


Identity: "Goat marked for death"

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ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the problem of peasant identity in Paraíba, from a dialogue with cinematography. The text was anchored both in authors who discuss the theme of peasant identity, as well as in images in visual resources. The complete research is being developed together with the doctoral program in History at the University of Passo Fundo – UPF.

Keywords: Identity, Peasant, Cinema.

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INTRODUCTION

The invention of the peasant in the Northeast reveals itself as a complex process, rooted in the intricate historical and social webs that have shaped the region over time. This social construction, which goes beyond a mere occupational categorization, is marked by particular dynamics that reflect the interaction between economic, political and cultural factors.

By observing the Northeastern context, it is possible to perceive the emergence of the peasant as a distinctive social figure. This is not just a product of agricultural activities, but a social creation that develops in response to a complex set of circumstances. The relationship with the land, the struggle for survival in often adverse conditions, and the interaction with political systems shaped the identity of the peasant in the Northeast.

The historicity of this invention lies in the resistance and resilience of these communities in the face of historical challenges, such as drought and social inequalities. The figure of the peasant emerges not only as a rural worker, but as a protagonist in the narrative of resistance, adaptability, and preservation of local cultures.

Moreover, the invention of the peasant is inseparable from the economic dynamics of the region. The relations of production, often marked by forms of exploitation, shaped the identity and position of the peasant in the social structure. Its invention is intrinsically linked to the economic transformations that marked the history of the Northeast.

In the midst of these complexities, it is critical to understand the invention of the peasant as a dynamic phenomenon, subject to change and adaptation over time. Their identity is forged not only by historical conditions, but also by constant interaction with other social and political spheres.

Thus, the invention of the peasant in the Northeast transcends the simplification of an occupational category. It represents a social construct that encapsulates the richness of experiences, resistances and adaptations over time, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexity of rural life in the region.

In the heart of Paraíba, a scenario is drawn where cultural roots are intertwined with the land, forging the rich Brazilian peasant ideals. In this region, the lives of peasants transcend mere agricultural activity, transforming into a living narrative of resistance, resilience and a deep connection to the land they cultivate.

Peasant wisdom, passed down from generation to generation, is a testament to the intricate relationship between the people and the rural environment. Oral traditions, ancestral agricultural practices, and reverence for nature converge to create a unique cultural fabric where knowledge of the countryside is as valuable as the soil that sustains crops.

The apparent simplicity of peasant life in Paraíba hides a rich complexity. The peasants, for the most part, personify the figure of the family farmer, whose daily life is permeated by natural



cycles and the unpredictability of the seasons. However, this apparent simplicity is a reflection of the deep understanding these individuals have of land, plants, and community relationships.

Solidarity is a cornerstone of the Paraíba peasant ideal. In rural communities, cooperation is an intrinsic necessity for survival. The sharing of knowledge, resources and efforts becomes a way of life, strengthening social bonds and consolidating the unity that permeates these communities.

The relationship with the earth is not only economic, but spiritual. The stories told in the shade of the trees, the celebrations that coincide with the seasons, and the reverence for natural cycles testify to a spirituality deeply rooted in peasant life. Every planting is an act of faith, every harvest a celebration of the sacred connection between man and nature.

However, this peasant ideology is not without its challenges. Modernization and changing weather patterns pose threats to the stability that these communities have traditionally enjoyed. The struggle for the preservation of traditions, for agrarian justice and for the recognition of the vital importance of peasants in the construction of Brazilian identity thus becomes a constant battle.

In Paraíba, peasant ideals are more than a cultural expression. It's a living narrative, rooted in the fertile lands and the lives dedicated to cultivating them. This narrative, loaded with stories of resistance and hope, echoes not only in the fields, but in the soul of the people who shape and are shaped by the peasant tradition (DURVAL, 2003).

Durval (2003) chooses to approach a narrative with a male perspective, considering it a historiographical territory that has been little explored. Its intention is to highlight the mistaken assumption that history, over time, has predominantly been the history of men. The justification for her analytical approach lies in the theoretical critique directed at a part of historiography that neglects the excluded, women, and sexuality. This critique is influenced by the currents of Marxism, psychoanalysis and the phenomenological existentialism of Sartre and Simone Beauvoir, which exclude man from the historiographical scenario.

The use of excerpts that intertwine the discourses on the masculine and feminine, covering themes ranging from the rural and urban to the empire and republic, public and private, industry and agriculture, mill and mill, nature and society, within the context of modernity and progress that characterized the twentieth century, specifically between 1920 and 1940 (DURVAL, 2003).

When Durval (2003, p. 21) states that "if everything is men's history, then it does not exist", he clearly establishes the purpose of his research. This is not a comprehensive narrative about the history of humanity as a species, but focuses on the study of the male gender. Unlike part of historiography that, influenced by Marxism, categorizes the masculine and feminine genders as separate and homogeneous realities, the author does not adhere to this dichotomy. This critical approach extends to the historiography of women, the excluded, sexuality and even gender.



Albuquerque Júnior's book does not fit into the perspective that presupposes the existence of a "female psyche" as opposed to a "male psyche", with asymmetrical experiences between a rational, pragmatic and utilitarian "male self" and an irrational, sentimental and fanciful "female self", as proposed by authors such as Nancy Chodorow, Joseph Pleck and David Lisak. Moreover, he does not submit to the dichotomy between public and private sphere, often imposed by theorists such as Habermas.

The book does not adopt a victimizing or masculinist discourse, which would confer on men the status of victims of psychic and social factors. This stance, which has found adherents in Brazil, as exemplified by Sócrates Nolasco, is not embraced by the work in question.

It is, therefore, a thorough investigation that required at least four years of work and its main objective is the analysis, from a gender perspective, of the historical and cultural construction of the identity of the Northeast. This identity is transmitted to the present day through representations such as "male goat", "plague goat", symbol of virility and strength, "bully" and brave, among others. The author, Albuquerque Júnior, who holds a PhD in Social History from the State University of Campinas and a post-doctorate in Education from the University of Barcelona, seeks to deconstruct the image that has been outlined and redrawn throughout an extensive cultural and intellectual production since the beginning of the twentieth century.

After the publication of previous works, including "The Invention of the Northeast and Other Arts" (Cortez/Massangana, 1999) and several books and articles, many of them centered on the theme of the male gender, Albuquerque Júnior presents his most recent contribution: "Northeastern: an invention of the phallus – a history of the male gender (Northeast – 1920/1940)".

In the first chapter, the author, based on the work "Order and Progress" by Gilberto Freyre and on material from writers of the *Diário de Pernambuco*, reconstructs a traditionalist discourse that saw the social changes in the Northeast, between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1940s, as a process of feminization of society. The transformations that pointed to the breakdown of social hierarchies, the advance of modernity, the rise of the Republic and the progressive victory of the city over the countryside were described in terms that referred to gender meanings, suggesting a feminization of society. This discourse used metaphors that embodied the historical changes in the feminine, representing women who challenged the traditional role of men, the role of father and patriarch, observing with anguish an era in which men lost their virility. This process, as described by Gilberto Freyre, has been identified as the decline of patriarchal society.

The author exposes how in male discourses gender boundaries seemed to be blurring: women adopted haircuts *à la garçon*, while men abandoned their beards. On the one hand, the demands of fashion and the refinement of modern life led men to adopt a delicacy in their words, gestures, and attitudes, resulting in a transformation that made them less rigid and seemed to weaken their virility



and potency (p. 49). On the other hand, there was a significant increase in the participation of women in the public sphere, especially in the field of letters, generating anxiety among men.

Frequently, male discourses sought to reaffirm the supposed intellectual superiority of men over women, indicating, in the author's view, a growing insecurity among men on this point. These changes show a process of horizontalization of customs, in which verticality and hierarchy were being threatened by the advancement of the feminine in society. This phenomenon was accompanied by the dissolution of the boundaries between ethnicities and races after Abolition, by the progressive entry of previously excluded sectors into politics with the arrival of the Republic, and by the fall of the society that previously called itself patriarchal.

The prevalence of urban social interactions to the detriment of rural ones resulted in the imposition of artificiality and masculinization on the female body. By contrast, bachelors were characterized by their paleness, thinness, and slumped shoulders, even though they were considered intelligent. Both cases illustrate the blurring of the boundaries between masculine and feminine.

In the context of marriage, the ideas of transformation, with the tendency to break down hierarchy and horizontalize relationships, are rooted in romanticism. This movement proposes that couples would no longer be united by economic interests, but rather by love, becoming an instrument that would allow women to choose their suitors. This poses a threat to the realization of traditional marriages, marking a feminization of relationships.

Another relevant aspect is the transition from the Empire to the Republic. With the Republic, a secular religion emerges that worships women and exalts love, an "ideal type of Mary", promoting an egalitarian sisterhood and a paternalistic hierarchical breakdown. Republican intellectuals were associated with feminine subtlety and delicacy. The change in the balance of power between men and women is undeniable, reflecting the trend towards equality and horizontalization in urban life, bringing women into the spotlight in the public sphere and questioning the decay of rural life and the patriarchal model.

In the urban environment, the transformations brought about by factories have impacted food customs, abandoning the tradition of good cuisine. This posed a threat to masculinity, leaving men more vulnerable and prone to health problems such as increased suicides and alcoholism. Community life was reduced to rare moments, contributing to the homogenization of cities, which came to resemble young people who did not belong to traditional families.

The author points out that the construction of the identity of the Northeastern man aims to replace the society based on the bloodline, where gender codes were predominantly private, with a configuration of sociabilities centered on the individual. In this context, gender identity increasingly becomes a personal choice. However, the author points out that social codes become more rigid and practices more vigilant, subject to detailed description and analysis.



The author's conclusion points out that around the twenties of the last century, a northeastern identity emerged, elaborated in the discourse of the elites, later internalized as a defining element of identity for the entire population of the region. This identity is characterized by stereotypes such as that of the Northeasterner, associated with a rural type, resistant to modern transformations, reactive to social changes and representative of an agrarian and patriarchal society. The author highlights the image of the exacerbated male who opposes social changes associated with the feminization of society.

In this context, the male world seems self-sufficient, excluding women not only from this world, but also from the region itself, where the "male woman" is perceived as a natural requirement. The author argues that this concept of the Northeast is a point of convergence of several historical events and results from a set of operations that construct a regional historical subject, playing a significant role in the political and cultural history of Brazil.

Thus, the work is important for the discussion of gender by contributing to the understanding of masculine and feminine not only as essentialized poles, but as elements that need to be thought about in their subjective multiplicities and in other possible ways of being man and woman. The author proposes to question the social legitimacy beyond the stereotype of the male and his submissive companion.

In view of this, the tense and violent climate in the rural area of Paraíba, from the 1950s onwards, was intense, to the point of becoming a documentary film. Thus, this article addresses some questions related to the relevance of the memory and identity of those people and, based on the documentary film directed by filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, which was based on the life of João Pedro Teixeira and the Peasant League of Sapé. To this end, the text was discussed by Joël Candau, a theorist who addresses the issues of memory and identity.

In this way, the agrarian question has always existed in Brazil, generating endless disputes, especially those dealing with peasants and landowners in republican times. When we go back to the 1950s, we have the fuse of this crisis, mainly caused by the changes that occurred in the countryside, due to mechanization, to what we call the modernization of agriculture.

Another aggravating factor of the crisis occurred with the implementation of sugarcane cultivation on several fronts, with the Northeast region, the former place of sugarcane cultivation, being the pivot. Thus, the evictions of the peasants from the land took place, due to the *foro*, a system that used the exchange of cultivating the land, while paying a fixed amount in kind to the owner of the land.

There were several mobilizations in the countryside, among them, the creation of charitable associations, with the purpose of providing and serving the most needy, those whose work was linked to the land. With this, it was possible to make demands, because there was still no Rural Worker



Statute, created only on March 2, 1963, although it did not meet the real needs faced by those workers at the time.

Faced with these scenarios of violence in the countryside, having together with it the creation of the Peasant League of Sapé, which referred to the memory of the first leagues that were created in 1940 by the communists and, in this context, the death of one of the leaders of those people, João Pedro Teixeira, occurred, it is in this context that the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, Inspired by the tragedy, he had the happy idea of creating a documentary film that would be based on the life and murder of the peasant leader entitled: "Goat Marked for Death".²

SO DOES THE STORY BEGIN?

He had been warned that they were going to persecute him. He had once witnessed, with his wife, a sinister round of their home. Perhaps he knew everything, but he had learned from the revolutionary poetry of the world that it is better to die knowing than to live deceived. [...] An idealist, he never understood in his agile intelligence and his correct reasoning, how all the lands of the Várzea da Paraíba belonged only to owners who could be counted on their fingers and hands. And so many landless men, and so many afflicted men, and so many hungry men! He had dreamed of agrarian reform, but he did not think of revising the statutes of the land wielding a sickle or a blunderbuss, the attitude of the desperate. He appealed only to the organization of peasant opinion, of the opinion of the countryside, because in organized opinion of the people, everything else would be disorganized. [...] Dreamed. He would pay for the crime of having dreamed. His dream was a dangerous vision of freedom. The landlords cannot understand that the hearts of the humble can nest beautiful dreams. (A UNIÃO NEWSPAPER, April 5, 1962).

It is at this moment that we resort to Joel Candau's theory, since, when we talk about João Pedro Teixeira and the cinematographic production, we refer to the memory and identity of a people, of a place, however, although we do not deny the struggle of the peasants of Paraíba to exercise the right over the land, we have to remember the construction of this memory and identity. Thus, when they fought for rights, as in the case of the peasants, they sought to find answers in a past, a memory, a place in which they idealized.

For Joël Candau, identity and memory are essentially inseparable in their social and cultural relations:

Memory, at the same time that it shapes us, is also shaped by us. This perfectly sums up the dialectic of memory and identity that come together, mutually nourish each other, and support each other to produce a life trajectory, a story, a myth, a narrative. (CANDAU, 2021, p.16).

² We emphasize that part of the introduction can be recognized in the research of Juliana Alves. ALVES, Juliana Ferreira. 40f. The documentary "Goat marked to die" and the construction of the history of the peasant league of Sapé. [manuscript]. Final paper (Graduation in History) State University of Paraíba. Guarabira - UEPB, 2014 [...] "Which approaches the Peasant League of Sapé from a process of construction of a historical memory for the movement, which began in the 1960s and was interrupted by the military coup in 1964, being reopened in 1980".



In the face of this, the peasant is the fruit of a memorable time, the Marxist struggle or Marxist paradigm of the present, which seeks to intervene in the society of its time, to change its place of speech and memory, to produce a new identity history, the mill of revolution is the transformation of the peasant deprived of property into a hero of struggle. The figure of the oppressive landowner of the times of colonial Brazil was still rooted in the memory of those people, oppressed in their impoverished origin by the representation of the former plantation owner, now the landowner.

When we work with memory, we must look at the history of the writing of the producers of History, so we have as an example the work of Manuel Correia de Andrade, while writing the preface to the work of Fernando de Azevedo in the 1980s, refers to the 1950s and 1960s and demonstrates the spirit of that time:

The oppression of rural workers, especially peasants in Brazil, has developed since the colonial period, with the humble resisting direct dispossession in their *tabas* - indigenous -, organizing black quilombos or transforming themselves into bandits - analysis of Lampião's epic - or fanatics - episodes of straws and cauldron, among others. They were spontaneous revolts, without a well-defined ideology, although always with respect for social justice, which were repressed with violence and refinement of perversity³.

So, it is the fabrication of the peasant hero, João Pedro Teixeira that becomes the memory and identity of the struggle, it was necessary to have a trigger, a fracture in time, the appropriate space for the construction of that unfortunate story, for the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho to understand the guiding thread of his filmic script, the activist leader, dead under the oppression of the landowner, now he gave life to the documentary "Goat marked to die".

The activist and leader becomes the representation of monumentality and martyrdom executed, now the peasant movement has a reference, something that could cling to in that moment of pain. The documentary film conceived by Eduardo Coutinho is the expression of pain transformed into a representative figure of the charismatic leader, and can refer us to what Le Goff (1996) states to be:

The monument, in the traditional sense, is a work built to go beyond the present and transmit to posterity the memory of a person or fact. If we look for the philological origins, we will see that monument is a noun that comes from the verb *monere* which means "to make remembrance", "to make remember". [...] "The monument is a sign of the past, [...] The monument is everything that can evoke the past, perpetuate the memory", the construction of individuals-monuments represents a privileged object in the study of the constitution of contemporary collective memory⁴.

³ ANDRADE, Manuel Correia apud AZEVEDO, Fernando Antônio de. *The Peasant Leagues*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Paz e Terra, 1982. p. 12.

⁴ LE GOFF, Jacques. *History and Memory*. 4 a Ed. Campinas/SP: Editora da Unicamp, 1996. p. 535.



The monumentalist and filmic memory created around the representation of João Pedro Teixeira is the object of worship of those suffering people and, now, being transformed into a documentary vision and with scripts, it allowed the memory of pain to bring encouragement to suffering and the possibility of building a history in those lands of latifundia.

LIGHT, CAMERA, ACTION

The fiction film, begun in 1964, shot in 35mm, black and white, without simultaneous sound recording, with non-professional actors, predominance of fixed shots and hieratic staging, would be resumed as a documentary, in 16mm, color, with direct sound, camera in hand, and agile style close to that of a ⁵reportage.

The 1960s, the revolution was knocking on the door, encompassed an artistic production increasingly marked by this perspective. The novelty of the set is not the thematic angle itself. The novelty was, rather, the presentiment that there, in the struggle for land, in the exploitation of labor in the countryside, in extreme misery, was the main point of tension in Brazil, and that, consequently, the future would be born from there – as suggested by the striking verse reiterated in *God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun* (1964): "the hinterland will become the sea/ the sea will become the hinterland". The geographical, social, and historical fraction focused on the works gained the status of a reduced image of the country – whether its face of perpetual barbarism, or the horizon of transformation that our class struggle sprang from the earth⁶ presented.

The biennium was 1963-1964, a period that marked cinema in the country. Among these we find at least four decisive films that were being gestated and produced in the short time leading up to the coup d'état of April 1964. The interesting thing to think about is that all of them were interested in a critical figuration of the recondite margins of Brazil, in which the geography of the hinterland, extreme misery, class struggle, messianism and spasms of revolt for the land coalesced into a mass of their own and, at that moment, unavoidable to understand the boiling land that the country had become (TOLEDO, 2021).

We have the *break* (pause) consequence of the military dictatorship of 1964, and the recordings of the film "Goat marked to die" are interrupted, due to the fierce persecution that those people would face for that hard blow that the nation suffered. Now, it was time to flee! An escape no longer from the conditions that plagued those places, but from the persecution of the military, who attributed to these peasant leaders as communist revolutionaries, the Cuban guerrillas of the Paraíba hinterland.

⁵ ESCOREL, Eduardo. Triumph and torment. In: OHATA, Milton (org.) Eduardo Coutinho. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013, p.486.

⁶ TOLEDO, Paulo Bio. Modes of popular connection in pre-1964 Brazilian cinema: considerations on *Vidas secas*, os fuzis e o unfinished *Cabra marcado para morrer*. *Journal of the Institute of Brazilian Studies*, Brazil, n. 80, p. 55-67, dec. 2021, p. 57



Although the abrupt interruption of the film's recordings caused the dispersion of the main actors, such as Elizabeth Teixeira, who would play herself, widow of João Pedro Teixeira, other times were being prepared, as in the speeches written by João Pedro Teixeira, emerging in the midst of two distinct temporalities, that is, the 1960s, stolen by the military dictatorship, and then in the 1980s, the recent past.

In the 1960s, its emergence was linked to the politics of production of the peasant subject and in the 1980s, its history began to be written again and had the function of serving as a means of promoting a rescue of the past, a term that historians do not like to use, as well as a possibility of bringing the history of the Peasant Leagues back. re-elaborating forms of continuity⁷.

In 1981, Eduardo Coutinho meets Marta in a bar in the Baixada Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, she is one of Elizabeth Teixeira's daughters, and he had already recovered the material that was seized in 1964, from the first recordings, and sees again the possibility of resuming them. Thus, we could say, the survivors of that period, such as Elizabeth Teixeira herself, who lived in hiding in Rio Grande do Norte using the false name of Marta.

The emotion is born from this parallel: the interrupted film completes itself against winds and tides, in a way coincides with the woman of fiber who, after eating the bread that the devil kneaded, meets her family again, reassumes her real name and reaffirms her conviction⁸.

And, now returning to the period of 1981, Eduardo Coutinho returns to the unfinished material to conduct what is perhaps his most important documentary, talking about the death of João Pedro Teixeira, the "Goat marked to die", and which premiered in 1984.

At the beginning of the film, fragments of the 1963 script are projected. It is possible to notice, in the passages of the text, an epic-popular structure, also derived from the poem, such as the presence of a narrator, noted as "cantador". He is an internal narrator of the film, who was the one who would probably make the connections between the fictional and documentary perspectives. There is no record of this narrative structure operating, that is, scenes in which this "singer" appears have not been recovered. Its insertion in the script, however, gives clues to the inventiveness that that project contained (TOLEDO, 2021).

MOVIE SCENES: "GOAT MARKED FOR DEATH" – 1964/1984

⁷ MUNIZ, Roberto Silva. 200f. The Making of João Pedro Teixeira: as the Peasant Hero. Dissertation (Master's Degree in History) - Federal University of Campina Grande, Humanities Center — Campina Grande, 2010, p.24.

⁸ SHWARZ, Roberto. The thread of the skein. In: OHATA, Milton (org.). Eduardo Coutinho. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013, p.460

1 – Scenes from the Movie (1964)



Elizabeth Teixeira and her children in the film *Cabra marcado para morrer*, by Eduardo Coutinho. This is one of the scenes recorded in 1964, as foreseen in the original script that the IMS now releases in e-book, and included in the documentary released in 1984. Eduardo Coutinho Collection/ IMS⁹

2 – Photographs (1984)



Peasant memories and identities.

Filming began in February 1964. Coutinho intended to tell the story of João Pedro Teixeira, leader of the peasant league of Sapé, in Paraíba, who was murdered in 1962. He didn't want professional actors: for the characters to be played by the peasants themselves. Seventeen years later, Coutinho returns to the region, manages to find Elizabeth, through the eldest son, Abraão, investigates the fate of the other ten children and all those involved in the project. It shows the originals filmed so long ago, the peasants rejoice with their faces, younger, live the emotion of recognition and the game of identifications. Twenty years later, Coutinho concludes his film, an epic told with clarity, patience and perseverance, by someone who trusts in work and days. An original experience in Brazilian cinematography. (ROBERTO MELLO, *Jornal do Brasil*, Jan.1985).

⁹ "The film imagined back then survived both in the shot scenes (it is estimated that 40% of the text was filmed, and some scenes were included in the documentary released in 1984), as well as in the script typed by machine and with handwritten notes by the filmmaker." IMS. Available at: <https://ims.com.br/2022/09/30/ims-lanca-roteiro-original-de-cabra-marcado-para-morrer/>. Accessed on: Aug 06. 2023.



CONSIDERATIONS

Embarking on a final journey in search of Elizabeth Teixeira's children scattered in different places throughout Brazil - as payment for the price of militancy - Eduardo Coutinho's documentary film builds the memory and identity of those people, does what seemed to be impossible: it further expands the mosaic of the agrarian question now not only in the Northeast, created in the monumentality of representations around João Pedro Teixeira, "Goat marked to die" allowing us to see other regions of Brazil.

The documentary film places us as true accomplices in this search, we find ourselves discovering new nuances for the story of Elizabeth Teixeira, and of her entire generation, understanding in a broad way what all the discussion that the documentary film and the characters propose means, and what are the real consequences of this.



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