



## Rural Education as a tool in facing coloniality in Brazil

**A Educação do Campo como enfrentamento à colonialidade no  
Brasil**

**La Educación de Campo como confrontación a la colonialidad en  
Brasil**

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### Abstract

The Brazilian rural landscape has been constituted through historical tensions that had repercussions on our entire social organization as a country. This landscape was structured following coloniality-based approach, which set the social place where Latin American peasants and territories were positioned. The objective of this essay is, thus, to discuss the relationship between Rural Education and the confrontation of coloniality. Methodologically, we start from a critical reading of the theoretical production on coloniality and Rural Education in Latin America, focusing on the intersections and crossings between these two theoretical-political fields in the Brazilian historical and territorial context. The struggle for the right to education brought the affirmation of rural landscapes as the territory of people's rights, opposing the coloniality that marginalized, through its modern rationality, the non-white peoples and the rural territories. This is the main aspect of disputes brought by Rural Education. It struggles for access to education, however, associated with other civil rights that demand a new social, political, cultural, and economic placement of rural peoples and their territories. Rural Education reshapes the Brazilian project of country and society project, taking into account the relevance of rural peoples in its constitution and, therefore, becomes the resistance to coloniality that has historically structured Latin American societies.



**Keywords:** Rural Education. Coloniality. Latin America.

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### Resumo

O campo brasileiro constituiu-se por meio de tensionamentos históricos que repercutiram em toda nossa organização social como país. O Brasil foi estruturado sob a égide da colonialidade que configurou o lugar social em que os territórios e povos camponeses foram posicionados. O objetivo deste ensaio teórico é discutir a relação da Educação do Campo com o enfrentamento da colonialidade historicamente imposta na América Latina, com foco no Brasil. Neste país, as lutas pelo direito à educação trouxeram a afirmação do campo como território de sujeitos de direitos, ao contrário da colonialidade, que marginalizou em sua racionalidade moderna os grupos humanos não-brancos e os territórios rurais. Quando, já no século XX, também os países latino-americanos fizeram sua inserção nos novos arranjos capitalistas, os territórios rurais e suas populações permaneceram associados ao atraso e à ignorância, já que o pretendido desenvolvimento e modernização estiveram concentrados na industrialização urbana pela via dependente e subordinada aos interesses dos países centrais. E é aqui o ponto central de disputas assumidos pela Educação do Campo. Ela luta pelo direito à educação, mas associada ao conjunto dos demais direitos que exigem um novo lugar social, político, cultural e econômico dos sujeitos e territórios camponeses. Assim, ela reposiciona o projeto de país e de sociedade brasileira considerando a relevância camponesa em sua constituição e, dessa forma, se faz resistência à colonialidade historicamente estruturante da sociedade brasileira e, conseqüentemente, latino-americana.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação do Campo. Colonialidade. América Latina.

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### Resumen

La construcción del campo agrario brasileño estuvo atravesada por tensiones que repercutieron en la organización social del país en su totalidad. Se estructuró en un contexto colonial en el cual se configuró el lugar social en el que se posicionaron los territorios y pueblos campesinos latinoamericanos. El objetivo de este ensayo es, por lo tanto, discutir la relación entre la Educación del Campo y la colonialidad. Metodológicamente, partimos de una lectura crítica de la producción teórica sobre colonialidad y educación rural en América Latina, con foco en las intersecciones y cruces entre estos dos campos teórico-políticos en el contexto histórico y territorial brasileño. Las luchas por la educación propiciaron la consolidación del campo agrario como territorio de sujetos de derechos, en oposición a la colonialidad que desde su racionalidad moderna, marginaba a los grupos humanos no blancos y territorios rurales. Éste es el punto central de las disputas que asume la Educación del Campo, la cual se define a través de la lucha por el derecho a la educación, pero asociado asimismo con un conjunto de otros derechos que demandan un nuevo lugar social, político, cultural y económico a los sujetos y territorios campesinos. Así, la Educación del Campo reposiciona el proyecto de país y sociedad brasileña considerando la relevancia campesina en su constitución y realizando, de esta manera, la resistencia a la colonialidad históricamente estructurante de las sociedades latinoamericanas.

**Palabras-clave:** Educación de Campo. Colonialidad. América Latina.

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## Introduction

This theoretical essay aims to discuss the relationship between Rural Education and the confrontation of a historically imposed coloniality across Latin America, with a

focus on Brazil. Therefore, a bibliographic survey was carried out on two structuring theoretical axes for the discussion: the productions on coloniality (encompassing the trajectory of the peoples of Latin America) and the productions on Rural Education (as a strategy of Brazilian rural peoples in the struggle for another education and, as a result, another society). Thus, the essay was organized through the structuring of coloniality in Latin America and, specifically, in Brazil to focus on how the actions of struggle for Rural Education can be read as a strategy to confront the historically imposed coloniality across this continent.

Brazilian history is marked by the development of modern capitalism from the insertion of Latin American territories in the colonial division of the planet. Since the capitalist system had, in the conquest of Latin American lands by the newly formed European countries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a mark of its global expansion, the colonial organization was configured as the basis for its structuring (MIGNOLO, 2017). In it, the hierarchical classification of the territories and peoples of the world, according to the modern rationality forged in and centered around Europe, defined the center and the margins of this system.

Among the marginalized were the Latin American countries, of which Brazil is a part. Its black, Indian and mestizo populations were represented as primitive, inferior, ignorant, or naïve (RIBEIRO, 2016). If the white European peoples were the most advanced point of civility and culture in this new modern rationality, the peoples constituted in Brazilian lands were more distant from the references of what was considered as a subject the more distant they were from the European standard.

When addressing the term *coloniality* here, what is problematized is that this arrangement lasted beyond the colonial period. The denunciation of the coloniality of power, of being, of knowledge (MIGNOLO, 2010) and of nature (ALIMONDA, 2011) does not thus refer to our imperial past, but rather to the structures and imaginaries that mark our place in the project of modernity and European universalism. Even with the reformulations of the capitalist system in its subsequent phases, through industrialization processes, international divisions of labor, the formation of Nation States across Latin America and the movements of insertion of these States in industrial capitalism, which demanded the alleged modernization and new patterns of national

development, the distances between center and periphery and the hierarchical classification of populations in these countries lasted beyond the colonial period. It is true that the facets with which these distances are shown are not the same, although their logic is still present and has real consequences in contemporary societies.

When looking at the Brazilian rural reality, the traces of coloniality are evident. The denial of rights and the development models historically assumed by Brazil have marginalized peasant populations and projected on them the stigma of backwardness and ignorance. The resistance promoted by this population, however, is also historical. From these resistances, Rural Education has emerged in recent decades, which we consider here as a force in confronting coloniality (cf. FARIAS & FALEIRO, 2018; ZEFERINO, DOS PASSOS, PAIM, 2019).

Rural Education is a movement of political struggle organized under the banner of claiming the guarantee of the right to education for rural populations in Brazil, which also requires respect for the specificities of peasant reality. In these struggles, it brings a set of other rights that must be guaranteed for the repositioning of rural territories and populations in society. It is at this point that Rural Education asserts itself as an action that is contrary to coloniality, and it is at this point that this essay aims to propose a reflection on the construction of another field, society and country project – the original foundation of Education from Camp. This other project that involves deconstructing the colonial foundations of Brazilian society.

### **From colonial to coloniality**

The reflection on the formation of Brazil refers to its colonial beginnings, not only within its geographical borders, but also in relation to the history of Latin America in which it is inserted. Further, looking at the history of Latin America requires a reflection on the discourse of modernity and the forms of coloniality that have sustained it since the arrival of Europeans in the “New World,” as they persist to this day and are at the base of the disputes of Field Education and the development model assumed by Latin American countries (RIBEIRO, 2016).

What is now referred to as Latin America arises with the arrival of European colonists in the Atlantic lands on this side of the world map. That is not to say that there was nothing here before. There is knowledge of the great civilizations that had already formed here or about the thousands of original ethnic groups that already lived on this continent. Nevertheless, when addressing Latin America here, we are talking about the insertion of these lands and peoples in global history from the perspective of modernity. Therefore, we are talking about a territory that becomes part of a version of global history initiated by the colonial division of the world (QUIJANO, 2008; FERNANDES, 2012).

The so-called modern period begins with the colonial period. It was in these periods – which not only coincide but are also part of the same arrangement created and which structured the social, political, economic, cultural universe and in daily dimension of human existence in the modern world – that Latin America became that to which we currently refer. The process of historical constitution of Latin America, in its forms of power, labor exploitation, the capitalist relations established here and the structuring of the world market, took place in an original way. A new pattern of control over work, resources and products was configured and structured as global capitalism. In a Eurocentric perspective and following a linear and unidirectional evolutionary logic of history, Europe and Europeans were positioned as the tip of progress to be followed by all other peoples. These were then classified as primitive, according to a racial classification of the world's populations (QUIJANO, 2008).

Since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe, a system of interpreting and acting on the world has been forged. This system is modern capitalism, structured by pillars that were justified by science, religion and a wide set of ideas sustained and expanded over the centuries to the status of absolute universal truths. Western Europe embarked on the ambitious project of declaring itself the center of the world, with the greatest importance, level of development, and civility. In other words, it assumed the position they it was ahead of this supposed process and gave itself the mission of imposing its project – European universalism – to the rest of the world, in Wallerstein's terms (2007).

As a time frame, we can take the year 1492 when Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, looking for the way to the East Indies, arrived in the Caribbean. The European enterprise of building a world system under his control reaches the Americas and begins there the constitution of a globalized world at the economic, cultural, political and territorial level. From then on, through the transatlantic lands, an intense flow of material and symbolic exchanges took place, even if these exchanges were asymmetrical and their benefits and losses were not shared equally. The original peoples of the Americas and their territories and populations were left with physical and symbolic violence, the looting of their wealth and subordination to the interests of the colonizing countries. For European colonizers, however, domain over territories, their wealth and their populations, in addition, of course, to the expansion of their world project, comprised the parts received (WALLERSTEIN, 2007).

As precisely written by Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira in the presentation of the book “European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power” by Wallerstein (2007), modern global capitalism coincides with the European expansion over the other territories of the planet, an expansion carried out through the military force, economic exploitation, and the promotion of injustice on a global scale, justified by the argument of civilization and progress considered as an invariable necessity. Faced with this conception of the world and its arrangement in economic, social, political and cultural terms, a heterogeneous organization of the capitalist system was structured in which different stages of civility, capital accumulation and political power configured between the central and peripheral regions of this system coexisted. In other words, it is here that the international division of labor takes place, not as intrinsic differences resulting from delays or more advanced stages of development among regions, but rather one which had inequality as an inherent issue in the capitalist system itself. The formation of the world market happened through the characterization of the capitalist center as synonymous with technological progress and its periphery as dedicated to the supply of raw materials, agricultural products and cheap labor (WALLERSTEIN, 2007).

The inequalities between the center and the periphery of the world were favorable to the central countries and were justified by the argument that they brought a collective benefit attributed to the notions of civilization, growth and economic development and progress, interpreted as universal values and considered natural. This

argument was based on the promise that the global expansion of modern capitalism, with its structuring inequalities, would bring benefits to humanity as a whole, as well as the argument that this process was historically inevitable – and the construction of the argument was assumed on a complementary basis by secular and theological philosophy (WALLERSTEIN, 2007).

The venture to conquer the Americas was then based on four arguments. First, the argument of affirming the brutality and ignorance of non-European peoples, a prerogative that advised that they should be governed due to their incapacities, including moral ones – hence the second argument that the Amerindian peoples should accept the European yoke as a form of compensation and punishment for their crimes against divine and natural law, which is directly linked to the third argument that affirms not only the European right to dominate the peoples of America, as well as its duty under such laws. The arguments are completed in the fourth, which argues that colonization would allow the evangelization of these peoples and, therefore, the diffusion of natural and universal values to the so-called barbaric peoples of the world (WALLERSTEIN, 2007).

The universality of European values was based on a passionate vision of the certainty they held these values as true, constructed as something natural, an indisputable fact discovered by authorities legitimized by them, be they prophets, religious leaders, or scientists. These truths were associated with and grounded in religion, science, and philosophy. This conviction, conversely, carried another side, which was intolerance to any other explanatory version of the world, such as those developed by non-European peoples and combated as a necessary part to fulfill the civilizing mission undertaken by Europe.

The European enterprise of global domination inaugurated a rationality that united the notion of modernity with colonialism. Its rationality was constituted by the optimism that, as they reached a true understanding of reality, they would all advance, as humanity, towards a better governance of society and, subsequently, in the full realization of human potential. In this, science was placed as the surest method for such an understanding. Materialistic, universal and optimistic rationality in the improvement of the social world is the basis of modernity and would be achieved by the efficiency of

the scientific method and the moral discipline provided by secular philosophy and religious doctrine. The European march was also based on a collectivist vision – as much as they addressed the centrality of the individual in the modern world – and produced, for the first time in history, a collective geoculture that promised material comfort for all when the proposed world system reached a social order that is sufficient to overcome inequalities between peoples, benefiting everyone (WALLERSTEIN, 2007).

The other face of modernity, felt by colonized peoples, was its constitution as “the other,” i.e., those far from civility and modern universal standards (DUSSEL, 1993; CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2005). It the constitution of “the other” that supports the extermination, slavery, exploitation and domination that accompany coloniality, alongside capitalist development and its rationality. The articulation between modernity and coloniality passes through Eurocentrism and a hierarchical and self-referenced social and epistemic imaginary that affirms European Occidentalism as the most advanced center and peak, taking its particular as universal (ESPINOSA, 2007).

The constitution of this relationship, which comprises the very history of capitalism, takes place through the coloniality of power and colonial differentiation. Coloniality of power is the set of constitutive aspects of capitalism and its historical patterns of power, while colonial differentiation means the distinction between the metropolis and the periphery, with their developments related to capital, work, and knowledge, all being aspects that accompanied the commercial expansion across the Atlantic (ESPINOSA, 2007). In other words, the “coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power” (QUIJANO, 2007. p.93).

This pattern is supported by the racial/ethnic differentiation of the world’s populations and reaches the material dimensions of the subjects’ daily and social existence and subjective dimensions. In the words of Quijano (2007), “with (Latin) America, capitalism becomes global and Eurocentric, with coloniality and modernity installed, until today, as the constitutive elements of this specific pattern of power” (QUIJANO, 2007. p. p.94). It was in the context of coloniality that the social identities of peoples around the world were formed, including Indians, blacks, mestizos, Asians and even whites, as well as geocultures, namely, the Americas, Asia, the East, and



Europe. Moreover, it is here that the regions of the world were distributed within the logic of world capitalist power, i.e., colonial-modern capitalism.

If we mark the beginning of this process with the arrival of European colonists in American lands, when analyzing its development from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it is observed that Eurocentrism mythologically affirmed itself as a preexisting form of power. Europe was the world center, authorized to colonize the rest of the planet and which, due to its more advanced positioning, in the linear, unidirectional and continuous sense of humanity's progress, could develop modernity and its rationality in a self-centered way. This is how another notion was also consolidated and, as a result of this development, configured by modern coloniality, according to which humanity would be differentiated between superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, or between modern and traditional places and populations (QUIJANO, 2007).

All these dichotomies between primitive and civilized, modern and traditional, inferior and superior take place in the relationship between the metropolis and the colony, the center and the periphery, but they were also reproduced internally in the colonies. In this sense, the issue of land ownership and the power surrounding its possession is striking in the society that has been structured here. The elite that formed in Latin America was the one who held the power to be the landowner, almost as a feudal lord who is above any authority, law, or other mechanism that restricts its will. It is from the organization around the large agrarian property that the economic, legal and administrative aspects, as well as the subjective, cultural and identities, of Latin American societies were structured (MARIÁTEGUI, 2008a). Whether it concerns the caste of the privileged or the expropriated masses, in different historical periods, it is around the farms and the power of their owners that the different places and social roles have been assigned. For landowners, the political and economic domain remained, while the ragged (Indians, blacks, and mestizos) were placed at the mercy of the capitalist enterprise installed in Latin America, in addition to guaranteeing them depression, ignorance, and poverty. It is, therefore, on racial distinction and on land ownership that Latin American societies were formed and, in the course of this process, it is from these same elements that nation states in Latin America were structured from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

The constitution of Latin American nation states was promoted within a philosophical and political vision that took as a reference the civilizational paradigm of Eurocentric progress (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2009). Thus, constituting oneself as a State and modernizing oneself was taken to “Europeanize” oneself – and to Europeanize oneself from the racial distinction and the separation between the white rational subject and the bodies treated as objects and inferiors of the Indian, black and mestizo populations of Latin America. In this assumed development proposal, the responsibility of the States being then formed was to promote a structural change across Latin American societies based on the acceleration of industrialization and modernization of agriculture, which should be inserted in the new form of capitalist production, as well as on the transformation of social relations through the overcoming of traditional cultures treated as archaic and pre-modern. The practices and traditions of the so-called primitive populations and societies were subjected to state modernization programs, which disrupted popular ways of life and, in fact, generated the impoverishment of their populations by removing from them their capacity for autonomy and sovereignty over their existence (BONETTO, 2012).

Intensified from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a dependent capitalism was imposed in Latin America, in which peripheral economies were inserted into an economic system that was already dominated by the central countries. Latin American countries were positioned in this global structure by the reconfiguration of their internal social forces pursuant to the national question, which was the need to build a notion of national and country identity, as well as generating a demand to define a national project. It arises for these countries, then, from the republican foundations, with the project of promoting national growth and development, but in light of a context in which these countries were positioned in conditions of subordination in the international division of labor, with this condition being a constituent part of the global capitalist system (URQUIDI, 2013).

With the power of the large estates persisting, adding to the power of the industrial bourgeoisie in formation, the assumed development model is carried out through conservative modernization. In other words, development involved the maintenance of a concentrated land structure, accelerated industrial urban development, the absence of democratic processes and the protection of the lower classes by the State.

The consequences of this process were felt in the unstructured expansion urban landscapes to the detriment of an intense rural-city migration, concomitant with the dismantling and devaluation of peasant social structures (URQUIDI, 2013).

The industrialization process of Latin American countries was confirmed as a social restructuring that focused on the urban world, in which the attributions of primitive, backward and ignorant fell on rural populations. In the same sense, it was in the cities that the economic, political and cultural highlights were concentrated, while the countryside was defined as the displaced space in the modernity intended as per the arrangements of global capitalism and its internal organization in peripheral countries.

The reason for bringing this discussion here and conducting it in detail is because this pattern has crossed the centuries and still constitutes the foundation of the place reserved for rural territories in Latin America and, therefore, in Brazil, as well as the social place in which rural populations in our society are placed today. With the reformulations that were necessary for its reproduction and permanence, this arrangement still shapes our social reality. When looking at the Brazilian case within the Latin American scenario, it is important to highlight some of its aspects.

### **Brazilian coloniality**

The expansion of modern colonial capitalism arrived in the lands that formed Brazil from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and brought by the Portuguese colonizers, a “small group that had just arrived from overseas,” which “was super aggressive and capable of acting destructively in multiple ways” (RIBEIRO, 2015, p.25). The new lands invaded were inhabited by indigenous groups, mainly Tupi peoples, in this initial contact. They totaled about a million people distributed along the Atlantic coast. These groups constituted diverse and complex societies that were already related to each other and circulated through the territory they occupied, with a plurality of ways of life and organization of their societies. Conversely, the Portuguese invaders came from a highly classist and urban civilization, whose decision-making center was located in Lisbon and who came supported by its institutions, such as the Holy Office, as well as by those that

represented scientific rationality in order to legitimize and sacralize the global enterprise of conquering new lands (RIBEIRO, 2015). Regarding its scientific rationality, it was:

[...] an effort to concatenate with knowledge the experience that was being accumulated and, above all, to put this knowledge into practice in order to discover any land that could be found, in order to structure the entire world into a single world, ruled by Europe. All of this had the aim of transporting there all the lootable wealth and, later, the entire product of the production capacity of the conscripted peoples (RIBEIRO, D. 2015, p.32).

As regards the religious arm that also supported them, when Portugal and Spain constituted themselves as Nation States and overcame their feudal structure, they became central propellers in the process of civilizational expansion. They assumed mercantile motivations were not the driving force, but rather the propagation of Catholic Christianity, which conquered peoples and territories overseas, with the divine mission of subjugating the whole world into a united Christendom (RIBEIRO, 2015).

The projection of European rationality fell on indigenous, black and mestizo populations in Brazilian lands, these being the body, wild, primitive, domesticable and exploitable ones, in need of being controlled due to the inferior situation in which they were in the human path forged by modern rationality (RIBEIRO, 2016). It is on this basis that Brazilian society was established, with its spaces of power and social places defined throughout the different phases through which the colonial enterprise in Brazil passed. This ranged from logging and extraction of resources from coastal forests in the first century of colonization to the sugarcane cycles in northeastern Brazil, gold and diamonds in Minas Gerais, coffee in São Paulo and the south-central region of Brazil, rubber in the Amazon region, and all the productive complexity and diversification that took place – sometimes as the main front for the production of wealth expropriated by the colonizers, sometimes as complementary productive activities that advanced Portuguese rule through the conquered space.

The social and power places were structured around the large sugarcane plantations, the mines, the coffeemaking oligarchies, and later, the industrialists in the emerging cities, who always kept the non-white groups under the yoke of force,

poverty, and cultural violence. The extent to which this notion has dragged on goes through the colonial period itself, but does not end there, having been later restructured in its republican guise and the constitution of Brazil as a Nation State. In other words, we still live in a society deeply marked by these elements and by our insertion in the global economy, following the paths that keep us attached to it, linked dependent and peripheral in different ways (RIBEIRO, 2016).

The local ruling class, a “sub-elite” subservient to the interests of the central countries did not have a national interest. Therefore, coloniality is persistent, even though the colonial period has ended. Brazil had its independence declared, the Proclamation of the Republic took place, we constituted ourselves as a Nation State and modernization and industrialization were proposed so that we could also be enrolled in the new capitalist arrangements and rearrangements. We were required to develop aspects of our Brazilian identity and the national issues demanded for all Latin American countries. Nevertheless, the social structure was maintained by the persistence of the power of the agrarian oligarchies, or by the industrial bourgeoisie formed here, especially from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and intensified from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, with the appeal of a “transition to modernity” in the country.

In the words of Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (2011):

[...] Latin American countries liberated themselves politically in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but their elites continued to be chronically dependent, considering themselves “European,” and for this reason the countries remained underdeveloped, incapable of carrying out the capitalist revolution. In the case of Brazil, it was only after 1930, when a nationalist elite took over the country, that industrial development was unleashed (BRESSER-PEREIRA, 2011, p.159).

As highlighted by the previous quote, especially since the 1930s, marked by the Getúlio Vargas administration, Brazil embarked on a project of modernization and industrialization, seen as a condition for its reinsertion into the new arrangements of the global capitalist system – a conservative and dependent modernization, but which, in terms of its internal contours, was made of the option centered on cities with the

subsequent emptying of the countryside. This was not only a demographic emptying, within the scope of policies aimed at this environment, but also one at the subjective level, insofar as it came to portray the countryside as a poor, backward place inhabited by people also characterized by poverty and ignorance.

The field, in its paths towards the intended modernization, was structured, then, by:

[...] three key elements: uneven development, in different agricultural products and in different regions; an exclusionary process, which expelled and continues to expel peasants, leading them to cities and regions different from their origin; and a model of agriculture that coexists and reproduces backward and modern social relations of production simultaneously, provided that both are subordinated to the logic of capital. In the countryside, this process has generated a greater concentration of ownership and income (FERNANDES; CERIOLI; CALDART. 1998, p.12).

The effects of this capitalist modernization process for agriculture and rural populations were felt in the midst of a process of non-inclusion of the vast majority of its population. Conversely, it generated an enormous rural-to-city migration that is estimated, especially between the 1960s and 1980s, to have generated the displacement of 30 million people, with the subsequent swelling of cities, increased violence and unemployment. The prioritization of capitalist agriculture (employers, based on large estates and export monoculture), to the detriment of the marginalization of family-based agriculture, in addition to the construction of a rural-city interaction through the subordination of the rural environment to the interests of the national urban-centered development model. This is evidenced in the Brazilian Statistical Yearbook produced by the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 1996. As of 1940, Brazil had a total population of 41,236,3155 inhabitants, of which 12,880,182 comprised the urban population of the country, while 28,356,133 were the rural population. In 1996, these numbers increased to 157,079,573 of the total population, with 123,087,553 for the urban population and 33,929,020 for the rural population. There was a general population growth in Brazil, which carried a set of elements that could be deepened for a better understanding, but that will not be done here. Nevertheless, the great difference in the numbers exposed between rural and urban

populations is evident, which has a character strongly marked by the development model adopted by Brazil, that is, urban industrial (FERNANDES; CERIOLI; CALDART; 1998).

The Brazilian agrarian question remains persistently marked by the high concentration of land and its subsequent inequalities, increasingly internationalized, violent and supported by the exhaustive exploitation of the work of its populations (FERNANDES, 2012). In fact, these characteristics have not changed since the colonial period! They were merely reformulated along the course of capitalism, but they reaffirm Mariátegui's perspective when placing the issue of land ownership as a pillar of our Latin American societies. "Started with the colonial instrument of *sesmarias* – land plots assigned by the state for farming purposes – and intensified by the Land Act of 1850, land concentration continues to be a hallmark of the Brazilian countryside" (ALENTEJANO, 2011, p.71).

When looking at the data from the 2006 Agricultural Census, we can see the high concentration of land in Brazil and a profound inequality in its distribution, which "reveals both past and contemporary processes of the way in which natural resources are appropriated in Brazil" (IBGE, 2006, p.107). While the area occupied by establishments with less than 10 hectares (ha) in area adds up to only 2.7% of the total area occupied by rural establishments, the area corresponding to rural establishments with more than 1000 ha in area represents 43% of the total. When crossing the information on the area occupied by each stratum of the dimensions of the properties with the number of rural establishments, we can observe a significant inversion of the values that reaffirm the high concentration of land in Brazil. In 2006, establishments with less than 10 ha that occupy an area of only 2.7% of the total account for 47% of the total number of establishments, while large properties that occupy almost half of the total area, concentrated only 0.87% of the total number of agricultural establishments in 1985, 1.02% in 1995, and 0.91% in 2006 (IBGE, 2006). These data persist with few changes in the 2017 agricultural census (IBGE, 2019). When group establishments larger than 10 ha in this account, which can still be considered as family establishments, "the contrast becomes even clearer when observing that establishments with less than 100 ha account for about 90% of the total, occupying an area of about 20%, while those with more than 100 ha make up less than 10% of the total and occupy about 80% of the

area. This picture has remained virtually unchanged in the last 50 years” (ALENTEJANO, 2011a. p.72).

In order to definitely reinforce the high degree of land concentration in Brazil, we can observe the value of the Gini index calculated in the latest census surveys. In Brazil, this index was 0.856 in 1995 and 0.872 in 2006 (IBGE, 2006), placing Brazil among the countries with the highest land concentration in the world.

In this discussion, one should not neglect the fact that land concentration is a key element in the Latin American social structure. Nor can we forget racial distinction as another founding element of our societies and which reflects on who has or does not have the land, how much land they have, the labor relations established in them, and the capacities and forms of insertion in the disputes required by global capitalism system, which has also established itself in rural areas. Finally, the concentration of land and the resulting inequalities are part of a development model and a national project, as well as the construction of identities and social places reserved for rural populations. In this sense, the way in which their populations are considered, for example, in terms of promoting, or not, access to rights, are also consequences of this model, and the effects of this great concentration of land – and, thus, of power – are felt by Brazilian society.

It should be noted, however, and as a necessary look at the force with which coloniality appears to show itself in our social reality, that rural peoples have always resisted this logic and never accepted it passively or peacefully. It is necessary to consider the efficiency of colonial arrangements and the ways in which they were structured, but without neglecting the fact that peasant populations have faced, throughout history, the impositions of this logic on their existence and that Rural Education is, thus, a consequence of such confrontations. While coloniality aimed at the end of the peasant world to the detriment of an industrial urban development project, the fact that the countryside still has great relevance in the national political and social scenario is evidence that the peasantry did not accept this destiny and historically fought for their existence and reproduction of their way of life from a condition of subjects.

From this perspective, we observe that the struggles in defense of the countryside in Brazil and its populations arise with the latifundium itself. Therefore,



since the structuring of the country by hereditary captaincies, we can already highlight the existence of the struggle for land and the resistance of our peasant populations (FERNANDES, 1999).

Five hundred years ago, since the arrival of the Portuguese colonizer, the struggles against captivity, against exploitation, and consequently, against land captivity and against expulsion, which mark the struggles of workers, began. From the struggles of indigenous peoples, slaves and free workers and, since the end of the last century, immigrants, peasant struggles for land have developed. Endless struggles and wars against expropriation produced continuously in the development of capitalism (FERNANDES, 1999, p.1).

The history of struggles in the Brazilian countryside to resist the impositions of modern colonial capitalism are as secular as the structuring of this system in our lands. The original populations resisted this model and faced, in their own way, the looting of their wealth, their enslavement and exploitation caused by the Portuguese colonizers, and the violence that accompanied this process. The black African populations that were brought to Brazil since the 16<sup>th</sup> century also continuously promoted resistance to the modern colonial model and the intense process of grouping into *quilombos* – settlements established by fugitive enslaved people and their descendants – permanently recorded in our history, as well as the uprising of peasant workers against the power of the colonels since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as in the constitution of the Canudos settlement in Bahia in 1893 and migratory processes and pilgrimages in search of land where peasants could live free from the yoke of the powerful landowners in Brazil, and the Cangaço region in northeastern Brazil, whose populations were willing to engage in social banditry to combat expulsion from their lands and the authoritarianism of the colonels. (FERNANDES, 1999)

Still, stating in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, other forms of organizations of rural workers – in associations, in unions, or through the Peasant Leagues – began to take place.

The Peasant Leagues were important political organizations against land expropriation. They emerged around 1945 in different states of the federation and promoted congresses and meetings to form a national awareness around the need to

carry out the agrarian reform, from the growth of the struggle for land and its insertion in the political agenda, the Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers (ULTAB) also emerged, linked to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and to progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. The latter also deserves to be highlighted, as the participation of the Catholic Church in peasant struggles is remarkable in Brazilian history. In this sense, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and the Basic Ecclesiastical Communities (CEBs), which formed the Basic Education Movement (MEB) (FERNANDES, 1999), are part of the resistance in the field.

Even though the 1964 Military Coup repressed the actions of peasant movements and organizations and accelerated, through a pact between the military and the national bourgeoisie to control the agrarian question, the implementation of the capitalist development model for the countryside and for agriculture, it did not make the clashes disappear. The CEBs were first established in the 1960s and expanded during the 1970s, as well as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), and the Pastoral Council of Fishermen (CPP), all guided by the perspective of Theology of Liberation, which proposed an ecclesiastical work guided by the organization of spaces of political socialization for freedom and popular organization. The result of all this history of struggles, which also emerged in the late 1970s, was the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), which can be considered the broadest Brazilian peasant movement (FERNANDES, 1999).

The trajectory of peasant struggles in Brazil, as long as the country itself, from the aforementioned organizations to the countless others not mentioned here, is what built the culmination context of these struggles in Rural Education. The last decades of Brazilian history opened up original scenarios among which the educational and peasant dimensions were able to experience an unprecedented position. These are the dimensions further addressed by the discussions of this text, insofar as it was in relation to them that address the confrontation of coloniality.

## Rural Education: Historical paths and the confrontation of coloniality

Education in Latin America has a trajectory that carries a colonial and colonizing character (MARIÁTEGUI, 2008b). The European/non-European duality was reproduced in how education was constituted, in its objectives and in the way in which it was offered. While culture and knowledge were privileges of a particular social layer, if this layer even defined what was, or what was not, culture and knowledge, and education, as a process of production and transmission of culture and knowledge, it met the interests of the ruling classes (WALSH, 2019).

Initially restricted to the privilege of a few, education served to maintain the wealth of national elites, being, mainly, an economic and social issue that did not include, therefore, the poor (MARIÁTEGUI, 2008b). Later, as Latin American countries made the effort to assert a national identity in the process of constituting themselves as Nation States and the beginning of a timid industrialization process that was dependent on central countries, access to education was expanded. It took on, however, the role of overcoming the delays and the so-called archaic culture of the peasant populations and, especially, of solving the social and economic problems of the countries. The children of the rural working classes were provided with a basic education that enabled them to internalize the new national identity and which prepared them, within the narrow limits of a useful education, for the new economic arrangement, as an available workforce (BRESSER-PEREIRA, 2011). As these processes took place in Brazil from the 1930s onwards, its educational history follows this path and reproduces its marks also in the peasant universe.

In the intense rural-city migration experienced by Brazilian society since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, education appeared, then, as an instrument to contain this threat, which could socially destabilize the country. It was thought of a particular type of school that would meet the guidelines of “pedagogical ruralism.” A school integrated to the local conditions – regionalist in nature – was proposed, whose main goal was to promote the “fastening” of man to the countryside. The pedagogical debate reinforced this position of “the school glued to reality,” based on the principle of “adequacy,” and thus placed itself on the side of conservative forces. That is because the fastening of man to the countryside and the exaltation of the agrarian nature of Brazilians were part

of the same discursive framework with which the rural oligarchy defended its interests. Conversely, the industrial group, also threatened by the swelling of cities and the impossibility of absorbing the workforce, swelled the current of ruralists (MAIA, 1982, p.27).

The impasses of rural education spanned decades, and to a certain extent, educational inequalities still remain robust in the Brazilian countryside. Nevertheless, from the late 1980s onwards, a number of important processes of confrontation of this reality were triggered by peasant social movements, which presented themselves as a resistance to the excluding reality to which the countryside in Brazil had been historically subjected. As the result of the historical resistance persistently promoted by Brazilian peasant populations, Rural Education is considered here as a movement in the fight against the imperatives of coloniality and social transformation for the repositioning of the countryside and its populations on the national scene.

Rural Education appears in Brazilian educational history during the 1990s, if we consider the claims for the inclusion of guidelines that highlighted the educational specificities of the rural environment, for example, in the Brazilian Education Guidelines and Bases Act, enacted in 1996. From the confluence of a set of social movements and the approximation of several struggles that questioned the agrarian reality in Brazil, not only with regard to education specifically, but also the social places of its populations, their relationship with knowledge, culture, agricultural production, food security, and sovereignty, and the relationship with the world of work and other dimensions of the political and social existence of the Brazilian peasant universe, the national movement of Rural Education made it possible for all these reflections and political incidences to be carried out jointly. The culmination of the Rural Education movement in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and its expansion in the last two decades follow the line of development of a field that exists and which has historically resisted coloniality, relating to a set of subjects that give continuity to the peasant historical struggles.

As a concept under “construction and as a category of analysis of the situation or of practices and policies of education of rural workers” (CALDART, 2012, p.257), Rural Education involves a range of social movements and is conducted through the organization of rural workers, aiming at a political incidence towards the State in the

direction of demands regarding culture, labor, and knowledge. It provides a clash between field, country and society projects that become explicit in the conceptions of public policy, education, and human formation in dispute (CALDART, 2012).

It was first established as Basic Rural Education, in the context of the initial discussions promoted around the education of rural workers (CALDART, 2012), which, in the mid-1990s, began to form the so-called Rural Education Movement in Brazil, with the Landless Rural Workers' Movement playing a key role initial as a mobilizer of these discussions, a set of other rural social movements soon joined this process. According to Munarim (2008):

National or regional organizations stand out, namely: the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), the Peasant Women's Movement (MMC), the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA), rural workers' unions and state federations of unions linked to the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), the Movement of Rural Women Workers – linked to CONTAG and which have supported, for example, the campaign called “Marcha das Margaridas” (“March of the Daisies”) –, the Education Network of the Brazilian Semi-Arid Region (RESAB) and, finally, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), in addition to a series of local organizations (MUNARIM, 2008, p.5).

At the origin of Rural Education, it is worth considering the educational experiences that were accumulated by these movements throughout their trajectory. It is also crucial to place the existence of educational struggles in Brazil around public and free education and its universalization, which has oxygenated the debates on the renewal of the then Rural Education by including rural populations as social subjects to be contemplated in their specificities (MUNARIM, 2008).

It was in the discussions conducted by this group of social stakeholders that the first arguments opposing the notion characterized by Rural Education were presented. Hence the replacement of the term “Basic Rural Education” with “Rural Education,” expanding the discussions to the dimensions of culture, work, training and social participation of peasant movements. In other words, the term Rural Education encompasses the understanding of an education that is considered in all social processes that form the subjects, including the school, and extends the right to education at all levels, from early childhood to university education (CALDART, 2012).

The Brazilian political field, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, was marked by the expectation of putting into effect the demands pointed out by social movements in relation to the guidelines built by Rural Education. It was during this period that a series of seminars, conferences and events that involved a wide spectrum of popular entities in the field took place and which led to advances in discussions on the subject. In this political environment, mobilizations were strengthened, and there was an expansion of the subjects involved, which reinforced the perspective of the field and the development model presented by the Rural Education movement. The motto “Rural Education: our right, a duty of the State” appeared, in which the common position expressed was that the struggle for Rural Education is necessary and must be ensured and guaranteed by the State through public policies that are consistent with the desires and demands of peasant populations and organizations (CALDART, 2012).

In pedagogical terms, the historical struggles of rural social movements and organizations were placed at an interface with the official school system. The social subjects of the countryside occupied the cultural and physical-structural space of the school, expanding their educational practice to the field of formal education, but bringing into this school their methods derived from popular educational practices. Thus, they also started to vie for another school project (MURAMIM, 2008).

The struggle for Rural Education as a social practice combines the fundamental issue of struggle for Agrarian Reform, which involves the right to work, culture, food sovereignty, and territory, as well as:

[...] social struggle for the access of rural workers to education (and not just any education). It assumes the dimension of collective pressure for broader public policies or even a clash between different logics of formulation and implementation of the Brazilian educational policy (CALDART, 2012, p.261).

The position of social movements on their Rural Education in Brazil is located, above all, in the “struggle of a class for the establishment of a social form that has assumptions linked to each other, the “material and cultural, and not merely formal, substantive equality” and respect for diversity (in society as in nature)” (CALDART,

2015, p.4). Therefore, it aims to confront the marked educational inequalities between the countryside and the city – a condition historically configured by the contradiction between capital and work and which materialize in contemporary society in the confrontation between agribusiness and peasant agriculture. On one side of this confrontation is the business and neoliberal logic that politically structure the Brazilian countryside and offer an educational and training project for the popular strata. On the other hand, the education of peasant subjects is understood as a broad, integral and permanent right to be built within a society project that acknowledges the political, social, cultural and economic place of the Brazilian countryside (CALDART, 2015).

Development logics that affect the rural world in a different way are in conflict and carry with them a confrontation regarding the access and quality of education for their populations. On the side of capital, the interest is in controlling the access, content and form of educational processes to meet the cognitive, behavioral, social and emotional requirements of training the working masses, adapting them to the demand for profit generation by companies and composition of their reserve army. On the side of labor, the goal is to organize a political demand to guarantee education as a human right that, therefore, must be assured to rural populations and which is in accordance with the dimensions of peasant territories in a broad and diversified way (CALDART, 2015).

The rural and country development project assumed by Rural Education is thus marked by its ability to decide the course that Brazil wants, eliminating the shocking social inequalities through the distribution of wealth, income, power, knowledge, and culture. It also involves valuing its populations and its natural and social heritage and presents the school and education as a space for deepening and developing this project. It features family and cooperative agriculture, in contrast to business agriculture created by the Brazilian conservative modernization process and requires considering rural populations as subjects of this new development project. It is closely linked to the struggle for land and understands that Brazil's agrarian reorganization is an essential condition for accessing rights historically denied to peasant populations.

In this way, it places itself in the field of the struggle for rights, being thus linked to the process of their universalization. It extends this debate to the set of other rights

that are also claimed: the rights to health, land, justice, and human development. It understands rural populations as subjects with rights and the school as a means of promoting them, as well as questioning how it has also historically contributed to the mechanisms of exclusion of this social group. Therefore, it also demands another model of education and another school that takes into account peasant struggles and the historical trajectory of rural subjects as its fundamental characteristic: “to link education with rights and, by linking education with rights, to link education with the subjects – the concrete, historical subjects, treated as people in the school” (ARROYO, 2011, p.76).

The intimate link between Rural Education and the struggle for land focuses on a core element of Latin American social formation. Being more than just a property or commodity, it is linked to cultural production and makes the subjects who work in it cultural subjects. The rural school should not be separated from this production, but rather make the educational process a form of cultural production and reproduction. The educational process takes place in and through the social movement, in struggles, in the workplace, in the family, and in everyday life, and it is up to the school to interpret and organize them pedagogically. The school, conceived in this way, is inherently linked to productive processes and peasant cultural matrices and, therefore, does not accept that the education model expressed in curricula, methods and pedagogical organization should be guided by an orientation unrelated to the struggle for land.

Therefore, the experiences built/being built placed on society by social movements also comprise a movement of pedagogical renewal, “as they are part of a social and cultural movement, springing from the social movement of the countryside” (ARROYO, 2011, p.68). Thus, Rural Education tackles fundamental issues of our social, political and cultural structure. By constituting itself as a movement that arises from the social movements of the countryside and which is based on the struggle for land and for the place of social subjects of rural populations, it faces the coloniality that is characteristic of Latin American societies.

Resuming the argument presented by Quijano (2008), referring to the structuring of global capitalism from the racial differentiation of the planet’s populations and on the Eurocentric, linear and unidirectional perspective of global development, Field



Education tackles this logic by affirming another project of development in which peasant populations are considered as legitimate social subjects. The representation attributed to non-white populations in Latin America, as bodies devoid of reason, as a sign of backwardness and the antithesis of modernity, as projected on rural populations, is addressed by Rural Education. While, throughout Brazilian history, the countryside was treated under the stigma of inferiority, the Rural Education movement was born, above all, from a perspective that includes the countryside in a development project that repositions peasant populations as social, cultural and political subjects.

It must be considered, however, that, in addition to the undeniable character of revindication and struggle against processes of exclusion and historical injustices in Latin America promoted by Rural Education, one must be aware of a few hazards. In claiming education as a right of rural populations, it must be continually stressed that this right should not be thought of from the standpoint of its integration into the capitalist market, nor should it simply be associated with the insertion of rural populations into the production process. Of the challenges that are posed for this reflection, one necessary demand is to scrutinize the details of whom we speak when addressing the Brazilian peasant world – the specific particularities that exist in the plurality and “pluriversality” that is required when considering its populations, which can no longer be viewed under a homogenized gaze.

In the current context, it is crucial to problematize the disputes drawn between peasant agriculture and the countryside as a territory of resistance, a hub in which we place Rural Education as opposed to coloniality and the agribusiness hub. This, in turn, is consistent with the arrangement of coloniality. Given that Rural Education is at the center of this dispute, which currently produces the dichotomy between fighting for the peasant capacity to reproduce their way of life or meeting the demands of integrating work and rural production with capital, the present day demands that this contradiction be made explicit. As Camacho (2017) summarized well:

Assuming that the countryside is in a dispute between two antagonistic models of territorial development – capitalist agriculture (landholdings and agribusiness) and peasant agriculture – proposals that are consistent with peasant education cannot be linked to the project of capitalist

integration/subordination, but rather of defending the interests of the subaltern classes. Rural Education must be understood in the contradiction of the class struggle, as a strategy of struggle of social movements, aiming at emancipation, as a conflicting human formation, because the countryside is in conflict (CAMACHO, 2017, p.657).

Given such disputes and considering that government sectors, companies and non-governmental organizations have appropriated the term Rural Education to promote actions that reinforce the logic of coloniality by agribusiness, it is essential that the original and primordial commitment of Rural Education is demarcated in these disputes with social movements, with the working class, and with the struggle for a project of society that overcomes structural inequalities in Brazil. Reaffirming this commitment and claiming the inseparability of Rural Education with this project is the order of the day.

### **Final remarks**

The structuring of Latin American countries, through their insertion in modern capitalism as a colonial territory or through the new arrangements that placed them in a dependent and subordinated way in their constitution as nation states, reveal a persistence and reformulation of coloniality lasting well into the present day. The deep inequalities built throughout this process turned Latin American populations and territories into peoples and places on the margins of the benefits proclaimed by the logic of modernity and its civilizing project. Nevertheless, resistance movements and confrontations with this logic have also been present in Latin American history, and it is in this hub that Rural Education is located.

Rural Education offers another insight of the right to education of peasants and the countryside as a territory of life, work, culture, and knowledge, with their populations repositioned as subjects of rights. By claiming the right to education, the struggles of Rural Education bring with them the set of other rights that overlap with the demand for a new look at the countryside.

Therefore, it represents a fundamental movement to think about Latin America and, specifically, Brazil. Because Latin America has been marked by the concentration of land ownership and racial distinction of its populations, rethinking the social, political and cultural place of the countryside involves deconstructing the notions of inferiority that, historically, have been associated with it and which affect the very structures that have formed this territory. Peasant populations need to be recognized as an essential social base in the construction of countries, with Rural Education offering a significant contribution in this task.

In the Brazilian case, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was one of relevant advances in the expansion of achievements and political incidence for Rural Education. If the democratic upheavals that Brazil has experienced in recent years have affected Brazilian society, things are no different for Rural Education since, because it is the expression of a set of popular forces, the impacts caused by recent political setbacks reflect negatively on its journey.

Understanding the persistence of coloniality in our arrangements as a society is necessary to situate the existing advances and impediments in the consolidation of a development, country and field project as proposed by Rural Education. That is what the present text intends to present: the fact that Brazil has experienced another place where family peasant agriculture was placed and which Brazilian society is able to recognize the relevance of work and rural culture in the economic, political, political, social and cultural formation of Brazilian society. Moreover, it is a fact that the expansion of this political space has brought a reaction from conservative hubs and the intensification of disputes faced against agribusiness, which make up the revealing tip of the continuity of colonial power today. In this context of disputes, Rural Education asserts itself as fundamental, and the discursive association of its foundations with aspects of coloniality intended here is thus shown to be original and relevant.

Above all, in this sense, limitations and necessary discussions are still perceived because the appropriation of Rural Education has become a fact that demands attention, as the new perspectives associated with it often do not expose the inconsistencies and social disputes. Understanding the plots structured by coloniality and the confrontations brought about by Rural Education should serve to make clear the clash between such logics and, thus, prevent the dampening of their struggles through the softening of the contradictions that are made as one wishes, under one's terms, to make apparent the

possibility that it is colluding with the modern capitalist development model. That is, Rural Education and modern capitalism do not fit together, except from the perspective of clash and confrontation, one in opposition to the other. To reaffirm this antithesis is an urgent and necessary demand in the present and in the near future.

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