrative is observed. This process is directly related to the devaluation of the figure of the narrator, in line with the interests and demands of contemporary capitalist rationality.

In view of this scenario, it is essential to articulate a movement of "memory rescue", oriented to the valorization of traditions that still maintain their links anchored in oral culture and in the intergenerational transmission of experience. Such a rescue should not be understood as a nostalgic return to the past, but as a critical gesture that recognizes, in the present, the formative and political power of traditional narratives. By rehabilitating memory and narrative as legitimate forms of knowledge, it creates

the possibility of interrupting the logic of oblivion produced by modern capitalist society and of restoring visibility to knowledge, experiences, and ways of life historically marginalized by the current social order.

It is understandable with this why political phenomena have come to be reinterpreted from a perspective aligned with a kind of "rescue of memory", since we find on the part of the State, in specific contexts, actions that manipulate and/or annihilate certain historical events that should not be silenced from the public space and, consequently, from the collective memory of the people (Guimarães, 2019, p. 107).

One of the conceptual notions developed by Walter Benjamin, which can contribute to the reflection on the meaning of experience in the context of peasant communities and the strengthening of cultural tradition, is the figure of the narrator. This popular figure gained centrality in Benjamin's analysis due to the fact that the author recognizes that the narrator transmits and updates popular knowledge through the act of telling stories, since the narrative puts the subjects in direct contact with memory. Historically, this figure has been present in a recurrent way in the popular classes and, in particular, in the Brazilian peasant communities.

From this perspective, it is observed that memory cannot be understood as a simple repository of past facts preserved in the present, but as a way of understanding the very process by which events become past. It is about understanding how events acquire new meanings when they are remembered, different from those they had at the time they occurred. In this movement, the experiences do not remain identical to themselves, but are resignified, gaining new meanings.

Thus, it becomes noticeable that, in peasant communities, subjects traditionally turn to their elders when they need to mobilize memories of the past, recognizing in them an authority based on accumulated experience and wisdom transmitted over time. This authority is not based on formal titles or institutionalized knowledge, but on the ability to narrate lived experiences and articulate them in a meaningful way for the community. It is important to highlight that memory is not presented in a homogeneous way throughout life: the memory of youth differs from that elaborated in maturity or old age, not because of distortion or loss of fidelity to events, but because the experience, when remembered, is reinterpreted and resignified. In this process, memory acts as a mediating force between past and present, transforming lived experience into transmissible wisdom and keeping cultural tradition alive through narrative.

Narrating is a profound redemption to those who are no longer present, to the lost tradition, to the resignification of tradition in the present. Narrating expresses, therefore, an ontology of action by re-signifying the *self* during speech and its place in the world of things. It is an act of rupture with the linearity of History and is the rescue of small, delicate, invisible, forgotten elements. Therefore, narrating implies a reconciliation of the individual with the world that he

shares – in a common experience – with a plurality. Narrating reveals a subject, a "someone" that until then, if a listener, does not exist politically. (Ferreira, 2019, p.131).

For the memories of the past to unveil with such intensity, it is even necessary to forget, because it is not possible to properly remember something without first having occurred the forgetfulness. This, in these terms, should not be understood as a simple loss, but as a layer that enriches the understanding of experience, by enabling the reconstruction and updating of the memorial narratives through which the world is interpreted. Remembering, in this way, bears a great resemblance to forgetting, because it involves undoing what memory has woven in order to redo it according to a different method. It is a movement that the elders and wisest carry out with subtlety, in such a way that, even when the same story is narrated repeatedly, something new and transformative always emerges.

It is not, therefore, a matter of returning to the past to discover what "really happened" through a coherent and linear narrative, but of understanding how an event is articulated with others in a delicate web of similarities that give it meaning. Memory and, consequently, the act of remembering, constitute the central element of the art of narrating. Thus, bringing memories to light through the act of storytelling should not be understood as the simple description of the events experienced as they occurred, but as the production of a new layer of meaning, extracted from the relationship between past and present.

The resistance of the popular classes, through their narratives, makes it possible for the culture and tradition of the vanquished not to be completely erased, even though modern capitalist society seeks to silence them. Walter Benjamin understood the best storytellers as those who always have something new to narrate, either from new experiences or through the reinterpretation of events already lived. In this way, such narrators become an active part of the historical movement of societies, past and present.

In this aspect, the importance of artistic and cultural expressions for the resignification of peasant culture is highlighted, which constantly seeks ways to stay alive even in a context of devaluation of its narratives within capitalist society. In artistic expressions it is possible to recognize central elements of the identity and value system of a people. Art, in general, plays a fundamental role in the preservation of culture, tradition and collective history. It is for this reason that, from this point on, the work turns to the analysis of an aesthetic production of the northeastern culture that has much to narrate about the peoples of the countryside: cordel literature.

### 3. CORDEL ART: A SOURCE OF APPRECIATION OF PEASANT CULTURE

Cordel literature has an inestimable value for the culture of the Northeast — this is undeniable. However, it is necessary to understand whether, as a cultural production, it still preserves this form of ancestral wisdom anchored in oral culture. It is, therefore, a matter of investigating whether, through the

cordels, and contrary to capitalist logic, there are narratives capable of preserving experience (*Erfahrung*), along the lines of Benjamin's philosophy.

In view of this, it becomes relevant to question to what extent cordel literature, as a popular artistic expression, is still capable of operating as a space for the preservation, transmission and renewal of experiences rooted in peasant culture. This question does not imply, at this moment, a conclusive statement about its critical potential, but points to the need to examine with greater attention the historical and cultural conditions that allow the cordel to preserve – or not – narrative forms linked to orality, collective memory and traditional ways of life. It is from this preliminary problematization that it becomes possible to situate the cordel within the philosophical debate on the crisis of experience in modernity.

### **3.1. ORALITY AND MEMORY IN THE CORDELS**

In all cultures of the world, art has developed as an expression of cultural life, constituting itself as a form of symbolic elaboration through which thoughts, feelings and actions are communicated. Through contact with the cultural productions of a group and/or community, it becomes possible to access their knowledge and social practices, as well as their collective memories, often marked by tragic and/or comic narratives. In other words, it is in cultural productions that one can recognize the worldview of a people.

In many cases, artistic productions can be understood as true "places of memory<sup>1</sup>", functioning as a kind of showcase capable of giving cultural visibility to the communities, as well as as a social stage in which the historical injustices suffered by these subjects are enunciated. In the context of popular culture — the art of the people and peasant aesthetics — especially those manifestations that maintain a strong link with orality, there is an interest in analyzing Cordel Literature.

It is important to bear in mind that cordel literature emerges as a popular artistic space in which the struggles and resistances of peasant communities are narrated, thus keeping alive the collective memory of these subjects. The main characteristic of this form of popular expression is orality, in contrast

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<sup>1</sup> The term was coined by the French historian Pierre Nora. The concept "allows the articulation of practices, agents, references and contents of memory [...] analyzes the approximations and distances between collective memory and historical memory. For the author, memory emerges from a social group unified by it [...] From this argument, Nora builds the notion of – places of memory – which, according to the author, serve to guarantee the fixation of memories and their transmission, and are impregnated with symbolism, as they characterize events or experiences lived by the groups, even if many of their members have not participated directly in such events". (Oliveira, 2009, p. 12).

to traditional written literature. The cordels address themes directly related to social reality, injustices, religion, politics, among other constitutive dimensions of the northeastern peasant culture.

Cordel is a rich, complex and lively poetic form, which expresses a mentality, a popular worldview. His narratives are stories created more for the ear than for the eyes, that is, their reception by the public presupposes singing, recitation or reading aloud, made by someone located in the middle of a circle of listeners who attentively and collectively follow the unfolding of the adventures. (Andrade, 2004 *apud* Silva, 2007).

Cordel literature is more than the simple record, on a piece of paper, of beautiful phrases that rhyme or fictional tales. It is a popular art that seeks to elucidate memories and interpret collective experiences. Gaudêncio and Borba (2010, p. 2) explained that "cordel literature is understood as being an artistic-cultural manifestation of popular culture that records the history and trajectory of a people, as well as being characterized by a poetic action that gives life to society". Through their narratives, often recited aloud and elaborated from a popular language, the cordelistas are able to express their wisdom and knowledge about their own culture, demonstrating, in their verses, the social reality, the collapse of cultural practices and the historical silencing of their voices. It should be noted that, in the cordels, one does not find the expression of the isolated experience of an individual, but memorialistic accounts that refer to the historical experience of a people that brings the tragicomic aspect of life.

Cordel literature seeks to establish and communicate meanings of balance, harmony and beauty within the community and in the way it relates to the world, while emphasizing the need to understand the pain, suffering, animation and happiness that permeate collective life. It is an important cultural expression that can be recognized as an artistic repository of the popular classes, expanding beyond specific cultural borders. Although the cordels are presented in the form of written texts, it is possible to clearly identify the traces of oral culture that constitute them, since the popular language remains as its central element, allowing the cultural history inscribed there to be preserved and transmitted over time.

Cordel "presupposes the sharing of knowledge and experiences and the use of culture as an instrument of struggle, of affirmation of identities and occupation of spaces. As much as an aesthetic expression, it represents a collective practice that involves, on the one hand, the relationship between memory and orality and, on the other, the dialogue between past and present" (Nemer, 2010, p. 8). In this sense, cordel can be understood as a form of rehabilitation of the art of narrating and the experiences of the world, which refers to the need to "[...] provide adequate care for the protection and maintenance of the bibliographic and documentary collection of any kind, with a view to maintaining its original form. Collective and individual measures taken with regard to repair, restoration, protection and maintenance [...]" (Faria; Pericão, 2008, p. 594).

Each cordel can be understood as an archive of mimetic acts. Whenever one names, translates, reads, or recites aloud to a group of listeners — since the aesthetic construction of the cordel was not designed for isolated enjoyment, as occurs with the novel, but for a shared experience — culture is strengthened and ancestral narratives are literally perpetuated. In this respect, it is a form of authentic experience, along Benjaminian lines.

From this perspective, the cordel has the ability to create links between the subjects and their own culture, since it preserves, both in form and content, central elements of the shared experiences that serve as the basis for the elaboration of their narratives. It is noteworthy that the cordelistas — who, in these terms, can also be recognized as narrators — do not tell their stories from a formal instruction derived from the books produced by modern science, but based on the experiences they lived or heard, whether from those who remained in their place of origin, or from those who traveled through different territories.

It is for this reason that it can be stated that "although many cordel writers were uneducated and did not attend school, they were artists and, as such, did not give up studying narratives and poetry, investigating, mining, mastering the art of cordel" (Silva; Vieira, 2013, p. 6).

Prosear a cordel goes beyond mere aesthetic enchantment with rhythmic verses. In many moments, these rhyming words make it possible to contact the subterranean memories of the subaltern classes or, in a Benjaminian philosophical approach, put the reader and the listener in direct contact with the narrative and with the tradition of the "vanquished of history". As Jares pointed out, the cordel seeks to emphasize the social reality of these subjects, as well as their political, economic and social needs and challenges.

The main characteristic of oral tradition is verbalism, transmitted from one generation to another, as an oral testimony of the collective memory of a people. This cultural expression is inherent to the formation of the identities of subaltern cultures and, therefore, the support of the cultural resistance of these peoples. Societies bring with them collective representations with their own identities that are widely disseminated through this tradition. [...] This collective expression is perpetuated over time and plays an important role in the resistance and in the formation of the identity of subaltern cultures. (Jares, 2010, p. 07).

. From the social experience of the popular classes and their observation of the world, the subjects transform these experiences into narratives, constituting an oral language of social transformation that is encouraged, nourished and transmitted from generation to generation through verses, rhymes and poetry. If, as Walter Benjamin advised, it is necessary to reinterpret history from a commitment to the

vanquished, then it is necessary to recognize the northeastern cordels as memorial documents of the peasants, capable of enabling reflection on the meaning of peasant experiences through the stories narrated by their narrators.

Cordel literature presents itself, metaphorically, as a cloud carried in the middle of the dry hinterland, announcing the hope of a more abundant harvest. In its most intrinsic dimension, the cordel produces cultural and memorial experience, even if it materializes in leaflets, paper or even digital media. These narratives were conceived to be verbalized, so that this process favors the sharing of experiences of a social reality that is not individual, but collective, rehabilitating the notion of narrative in the face of the experience emptied of experience characteristic of modern society. If capitalist society tends to supplant oral culture under the allegation that social and economic transformations would be necessary for progress, cordel stories seem to operate, contrary to bourgeois and progressive historiography, as an act of resistance by rural subjects.

### **3.2 HISTORY AGAINST THE GRAIN IN THE CORDELS: A HOPE FOR THE VANQUISHED**

In view of the recognition that cordel literature, produced within the scope of northeastern popular culture, can be understood as a form of preservation of the collective experience of a group — considering that the narratives present in these stories seek to preserve and disseminate collective memories, whether real or fictional, fruits of an oral tradition that still resists among communities and peoples who cultivate ways of life not entirely submitted to the logic of unbridled progress of capitalism — it is intended, as the final act of this reflection, to establish an analysis-essay of a literature of northeastern cordel.

If the way of life instituted by modern capitalist society has produced, as we have sought to explain throughout this work, an erasure of the narratives and collective memories of peoples, groups and/or communities in the name of a supposed "progress of humanity", it is up to philosophical reflections that problematize history from the ruin of the "vanquished", and not from the triumph of the victors, to think about the multiple meanings that can be extracted from peasant life from their experiences, cultural productions, reports and their own narratives.

Thinking about a "rescue" of these silenced memories from peasant cultural productions, or even an effort of remembrance that connects with the struggles and mourning of historically oppressed groups — among which peasants occupy a central place, as they are directly affected by the discourse of "progress" — can be configured as a relevant social strategy in the exercise of valuing peasant culture. It is in this sense that Reyes Mate, in *Midnight in History: Comments on Walter Benjamin's Theses "On the Concept of History"*, stated that:

The purpose of remembrance is to rescue the right to justice from the past or, if one prefers, to recognize in the past of the vanquished an injustice that is still in force, that is, to read the frustrated projects with which history is sown, not as costs of progress, but as pending injustices (Mate, 2011, p. 28).

Benjamin, in his text "*On the Concept of History*", made explicit his criticism of the idea of progress by problematizing the classes that are relegated to the shadow of modernization processes. According to this perspective, the so-called "industrial evolution" began to replace people with machines and, simultaneously, to robotize subjects destined for the most dehumanized forms of work. Under these conditions, the routine marked by work from sunrise to sunset makes the injustices of the capitalist system materialize directly in the lives of the subaltern classes. In this sense, Bernardon highlighted that "the atrocities of the capitalist mode of production are perceived daily in the lives of the subjects, since they manifest themselves through hunger, unemployment, violence, physical and mental illness, resulting from long working hours, among other manifestations" (Bernardon et al., 2017, p. 2).

It is a capitalism that takes on multiple faces, depending on the historical and social context in which it manifests itself, and that seeks, through its hegemonic narratives, to hide the contradictions it produces, the subjection of human beings and the destruction of cultural traditions that still resist. In the context of peasant communities, this specific mode of presenting the so-called "capitalist progress" received the name of *agribusiness* or agribusiness.

The official discourse of agribusiness emerged with the objective of expanding its agricultural frontiers under the justification of promoting high levels of development. However, what this discourse of "progress" silences is that such a model of production has caused the expulsion of peasants from their own lands, in addition to causing serious environmental damage and the increase of diseases in the countryside and among the population in general. The effects of this process are numerous and catastrophic, extending from the capture of well-being and health to the weakening of peasant culture. Even so, the wreckage produced by the advance of capitalism is often camouflaged under the guise of technological innovations. These innovations, however, come at a high price: the appropriation of land, the contamination of water, and the systematic withdrawal of rights from rural peoples.

Agribusiness was introduced into the rural space abruptly, without the peasants having effective conditions to defend themselves from this structural violence. As a consequence, many began to submit to the work imposed by this productive model, being compelled to give up their traditional ways of life to fight for their own survival. It is just one among the countless contradictions engendered by the capitalist system, whose economic, social and cultural impacts fall directly on the peasants. In this sense, Guimarães observed that "the way of life produced by the system that develops from the exploitation of

human labor is daily shattering collective experiences. The faculty of exchanging experiences atrophies due to the images of destruction that are traumatically captured by human perception" (Guimarães, 2019, p. 116). In the same direction, Silva underlined that:

The rise of the bourgeoisie and its capitalist practices, such as individualism, unbridled competition, the accumulation of capital, the fetish of the "current", etc., lead to the loss of both tradition and memory. Individuals no longer share their experiences, because the process of fragmentation is so great that they themselves do not recognize themselves in tradition. It is undeniable that there is a kind of "abyss" established between one generation and another that deprives them of exchanging experiences (SILVA, 2014, p. 119).

When subjects are deprived of resources – without access to food, water, land and basic means of subsistence – it becomes necessary to find, in the sphere of culture, mechanisms capable of preserving and amplifying their voices. It is for this reason that the oppressed found in popular artistic expressions, including cordel literature, "a process of search for identity, in which, through a cycle of injustices, ways were elaborated to represent the struggle for social justice, facing the social, economic and cultural problems that capitalism and agribusiness introduced in the countryside" (Jares, 2010, p. 10).

An expressive example of this form of popular art, which highlights the social reality of a people and the trajectory of their struggle, is the cordel literature entitled *The curse of pesticides or what agribusiness does*, by Rogaciano Oliveira and Gigi Castro. In this cordel, a kind of rescue of the memory of the "subaltern" subjects is observed, insofar as the rhyming verses echo the suffering of the peasant peoples who have faced this abyss for more than five hundred years, considering that the peasant struggle dates back to the beginnings of the colonization process.

Through the social narrative present in this cordel, it becomes possible to acquire historical awareness — since, as Benjamin pointed out, good narratives are sources of wisdom — about the processes of enslavement, silencing and devaluation of peasant culture, which contributed to the progressive loss of ties with tradition. The authors found, in the cordel, a way to narrate this long process of struggle of the peasants who continue to be silenced in the name of progress. Thus, the cordel begins by highlighting the evils caused by agribusiness and states, in its stanzas, that:

Our environment suffers from enormous degradation for more than 500 years  
Since Colonization: From the people to the environments, the one who loses is our Nation.

[...]

And then it seems that time has not moved: The form of the owner has changed, But not of the  
worker: From slave to settler Or small farmer.

[...]

It is therefore necessary to think about the dangers that this entails: To take away from the people the right to water, air and land! To warn about the madness that kills and that binds us  
(Oliveira E Castro, 2011, p. 03)

Perception is perhaps the most elementary model of an experience. It is important to highlight, at this point, that Benjamin made explicit the main characteristics of the narrator and the source of interconnection between narration and experience. This connection enables a way of preserving aesthetic experiences that places the narrative at the center of the process of constituting cultural values. As the author stated: "Now, if the source where the narrator seeks human experiences goes into decay, the very art of narrating is on the verge of extinction" (Silva, 2014, p. 128). Through their stories, tales, verses and rhymes, the peasants symbolically prepare themselves to confront capitalist barbarism.

From this perception, from this representation mediated by art, the peoples of the countryside broaden their desires for change, seeking ways to recover their subsistence outside the unbridled logic of exploitation of human beings and natural resources aimed at obtaining profit. The daily journeys and struggles are long and, therefore, it is necessary to find strategies so that their voices echo loud and clear, so that historical injustices are denounced and repaired. The cordel rehearsed here seeks to give visibility to the peoples of Chapada do Apodi and Tabuleiro de Russas, who fight for life in the region of Baixo Jaguaribe, in Ceará, showing that, based on organization and collective resistance, even in adverse conditions, one should not remain silent. Thus, the cordel recites that:

That's why in Chapada  
Apodi's call  
Zé Maria protested  
Against this aggression there:  
Aerial spraying  
Killing the people there.

He made a strong move  
Against what has arrived  
In Limoeiro do Norte  
It was a voice that cried out  
Defending the environment,  
Companies denounced it.  
(Oliveira E Castro, 2011, p. 12)

Through rhymes, it is affirmed that it is from social movements and collective action that it becomes possible to go further, highlighting needs and claiming rights to public policies. Agribusiness, articulated with the power of capitalism, weakens these communities, operating as a conscious strategy for the production of fear in the face of insurgent voices that make explicit the contradictions of this way

of life imposed by modern capitalist society. The stories recited in the cordel, whether real or fictional, in addition to constituting a strategy for the preservation of ancestral culture – constantly threatened by the overlapping of immediate experiences over experiences, as Walter Benjamin pointed out – can also awaken social sensitivity in the face of shared memories.

Through the verses, the authors bring to light the multiple forms of calamity experienced by these communities. Such productions, by connecting with the sensibility of individuals, can contribute to collective mobilization in defense of the guarantee of their ways of life. In the case of peasants, these struggles concern the right of access to land, water and a form of existence that does not subject human beings and nature to the logic of economic exploitation, as occurs in the agribusiness model. The authors of the cordel end their rhymes by highlighting that:

Putting pressure on agribusiness  
Use legislation  
Enforcing rights  
Of our population  
Change what is written  
From governments as said  
By the Constitution.  
Necessary for this attempt  
It is the mobilization:  
Come and make movement!  
Putting the world into action!  
People together is the yeast  
To change this moment,  
Build another nation!  
(Oliveira E Castro, 2011, p. 18).

In order to build a fairer world, rural peoples cannot cease their struggles and questions, and must have their voices heard and their narratives epistemologically legitimized. The possibilities for action are numerous. Bringing to the public and political space the stories and memories inscribed in cordel literature — this northeastern and peasant cultural asset — presents itself as a powerful and necessary alternative. After all, by making visible the memories of a people's struggle and suffering, it opens up the possibility of repairing the historical injustices suffered by historically oppressed groups or, at least, of awakening the collective conscience to the recognition of the existence of these indignities.

Although the cordel analyzed is presented in written and documented form, it is essential to highlight that it circulates and comes to life mainly through orality, being reverberated among the peoples of Chapada do Apodi and by peasants who recognize themselves in the social reality narrated there. In this sense, the power and relevance of oral histories can be observed, since it is through them that the

cordel acquires its fullest meaning. The narrative about the impacts of agribusiness is an experience shared by broad segments of the peasantry, and not only by the subjects of the Chapada do Apodi, opening paths for collective reflection on the meaning of the experiences lived in relation to agribusiness.

In this way, it is possible to perceive the close relationship between the work of memory and the filter of the narrative, whose purpose goes far beyond the mere writing of a cordel. Through the act of narrating — articulated with cultural practices and social movements — a collective consciousness is built that crosses generations, enabling the strengthening of peasant culture and class struggle.

Art and social struggles go hand in hand to the extent that, through their narratives, they bring to light social, historical, and environmental issues in a broad way. In cordel literature, there is a true epic of the "history of the vanquished", in which the struggles, joys and mourning of the peoples of the countryside are inscribed. To continue these narratives is, therefore, to preserve and update an ancestral culture of oral matrix that continues to resist the so-called "advances" of progress.

#### 4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reflections developed throughout this article have made it possible to highlight how modern capitalist society interferes decisively in the ability to exchange transmissible experiences, due to a way of life structured by permanent competition, the fragmentation of social time and the instrumentalization of human relations. In this context, authentic experience — understood, in a Benjaminian key, as the meaning of life built communally from the links with tradition — has been progressively replaced by isolated and discontinuous experiences, producing a generalized impoverishment of collective experiences.

This impoverishment, which Walter Benjamin identified as a new form of barbarism, manifests itself in the decline of the figure of the narrator and in the corrosion of traditional forms of memory transmission. This process has a particularly intense impact on rural peoples, whose narratives, knowledge and cultural practices are systematically made invisible in the name of a discourse of progress that legitimizes the expropriation of land, environmental destruction and the weakening of peasant ways of life.

It is in this critical horizon that this article sought to demonstrate that cordel literature cannot be understood as a mere folkloric record or secondary aesthetic manifestation, but as a form of aesthetic and social experience capable of preserving, transmitting and updating collective memories. By articulating narrative, orality and tradition, the cordel re-inscribes in the present historical experiences of

rural peoples, operating as a privileged space for symbolic resistance and critical elaboration of social reality.

The analysis of the cordel *The curse of pesticides or what agribusiness does* showed how this form of popular art acts as a true narrative archive of peasant struggles, allowing the experiences of historically oppressed subjects to be narrated from their own references. It is a cultural practice that breaks with the logic of the homogeneous and progressive time of capital, repositioning the memory of the vanquished as a critical criterion for understanding history.

By assuming cordel literature as an object of philosophical reflection, the analysis also produces relevant epistemological impacts, by tensioning traditional hierarchies that separate erudite and popular knowledge. Recognizing the cordel as a bearer of experience, memory, and narrative implies questioning the hegemonic criteria of legitimization of knowledge and broadening the field of critical thinking to include forms of knowledge historically marginalized by modern rationality.

On the political level, this type of approach contributes to understanding culture as a field of dispute. Peasant narratives cease to occupy a residual place and begin to operate as a critical force capable of unveiling the structural contradictions of contemporary capitalism, especially in the context of agribusiness. Collective memory, in this sense, does not appear as a simple evocation of the past, but as an active instrument of denunciation, resistance and vindication of historical justice. From a formative point of view, the analysis points to the need for educational and cultural practices that place narrative, orality and experience at the center of training processes. By valuing popular cultural expressions as fundamental mediations of critical learning, the work dialogues directly with the field of education and with the urgency of resisting the reduction of human education to technical training and functional adaptation to the market.

In this way, it is argued that cordel literature contributes to the rescue of the figure of the narrator within the peasant culture, not as nostalgia for an idealized past, but as a concrete possibility of reactivating the experience in a world marked by its crisis. By preserving collective memory and oral tradition, cordel reaffirms itself as a fundamental cultural asset to think about history against the grain of capitalist progress and to strengthen forms of life that insist on resisting modern barbarism, keeping open the possibility of new ways of narrating, remembering and transforming the world.

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