

Experiences, knowledge and actions produced by rural women in São Rafael/RN, Brazil

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Abstract

We aimed to contribute to the unveiling of the existing inequalities between men and women. To this end, a bibliographical survey was conducted on Gender Geography and Social Movements, the main categories of analysis of this research. Among the main authors were Monk and García-Ramon (1987), Francisco (2011), Ferrante (1982), Seager and Olson (1986), Karsten and Meertens (1991-1992), Calió (1992) and Gonh (2000). Then, led by the emphasis on investigating the daily experiences of the Women Producers of Desterro we conducted interviews, direct observations, analyses and discussions in light of the Theory of Social Representations. We found that the handicraft activity with the carnauba stalk and straw, performed by the Women Producers of Desterro is a knowledge produced by these women, contributing to the change of the existing social arrangement in the place, giving these women autonomy and empowerment. This shows that social roles have been defined, knowledge has been generated, and social practices produced, especially the systems of actions linked to being a woman in this inland community in the Brazilian Northeast through the collective organization called the Community Association of Desterro Producers.

Keywords: Being a woman. Field. Knowledges. Doings.

Experiências, saberes e fazeres produzidos pelas mulheres do campo em São Rafael/RN, Brasil

Resumo

Objetivamos contribuir com o desvelamento das desigualdades existentes entre homens e mulheres. Para tanto, foi realizado levantamento bibliográfico sobre a Geografia de Gênero e Movimentos Sociais, principais categorias de análise dessa pesquisa. Dentre os autores principais destacam-se Monk e García-Ramon (1987), Francisco (2011), Ferrante (1982), Seager e Olson (1986),



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Karsten e Meertens (1991-1992), Calió (1992) e Gonh (2000). Em seguida, conduzidos pela ênfase na investigação das experiências do cotidiano das Mulheres Produtoras do Desterro realizamos entrevistas, observações diretas, análises e discussões à luz da Teoria das Representações Sociais. Constatamos que a atividade artesanato com o talo e a palha da carnaúba, realizada pelas Mulheres Produtoras do Desterro constitui-se de um conhecimento produzido por essas mulheres, contribuindo para a alteração do arranjo social existente no Lugar, dando a essas mulheres autonomia e empoderamento. Isso evidencia que papéis sociais foram definidos, saberes foram gerados e práticas sociais produzidas, principalmente os sistemas de ações ligados ao agir do ser mulher nessa comunidade interiorana do Nordeste brasileiro mediante a organização coletiva denominada Associação Comunitária das Mulheres Produtoras do Desterro.

Palavras-chave: Ser Mulher. Campo. Saberes. Fazeres.

1 Introduction

The work results, on the one hand, from the discussions and experiences that we have been developing in the discipline of Supervised Curricular Internship I - Community, with the Interdisciplinary Degree Course in Field Education at the Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA) and, on the other hand, from studies and discussions held in the Studies and Research Group Observatory of Socio-Spatial Inequalities, Territorial Dynamics and Uses of the Territory in the Brazilian Semi-arid, CNPq / UFERSA. Its theme is the experiences, knowledge and doings produced by women producers from/in the rural area of São Rafael/RN, which is located in the Microregion Assu Valley, in the West Potiguar Mesoregion of the State of Rio Grande do Norte, in the light of the approach of Gender Geography.

The Human Geography, as of the 1970's, brings in a more advanced way, the discussion, within the Cultural Geography, of the subfield known as the Gender Geography, with the establishment of conceptual and theoretical bases, aiming at understanding the social-spatial problems that involve gender. This situation represents an advance in Human Geography in the sense of expanding the scope of understanding the problems that involve socio-spatial inequalities, territorial dynamics, and contributing to the process of unveiling how territory is used and by which actors/actresses.



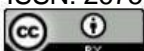


Therefore, "desde mediados de los años 70 ha ido creciendo la producción científica en geografía que adopta un enfoque feminista" (MONK, & GARCÍA-RAMON, 1987, p. 148).

Given the socio-spatial complexity of the current geographical period - the technical-scientific-informational period - there is, today, a diversity of themes and approaches when the subject is women in the geographical approach, because at the beginning of the consideration of systems of actions and spatial practices of these elements of geographical space in Geographical science, the studies were characterized by analyses limited to the search for a specific identity, as well as conceptual and methodological bases for the preparation of studies. Thus, according to Francisco (2011, p. 28), "[...] gender studies initiated in the late seventies originating in the United States of North America, Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy and Holland constitute an academic expression of the women's movement".

Seeking to contribute to the political debate about the issues of inequality of women's status in Brazilian semi-arid society, from an empirical sample of a portion of the semi-arid North of Rio Grande do Sul, this work aims to contribute to the process of unveiling the inequalities between men and women. In this sense, we make use of the contributions of Gender Geography, since it has been installed and developed conceptually and methodologically, enabling us to broaden the range of alternatives for analyzing gender and spatial processes. In this way, the present work seeks to examine the relations of the Geography of Gender and the activities developed by the women producers of the Desterro farm, rural area of São Rafael, in the strategies of family survival, seeking to highlight the educational experiences, knowledge and doings of these women and which theory of knowledge is linked and sustains these systems of actions and practices of/in the field in São Rafael. This is important, among other aspects, because it contributes to the search for the political origins, the issues of inequalities and status of rural women within the organizational/organizational practices in the Brazilian Semi-arid Region.

It is also our claim that the present discussion can contribute to the debate about the need to make visible the reality of women and their roles in the rural areas, in front of

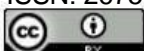




organizational possibilities, their work, their experiences, their knowledge and their importance in the process of maintaining the existence of the family environment, which unfortunately is still little noticed and valued their system of actions against the prevailing patriarchal society. This means that "the work of women in the field, involved in a web of relationships that make them bound to chains that are sometimes invisible, presents itself as a little explored object of study, which is no less important" (FERRANTE, 1982, p. 97). In this sense, knowing that gender relations, for being influenced by conventions, already long pre-established since the Neolithic period of human history and reinforced in the 18th century with the Industrial Revolution, corroborate the construction of systems of objects and systems of actions that constitute a distinct social space for men and women, therefore for the unequal and combined nature of the Places that constitute the geographic space, a fact quite noticeable in the countryside subspaces, especially in the Brazilian semi-arid Northeast.

We also emphasize that when we mention the Neolithic and the Industrial Revolution, we are not referring to the precise dates of the beginning of the process of inequalities between men and women, but to call attention to the roots of the past that are present today and that still show themselves without a conclusion, in view of the complex process of (re)production of capital of which men and women are part and that has always done so in the most diverse and varied cultures. Hence, we imply in a gender approach from the perspective of relations and dynamics of land use that starts from social relations that imply social-spatial configurations and that enables problematizations about culture and spatial dialectics, because this is what a Feminist Geography is about.

Finally, it is important to highlight according to Lara (2016, p. 143) that the authors cited above and those that follow, contributed "[...] to the deepening of the theme, especially the discussion on gender inequality", which allows us to identify systems of actions "[...] of inequality inherent in the discourses, past and present, in the country and region", once "[...] that inequalities between men and women are potentiated in other inequalities, such as social and economic ones".





2 Literature review

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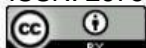
According to Francisco (2011), the main line of studies within the Geography that seeks to discuss the relationship between women and space is the Gender Geography, rooted in feminism, i.e., based on the gender perspective, since it deals with roles socially apprehended by men and women in the context of socio-spatial formations to which they belong. This author also points out that Gender Geography is related to and originates from the geographic thought currents: Neopositivist Geography, Humanist Geography, and Marxist Geography.

According to Monk and García-Ramon (1987, p. 148), two approaches characterized the first feminist studies in Geographical science: "la crítica de la geografía que daba por supuesto que la experiencia masculina equivalía a la experiencia humana en geografía en general, y la descripción empírica de la geografía de las mujeres para demostrar cuán distinta era de la de los hombres".

The theoretical and methodological foundations of Gender Geography have been and are being established through the development of work and research by geographers and geographers from different parts of the world, through the emergence of research and approach themes.

Although bringing an empirical dimension to the reflection in this research: knowledge, experiences and forms of organization of a group of women from the Brazilian semiarid region, we do not aim to fall into the mere description as already denounced by Seager and Olson (1986, p. 8) apud Francisco (2011, p. 28), when they state that: "during the last ten years much more has been known about the lives and experiences of women in all parts of the world".

For Karsten and Meetens (1991-1992, p. 182-183), they state that "the pioneer stage of women's studies in geography was characterized by the search for an identity of its own and, therefore, precise conceptual and methodological requirements for research practice were established".



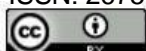


According to Calió (1992, p. 3), one of the paths indicated today for Gender studies in Geography is the one that is "[...] based on the question of gender relations applied to the analysis of the social and spatial structure of societies. This perspective implies, on the one hand, that we take into consideration the premise that the inequalities between men and women cannot be understood outside of a dialectic approach that seeks to bring into the analysis process the capitalism as one of the causes of this process and, on the other hand, that it is an analysis that also takes into consideration the lived experience of women in their places and their forms of collective organization, such as the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro. This means that access to public places, as well as the distribution of the collectively produced wealth and the access to the equipments of citizenship, whether in the countryside or in the city, is not experienced in the same way by men and women, therefore, it is constituted by an unequal relationship, as Calió (1992, p. 7) puts it very well: "isolated in the private space of the home or to its public extension (the health center, the pharmacy, the hospital, the store, the supermarket, the market, the butcher store, the bakery, the school, the park, etc.), they wage an incessant struggle against the clock, trying to manage their daily lives."

It was seeking to overcome and break this barrier that women from the rural area of São Rafael decided to organize and fight for collective improvements, showing that the social movement as a system of collective actions built through sociopolitical character by these social agents gives success and benefit to the collectivity. This shows that social movements

[...]politicize their demands and create a political field of social force in civil society. Their actions are structured on the basis of repertoires created on issues and problems in situations of conflict, litigation, and dispute. The actions develop a social and political-cultural process that creates a collective identity for the movement, based on common interests. This identity derives from the strength of the solidarity principle and is constructed from the referential base of cultural and political values shared by the group (GONH, 2000, p. 13).

Starting in the second half of the 20th century, several experiences of social organization of women began to emerge in the Brazilian Northeast, creating links



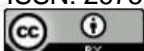


between them and connections and exchanges with other social actors, seeking to confront and overcome the economic and family difficulties that are present in the lives of most poor women from the sertão.

In the Brazilian semi-arid region, economic and gender relations still maintain strong traces of the colonial era, since it is still possible to clearly perceive a system of actions and a system of objects constitutive of subsistence agriculture, as well as a family structure organized along patriarchal lines, in which women's work, most of the time hard, becomes invisible and their freedom and sexuality controlled, especially because they are from the rural areas and because of their condition as women. Such reality makes the social representation of the country woman as a female figure confined to the drought environment and submissive to the male authority common.

In contrast to this social representation and image that is in the social imaginary, another social representation is vivid, such as the one we see in São Rafael. Women of courage, resistance, and struggle are organized in association, facing the natural, social, and historical conditions of the belonging socio-spatial formation, invoking autonomy and equity. This is visible in the speeches of these women, where from the development of handicrafts with carnauba, improvements such as: "source of income" and/or "improvement of income" are recurrent in their speeches. Such reality draws our attention to the fact that it is through social representations that the social-spatial subjects give meaning to the world, since "they [the social representations] circulate in discourses, are brought by words and conveyed in messages and media images, crystallized in behaviors and in material and spatial organizations" (JODELET, 2001, p. 17-18). Thus, the expressions above show a little of the trajectory of the rural women workers in the semiarid region, situated within the dynamics of social relations, in which issues related to gender are part of a movement built in the midst of social contradictions that provide the conditions for collective organization.

This means that in the field of human sciences we cannot fail to consider these narratives, as they reflect many other histories and geographies of many other women's organizations in the Brazilian semiarid region where the struggles faced by these women



can gain more respect, because there are several claims sought and achieved: generation of their own income, access to health services, access to water, etc., a fact that breaks the social representation and also the condition of passive and of just people whose home and domestic chores were their competence. Thus, the effective empowerment of these women would not be possible without their active participation in movements and the creation of the association, as well as the possibilities that non-formal education plays in the roll of collective organizations, since it is, in a broader sense, the educational construction that covers the set of influences of the natural and social environment and that affects the development of men and women in their active relations with the social environment (LIBÂNEO, 2007). This means that "The practices of non-formal education are usually developed outside the school walls, in social organizations, in movements, in training programs on human rights, citizenship, identity practices, struggles against inequalities and social exclusions" (Gohn, 2009, p. 31), such as the Association of Women Producers of Desterro in São Rafael.

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Characterization of the study area and geographical location

The Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro (5°51'58.29 "S 36°50'56.69 "O) is located 8 km southeast of the town of São Rafael, in the Assu Valley Microregion, in the West Potiguar Mesoregion of the State of Rio Grande do Norte. The area where the settlement of Desterro is located is geologically characterized by large granite outcrops, in the form of inselbergs.

The climate is semi-arid, with rainfall concentrated in the period from January to July and the predominant vegetation is the subarboreal caatinga, with abundance of cactaceous and plants of low size and scattered.

Figure 01 – Panoramic View of Sítio Desterro, Rural Area of the Municipality of São Rafael/RN, Where Our Research Was Conducted



Source: Google Street View, 2012.

3.2 Research Classification

This work, from the point of view of research classification, is classified, according to Gil (2007), as to its purpose as exploratory research and, as to the means, as bibliographic research and field research. As for its nature, it is qualitative. In this way, we began the methodological procedures with a bibliographic survey about the Geography of Gender and Social Movements, the main categories of analysis of this research. Next, guided by the emphasis on the investigation of the daily experiences of the women producers of Desterro, we carried out interviews, observations, analyses, and discussions about the investigated theme in the light of the Theory of Social Representations.

3.3 Research Procedure

The methodological procedures consisted of data collection through bibliographic research and field data collection, with the women producers of Desterro.

3.3.1 Bibliographic Survey

We used books, articles and doctoral theses related to the Geography of Gender and Social Movements, as well as a diagnosis about the knowledge process, practices



and experiences transmitted in the face-to-face relationship and/or through social relations constitutive of non-formal and informal education, through the empirical knowledge of the authors and visits related to the Supervised Curricular Internship I - Community, in the scope of the Interdisciplinary Degree Course in Rural Education at UFERSA.

3.3.2 Data Collection in the Field

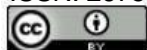
Initially, we prepared a questionnaire for the women producers of Desterro, consisting of questions about their profile, practices, knowledge, and experiences. Next, we prepared another questionnaire, also composed of questions about the profile and the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro. The latter was developed with the president of the association through a recorded and transcribed interview, just as it was done with regard to the collection procedure with the women producers of carnauba stem and straw handicrafts from this association.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Contribution to the Geography of Gender and Social Movements in the Brazilian Semi-arid: Experiences, Knowledge and Doings Produced by Rural Women in São Rafael/RN, Brazil

The Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro was founded on November 23, 2002, through the desire of a group of women to improve their community, among them a better family income and access to social programs and services. The association produces and sells several products made with local raw materials, especially carnauba straw, such as baskets, trunks, bottles, bags, vases, fruit bowls, American games, and lamps.

The institution has a total of 63 members and five active in the production of handicrafts from carnauba stalk and straw, which, these five, constituted the universe interviewed/investigated in this work.



According to Cascudo (1964, p. 192), "It can be said that nothing is lost from the carnauba", in the sense that the number of uses of this plant is large, especially by the man and woman of the countryside in their daily activities, through the use of its parts, from the seed to the wax that is extracted from its leaves, which was the main responsible for the high commercial value of the tree during a certain period in the economy of Rio Grande do Norte, that is, right after the First World War, as highlighted by Felipe Carvalho (2002). In this economic and utilitarian perspective of this tree in the context of the Brazilian Northeast, there is the employment of human activities, from the extraction of its fibers, straw and stalks in the making of handicrafts, as seen in the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro in São Rafael.

The construction of the headquarters came after the creation of the Association, inaugurated on May 04, 2005, with resources from the Solidarity Development Program of the Government of the State of Rio Grande do Norte, which released R\$ 26,745.25 for the construction of the headquarters, plus about R\$ 2,972.54 of members' contribution in labor, which had a total of 29,717.80, including the construction of the headquarters, training of women, construction and purchase of work equipment for members.

Named Centro Múltiplo (Multiple Center) (**Figure 2**), the headquarters of the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro is a geographic fixture that symbolizes a lot of happiness for these women, since it refers to a place where several activities developed in the community are carried out and where the carnauba stalk and straw handicrafts are made.

Figure 2 – Plaque of the Inauguration of the Headquarters of the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro, Rural Zone of São Rafael/RN



Source: Patrícia Maraísa de Souza, 2017.

The space represents a landmark of the struggle and achievement of women for a dignified life in the community and the search for development activities that promote local development in the rural area of the semi-arid region, having a very significant social and environmental value for this collective of women and, therefore, for the community of Desterro.

The activities developed in the Association consist of handcrafting the carnauba stalk and straw (**Figure 3**), activity performed every afternoon during the week by a collective of five women, who with an incredible skill in handling the carnauba stalk and straw transform them into very talented and knowledgeable manifestation pieces, among which: hats, mats, bags, baskets etc.. In the association it is also developed, three times a week, the Pro-Jovem Saberes do Campo (Youngsters of Rural Knowledge) and, once a month, the space becomes the center of attention of the Family Health Program (PSF). The headquarters also houses a Creole seed bank, formed and maintained by the members; a library built with book donations by people from the community who have achieved personal success in formal education and by receiving books from the Ministry of Agrarian Development's Arca das Letras Program, which came to complement the collection. In addition, the association's space is used to hold community meetings in

which they seek to debate and discuss improvements for the community with fundraising and projects aimed at local sustainable development.

Figure 3 – Woman Making Handicrafts from Carnauba Stalk and Straw in the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro, in São Rafael/RN

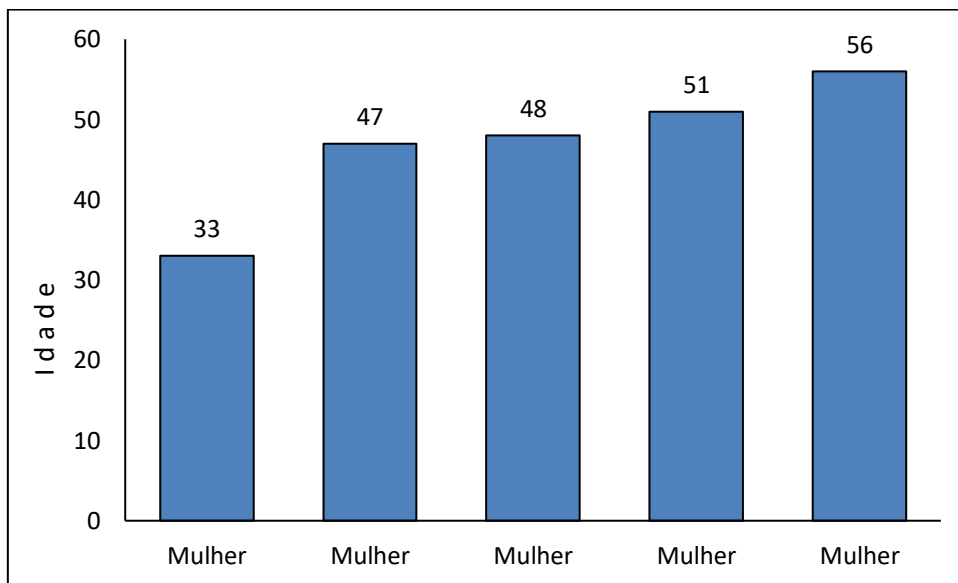


Source: Patrícia Maraísa de Souza, 2017.

Requests for orders can be made to any of the partners. In the case of large orders, a meeting is held with all of them to agree on prices and estimated time for completion and delivery of the product/s.

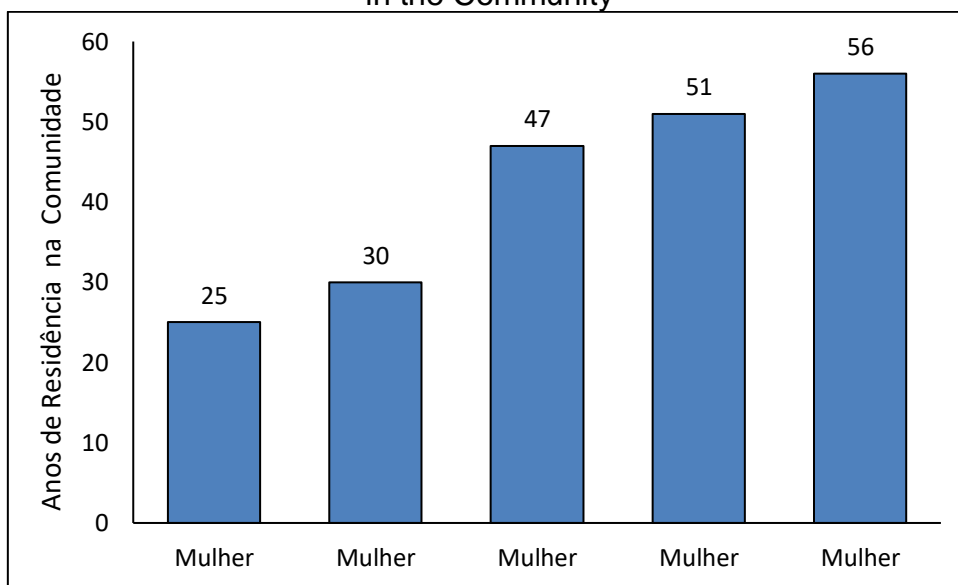
The profile of these women active in the carnauba stalk and straw handicraft is made up as follows:

Chart 1 – Variation in the Age of the Women Producers of Carnauba Palm and Straw Handicrafts from the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro



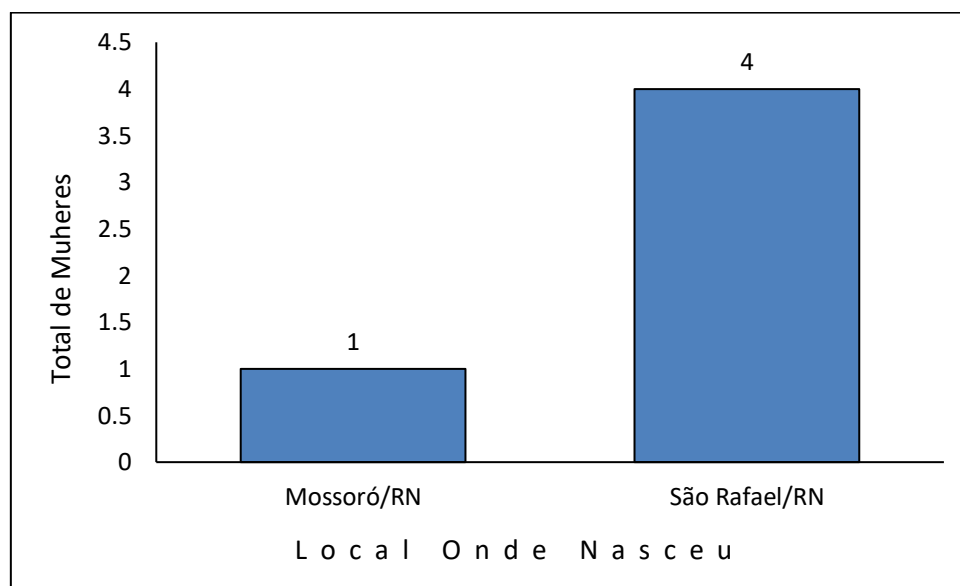
Source:Field Research, 2018.

Chart 2 – Variation of the residence time of the women producers of the Carnaúba stalk and straw handcraft, from the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro, in the Community



Source:Field Research, 2018.

Chart 3 – Birthplace of the Women Producers of the Carnauba Stalk and Carnauba Straw Handicraft, of the Community Association of Women Producers of Desterro



Source:Field Research, 2018.

According to the data above, we notice that the age of the Women Producers of Desterro varies from thirty-three to fifty-six years old, with most of them being over forty years old. Regarding the time of residence in this community, we noticed a significant affective bond, since most or all of the years of life lived in the community, since, in addition, almost all of them were born in São Rafael.

In addition to making handicrafts from the carnauba stalk and straw, these women have subsistence farming, fishing, and work in the family home as their occupation, which shows a multiplicity of tasks performed by these socio-spatial agents. The income varies from R\$ 200.00 to R\$ 930.00 reais, distributed as follows: one woman has R\$ 200.00, another R\$ 300.00, and the others (the other three) have a monthly income of R\$ 930.00.

In relation to education, one member has a degree (in Pedagogy), who is the president of the Association, while three have incomplete elementary school education and one has completed high school education. Four of them are married and one is single, the married ones having a total of 2 to 4 children.

The reasons why this group of women decided to work with handicraft products made from the carnauba stalk and straw stem from the decision built in a meeting from

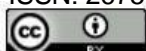


the same, in which the Coordinator of the Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Enterprises (SEBRAE) of Assu/RN participated, at the invitation of the president. Thus, from a joint reflection on the local potentialities, they defined the handicraft made with the carnauba stalk and straw. From then on, the activity with this raw material started to constitute a series of dynamics and changes in the lives of these socio-spatial agents from this part of the Brazilian semiarid region, conquering, despite the little but significant income, family income generation and a certain autonomy in relation to their husbands, because, according to them, before they only bought certain products if their husbands gave them money. In this way, this collective was able to promote the construction of a new social representation of/in the community, because besides these achievements, they are also able to bring projects to benefit the community.

Next, we analyze the experiences, the knowledge, and the actions of the Women Producers of Desterro, in order to understand the articulations, trajectories, and strategies linked to this collective organization of female rural workers in the Brazilian semiarid region. With this reflection, we want to reflect on the emancipation of these rural workers, their articulations and strategies to obtain space and recognition, articulating the categories class and gender in the geographic analysis, thus avoiding generalizations.

In relation to the knowledge of the women producers of Desterro, we noticed that this knowledge is made up of the lived world, that is, of the daily experiences that take place in the surroundings, whether in the relationships at home or in the Association. Some, for example, cite the Association as a space for struggle, based on the union and the work they develop as a group. Such engagement is visualized in view of the social representations that the members have of work, of education, and of the Association itself. In their speeches we find, among other aspects, a knowledge of *tácito*, this is called by Moscovici (2003), creator of the Theory of Social Representations, a consensual universe, where common sense prevails and that reveals the existence of "wise amateurs" and a "society of amateur thinkers", revealing that

by the way, these 'wise amateurs' - and we all are in one domain or another - inhabit the world of conversation, with their habits of documentalists – a little bit





self-taught, somewhat encyclopedic - they often remain prisoners of prejudices, of finished visions, dialects taken from the world of discourse - and we can only bow down. However, they reveal to us, that individuals, in their everyday life, are not just these passive machines to obey devices, into which a summary social psychology, reduced to collecting opinions and images, wanted to transform them. On the contrary, they possess the freshness of imagination and the desire to give meaning to the society and universe they belong to (MOSCOVICI, 1978, p. 56).

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It is with respect to this theory that we look into the universe of conversation, the shared knowledge, that is, their social representations, to unveil the local reality (Sítio Desterro, Rural Zone of São Rafael), as well as the identity of these wise amateurs that is established by the context lived, throughout the daily life.

Let's see some speeches (ip litteris) that reveal, among other aspects, the struggle of these women regarding the confrontation of living conditions:

"The purpose was an income for the women who depended on their husband, on farming" (RC);

"Ah! The association came to help us, to get together, to get the group together [...]" (FC);

"To have a source of income, to work together with the women of the community, to have a [pause] a better future! (RM).

In rural families it is common for women to be responsible for domestic duties, and this role is socially relegated, as mentioned above. The head of the family (men) is responsible for its sustenance through manual labor: agriculture, cattle raising, and other economic activities that make the rural space dynamic. Such context, although notably present, is overcome when the importance of autonomy for the women of the countryside emerges. The speeches above reinforce this assumption by pointing out the self-organization of female workers in the search for the recognition of their economic contribution through handicrafts, in addition to taking care of the house and the family. The origin, in the past, of this search for the emancipation of women in general can be linked to the French Revolution, responsible for this feminine uprising, for having in its core the thoughts of equality, fraternity, and freedom and in what concerns the time-space- Today, such ideals have intensified with the aggregation of different currents of





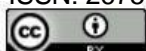
thought and media representation. In the context of the Brazilian semi-arid region, this is due to the diffusion of the search for rights and access of collective organizations that are present in several places in the Brazilian Northeast, whose protagonists are rural women workers. These elements (information) that are part of the reified universe, according to Moscovici (2003), are reinterpreted (in an inter-communication with the consensual universe - built above all in the associations when they hold their meetings), from the processes of interaction and communication to translate a lived reality. This is how these rural women in São Rafael ratify their belonging to the group and explore the same possibility as being a propellant of autonomy, engagement, union, and respect from the community they belong to.

With regard to the actions of the women producers of Desterro, we understand, from what we observed, that tradition is a transmitting element of this practice, a fact that is consistent with the way they have learned to prepare the weft of objects made of carnauba stalk and straw. Transmitted, this knowledge, which is translated into making throughout the generations, acquires a characteristic, although its own, but with traces of a relationship coming from informal education and non-formal education built and shared over time, being a guide for action (ABRIC, 1998). This means that, in the craft production of the Women Producers of Desterro, the work process is characterized and integrated between knowing and doing, having, in the words of Alegre (1988, p. 14), "[...] a fusion between intellectual elaboration and technical expertise, between 'ingenuity and art', art and work".

It is for this reason that Caxile (2019, p. 4) draws our attention to the fact that,

the word 'tradition', [...] reaches its full meaning when it refers to the dimension-time-space of the group's living and experience. It is constituted in the past to allow the present to orient itself in a continuum and by means of an impulse toward tomorrow. Tradition exists only as an act of community. It establishes a partnership with a group, that is, a community creates itself.

Considering that handicraft work is not highly valued, the Women Producers of Desterro emphasize a reality: the fact that, over time, handicrafts have become less valued through the new technical apparatuses of product elaboration, a fact that impacts





in the artisans' economic conditions, evidencing that "the production of knowledge at work is engaged in a debate of values" (SCHWARTZ, 2003, p. 26).

In this regard, the words of Alegre (1994, p. 12) are salutary):

The Industrial Revolution strongly accentuated the differentiation. As hands were replaced by machines, the masters of trades suffered a new decline: technology stripped them of their authority in the knowledge of their work, stripped them of the social dignity they had badly wounded as owners of certain knowledge, deprived them of remuneration commensurate with the quality of what they performed.

Therefore, still according to this same author (Alegre, 1988, 1994), in the Brazilian Northeast, despite having managed to preserve for longer the best-regarded craft work, it did not obtain a satisfactory financial return, a reality quite visible in relation to the Women Producers of Desterro and in other collective organizations present in the interior of the Northeastern semi-arid region, a fact that deserves more attention and investigations that aim to make this reality more visible, given the local importance in the communities where they occur.

Last but not least, another reality that calls our attention concerns the intersubjectivation of a Freirean premise: knowledge and actions that are collectively built and intersubjectively shared. In other words, the system of actions and the objects produced by the Women Producers of Desterro show that: "no one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men [and women] educate each other, mediated [and mediated] by the world" (FREIRE, 1975, p. 63) lived.

4 Final considerations

Among the conclusive elements of this article, we highlight some findings that corroborate the objective pursued and, at the same time, present challenges and perspectives related to the experiences, knowledge, and actions of the Women Producers of Desterro.

Despite the fact that we live in a society whose hallmark is the systemic presence of technique, science, information, finance, norms, and politics acting on the formations of

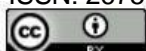




the human being, we have not been able to reach a consensus on how to deal with these issues, although there is a tendency to replace manual work with industrial work, the collective articulation that promotes the transformation of simple materials from the environment into artisanal activities may represent and constitute a mechanism to promote sustainable development, a fact that deserves to be more valued and disseminated, especially in the context of the Brazilian semiarid region, in the face of the process of promoting the goals of sustainable development, which all societies should strive to achieve by 2030, according to the United Nations, as well as in the context of the process of living with the semiarid region, in which handicrafts made from the carnauba stalk and straw are an alternative with its creative and subsistence dimension.

Being a result of a learning process transmitted through cultural tradition, the handicraft with the carnauba stalk and straw is part of the movement of knowledge construction and, therefore, of learning throughout the life of the Women Producers of Desterro, facilitating, through collective organization, the domestic and working life and, therefore, the survival in the field. This highlights the importance of the debate around the issues and themes related to the Geography of Gender in the context of the Brazilian semi-arid region, bringing to light the need for analysis of collective organizations led by people who are still on the verge of invisibility and insignificance, unveiling the constant inequalities between men and women that still persist and highlighting the importance that collective work has in the lives of these people and the knowledge and skills as forms of knowledge related to survival and, not only as a cultural tradition transmitted and maintained for generations, but made significant and active in improving the lives of people who are connected to it.

The handicraft of carnauba stalk and straw made by the women producers of Desterro is understood as a knowledge produced by these women who hold and reproduce it, contributing to the maintenance of the change in the existing social arrangement in Desterro village. This shows that social roles have been defined, knowledge was generated and social practices were produced, especially the systems of





actions connected to being a woman in this community in the interior of the Brazilian Northeast.

Thus, we could see that knowledge is and has been passed on between generations, being of great use in the lives of these women. Learning how to deal with the carnauba stalk and straw, transforming them into utensils or decorative pieces, is a technique not only related to the tradition of the Desterro settlement, but mainly a knowledge applied to that semi-arid reality in the service of emancipation and survival, once the links with the products made with the carnauba stalk and straw are translated into actions linked to survival.

Finally, we understand that the reality of those women who dedicate themselves to craft work is an invitation to instigate analysis and reflection about the factors that involve women in the context of the semi-arid and to think about the transmission of knowledge that is not done through standardized ways, but through informal and non-formal situations, highlighting its importance in places where this practice occurs, referring a representational content of a system of actions of the Association's communicative action in question, essential to confront the sociocultural conditions to which women are subjected in the Brazilian semi-arid.

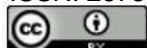
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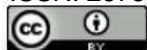
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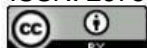
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