

# RURAL PRACTICES OF READING: FROM COLLECTIONS TO MODES OF READING

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses issues related to the reading practice of six assiduous readers coming from rural areas; emphasis is given to the analysis of private collections and the means and ways of reading. The approach derives from the results of a survey based on theoretical assumptions related to the history of reading and the propositions by historian Roger Chartier, and the concepts of the sociology of reading and culture discussed by Bernard Lahire. Through the analysis of the private collections, classified according to the spheres of social circulation, the topics of greatest interest to the readers were identified, as well as modes of reading which revealed silent and extensive reading practices.*

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READING HABITS • RURAL AREAS • SOCIOLOGY OF READING • BOOK  
COLLECTION

**T**HE WRITTEN CULTURE IS PRESENT IN EVERYDAY of a graphocentric society, and it is a recurring and consolidated practice among some social groups or in certain geographical contexts. Studies which deal with reading and writing acquisition are linked, in most cases, to school practices or to the urban culture, in which social relationships and professional activities require individuals' higher level of literacy. Thus, sometimes, it is possible to consider the absence or rarity of written culture in other social contexts, such as the rural one. Given these facts, some questions can be posed: what is the presence of reading in rural areas? What relationship do individuals linked to these sites have with reading? If they read, what do they read and how do they do it? This article intends to give visibility to the existing reading practices in rural areas, analyzing the individual trajectory of six assiduous readers.

This subject is discussed from the results of a survey that aimed to analyze the individual trajectory of six assiduous readers<sup>1</sup> who have lived much of their lives in rural communities, where they established their first relationships with the written culture and incorporated reading aptitude. The six analyzed subjects live in the southern towns of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, four men and two women: Antonio, Nei, Henrique, Ismael, Ondina and Tecla.<sup>2</sup> Those readers were born between the years of 1916 and 1936, and they attended three to five years of primary school, with the exception of Ismael, who did not attend formal school, and Nei who attended high school. All are from farming families, descendants of European immigrants who worked during their professional life in rural activities as family labor, establishing meaningful link with the

<sup>1</sup> It is characterized as "assiduous readers" those individuals who read constantly and intensely in order to be educated or to read for pleasure.

<sup>2</sup> It was opted to use only the first name of the subjects and not to disclose the locations of residence, in order to preserve their identities.

rural environment. Given the questions that arise about the practices of reading, it is tried to analyze here, with more emphasis, the constitution of private collections, the means and modes of reading of these subjects. For this, the theoretical assumptions that guided the research studies are tied to the history of reading and the concepts of the sociology of reading and culture, with the theoretical support of authors like Bernard Lahire and Roger Chartier.

As Chartier teaches (2001b), in addition to link the objects and practices to the social groups which they belong, it is pertinent to understand the use and consumption of these groups. In this study, through the lives of readers in evidence, it was possible to sketch a picture of the reading practices in the social world, showing the reader as a singular individual in society, permeated by personal relations that constitute him/her. In this research, the individual gains space and representation as one subject; however, he/she is bound to a particular social group, which enables “to answer lay, but essential daily questions about the lives of individuals in society” (LAHIRE, 2005, p. 36).

The group of analyzed readers was found from what was called “contact network.” So, it was contacted more than 20 readers of which 14 were actually interviewed. However, given the methodological requirements that involve a search on an individual scale, in which the subjects must be investigated thoroughly, in order to grasp the internal plurality of the single individual, there was a need to reduce the number of readers surveyed. Thus, the selection process of the readers was initially conditioned to their availability and personal interest, and the willingness to talk about the experienced sociocultural events, and especially about their reading practices. This is a very important aspect in the selection process of the investigated group because it is a study that seeks readers’ “confidences” about their readings. Once verified the subjects’ availability and willingness, it was chosen to work with a group of six readers, apparently more homogeneous, so that it could be possible to control variables such as age, social origin, period and level of schooling, and then envision the oneness plurality of each social individual. However, given the analysis of the six social trajectories, it was realized that even having in the “unfold” social context a homogeneous social group, the subjects have singular “folds” arising from different forms of socialization (LAHIRE, 2002).

To learn this internalized social reality in the singular individual, according to Lahire (2002), it is necessary a series of information that need to be compared and crossed over the same subject. For that, the analysis was done in the vertical direction, at the intersection of several data corresponding to the trajectory of the same individual. Oral sources were presented as the main methodological approach to the data collection; it was done 30 interviews with six subjects, defined as “in-depth

interviews”, long report in which they could speak freely about their life trajectories and their relationship with reading. Besides the interviews, other documents were added to the empirical material, such as field notes (BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994), the record of the books that belongs to the private collection of the interviewees, besides written inscription in books, inventories, letters, photos and texts written by the readers about their own readings. These documents, in most cases, were presented in order to illustrate what was recounted.

The record of books which belong to the private collection of each of the interviewees was made from the title and the main bibliographic data of the copies. Detrez (2004) says that the classification of literary genres depends on the personal experience of reading of each individual and suggests that data collection is carried out from the title of the work: “the question of the titles in no way excludes an analysis by genre. The whole corpus of titles was coded by genre *a posteriori*” (p. 100). This was the stance taken in the research when dealing with the analysis of collection, in other words, after the registration of the collections, the ranking from the spheres of social movement was done.

For the data analysis, it took into account the alert of Lahire (2004) regarding the care to be taken not to homogenize heterogeneous contexts, seeking to consider the singularities of the principles of socialization in different periods of a trajectory. Thus, it was attended to changes and continuities in order to learn the contradictions and dissonances that the report presented, even noting that often these aspects arise in ways almost imperceptible to the interviewee, who usually seeks to maintain a coherent discourse on their social trajectory.

## THE LITERARY PREFERENCES IN THE COMPOSITION OF PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

According to Darnton (1995, p. 152), the collection of a private library can identify the profile of a reader, even if the possessed books do not directly correspond to the read book, or even that many read books do not belong to the private libraries. Readers may have books that they have never read, or even they have read books that they do not have, considering the established socialization networks on the loan of the written materials. In the case of the analyzed readers, it was observed that several books were given to them by friends and family, a fact that reinforces their representation as assiduous readers among people with whom they live, as they deserve the books as gift. Initially, with the analysis of private collections, it would be possible to map the subjects by which readers have more interest, and thus “connect ‘what’ with ‘whom’ of the reading” (DARNTON, 1995, p. 152). Therefore, when it can still rely on the report about the relationship that the reader has

with his/her collection, the ability to delineate the ways of reading becomes even greater.

To penetrate the spaces in which private collections were stored demanded patience and, especially, respect to the reservations and restrictions of the interviewees. In most cases, the collections were stored in the bedroom, in drawers of a chest or wardrobe. The record of books, magazines and newspapers that made up the collections was usually done after the third interview with each interviewee, when a trust relationship was beginning to be established. Thus, after the record of books that each reader had, these were classified according to the spheres of social circulation, making it possible to discern their literary preferences, even before the weightlessness of the factors involved in this classification, due to the complex categorization related to literary genre.

Donnat (2004) who is a reading sociologist, in this respect, questions: “How to rate books? What criterion is used to define the genre? This issue of categorization of genre [...] is particularly difficult in the case of books, as there is no true consensus on a nomenclature” (p. 70). This occurs, according to the author, because the recognition of a genre is not an intrinsic and timeless property, with the status of the variable gender. As Marcuschi (2002, p. 30), “genres are not natural entities such as butterflies, rocks, rivers and stars, but they are cultural artifacts historically constructed by humans”. In other words, genres are socio-historical and cultural sensitive phenomena that resist to a precise and stable classification. Marcuschi (2002) adopts the term “domain of discourse” used by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe a sphere of human activity. These domains provide very specific discourses that can be understood as legal, journalistic, religious, among others. The spheres of human activity or the social circulation spheres do not cover a particular genre, but they originate several genres which are themselves institutionalized communicative practices or routines (MARCUSCHI, 2002, p. 24).

The classification of private collections reveals the topics of greatest interest to the interviewed readers, which are linked, in most cases, to the process of reconstructing their identities, as seen in the literary preference of Henrique, one of the six studied readers. Henrique is a farm worker “with callused hands from the hoe”, as his words, a reader that, when looking to the library he has, is proud of the relationship he established with the written culture, also transmitted to their children. Having only finished third grade, due to the absence of schools which enable him to follow up the studies in the rural area, is something that Henrique lamented. He also discusses the difficulties of access the printed material in the countryside. However, he claims to have overcome such difficulties valuing the daily practice of reading and writing in the family context as something essential to human development.

Henrique’s collection consists of 35 books, as listed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**HENRIQUE'S PRIVATE COLLECTION**

SPHERE OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION	NUMBER OF BOOKS
Literary	14
Historical	11
Politics	4
Religious	3
Didactics	3

The most presented sphere in his collection is the literary sphere, which is composed of books that mostly have plots about historical themes, followed by the titles of historical sphere. In this regard, there are several books on the subjects in which have more emphasis in his reports, as for example the World War II and the government of Getúlio Vargas. Henrique has a special interest in these topics because he has called to serve in the army during the war and has been a supportive of Getúlio Vargas. However, it seems that he does not make distinction between the read literary genres, and he sometimes shows only to understand the books by their historical content. For example, when he refers to the exemplary *O homem que matou Getúlio Vargas*, by Jô Soares, Henrique mentions to have found a book that tells another story about the character's death, suggesting that this might be the "true version" of the story, without considering the literary character of the book.

In addition to the listed books, other printed materials were observed at the house of Henrique. His unmarried daughters, who are also readers, even putting themselves in a very reserved manner and not being willing to talk about their practices, during one of the interviews, decided to show some of the books they have. With this, it was seen other spaces of the house that sheltered written materials. Besides Henrique's daughters' books, there were some magazines, for example, copies of *Veja*, *Isto é* and *Caras*. For these, Henrique did not fail to mention: "I like history and everything that is new, this all I value." ["Eu gosto de história e de tudo que é tipo de novidade, isso tudo eu prezo."] However, although he demonstrates interest, none of his reports refer to these readings, which seems to indicate that the magazines are read especially by his daughters.

The family has never got subscription of newspapers or magazines; buying these printed materials occurs when someone goes to the urban area of Pelotas and buys them at a newsstand, even though these are means of information greatly valued by Henrique: "The newspaper brings it on time, the book describes, but not like is in the newspaper. The newspaper is a great thing. For me, then, I am curious about novelty..." ["O jornal traz aquilo na hora, o livro descreve, mas não como está no jornal. O jornal é uma grande coisa. Pra mim, então, que sou curioso por novidade..."] When talking about the access to written materials,

Henrique emphasized the difficulties of buying these in the countryside, citing the example of newspaper, due to the geographical distance from his country estate, it has never been possible to have a subscription. He also said that family or friends, whenever they visit him, take newspapers from previous weeks, that he reads it with delayed.

The newspaper also makes up the list of readings of Nei, resident in another rural area. He says that, despite the difficulties of access, he has always been an assiduous reader of these newspapers, experienced practice since childhood and that it has become indispensable in his life. Nei remembered that at 5 years old, he read the newspapers subscribed by his father, who for a long time received *Correio do Sul* and *Libertador*.<sup>3</sup> “The first newspaper that he signed up was in partnership with his brother, it was from Bage, *Correio do Sul*. After, my father subscribed *Libertador*, which it was from Pelotas, but it was a part of the Political Party, it had general news, but it belonged to the Party. Now, to get here on the countryside...” [“O primeiro jornal que ele assinou, até era em sociedade com um cunhado dele, era de Bagé, o *Correio do Sul*. Depois meu pai assinou o *Libertador*, que era de Pelotas, só que era um órgão do Partido, tinha o noticiário geral, mas era do Partido. Agora, pra chegar aqui no interior...”] According to what he reported, copies which his father subscribed traveled a long way before reaching the final destination: “From Bagé, it came by train to Pelotas, from there it was distributed to Canguçu, it came in a carriage called diligence, a four wheels carriage, there the person in charge classified and distributed it. Then, someone would get or it was sent by someone.” [“De Bagé vinha de trem pra Pelotas, de lá distribuíam para Canguçu, vinha numa carruagem chamada diligência, uma carruagem de quatro rodas, ali o encarregado classificava e distribuía. Depois alguém ia buscar ou mandavam por alguém.”] Thus, reading the newspaper sometimes could be awkward facing that various editions arrived at the same time, as Nei explained:

...the newspaper was daily, but to get in our hands here in the countryside only when we went to Canguçu, [...] only by horse, so when I went, I brought a stack of newspaper. For us to read it was kind of complicated, we wanted to see the latest news, so the others were left out, because there were always lots of interesting things. That time was not easy, when the news arrived here, we were already interested in other newer one, already looking at the younger one. [jornal era diário, mas pra chegar nas mãos aqui no interior só quando a gente ia a Canguçu, [...] só a cavalo, então quando ia, vinha uma pilha de jornal. Para a gente ler era meio complicado, a gente queria ver as últimas notícias, então iam ficando aquelas outras, que sempre tinha muita coisa interessante. Aquela época não era fácil, as

<sup>3</sup> *Correio do Sul* was a daily newspaper, published in Bage (RS), which circulated from 1914 to 2008. (Available at: <[http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correio\\_do\\_Sul](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correio_do_Sul)>). *Libertador* began its activities in 1924 in the city of Pelotas (RS); it was an opposition newspaper, linked to *Aliança Libertadora* political party, and it had their activities finished in 1937 when the Estado Novo abolished political parties and ordered the closure of several partisan newspapers (LONER, 1998).



notícias quando chegavam aqui já se estava interessando nas outras mais novas, já se olhava as mais novas.]

At the time the interviews were conducted, Nei subscribed a newspaper called *Diário Popular*, which was delivered daily in the veterinary clinic of his nephew in the city of Canguçu, and sent to his residence; other newspapers were bought sporadically. The texts from newspapers were for him a source of reading with unique features and benefits, as he mentioned:

...I consider the newspaper one of the largest sources of instruction, because it is a diversified reading, because today, with globalization, we have to know what is around the world, despite of other means of communication. Now the newspaper has an advantage, who subscribes the newspaper is aware of spelling changes. [...considero o jornal uma das maiores fontes de instrução, porque é uma leitura diversificada, porque hoje, com a globalização, a gente tem que saber o que há em todo o mundo, apesar de ter outros meios de comunicação. Agora o jornal tem uma vantagem, quem assina o jornal está a par das modificações da ortografia.]

Besides the newspaper, he subscribed for few years *Noite Ilustrada*, *Cruzeiro* and *Seleções Reader's Digest* magazines.

Regarding to the collection of books, the sphere with greater predominance is the historical. Topics related to local and regional history are mostly found in the collection as well as on his narrative, as presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**NEI'S PRIVATE COLLECTION**

SPHERE OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION	NUMBER OF BOOKS
Historical	5
Literary	3
Legislative	2
Sociological	1

The books of the historical sphere were often mentioned by Nei during the interviews. When talking about local history referred to the title *Canguçu: reencontro com a memória*, by Claudio Moreira Bento, stating that many of the stories in the book that he knew by “just hearing about them” [“só de ouvir falar”] had been recorded and thus preserved. Nei said that one of the books about the history of Brazil he won as a gift from his grandson, days before the third interview, and he was reading it at the time. However, he talked about other books that were not found among the materials available, since, according to him, he



read many borrowed books, as well as he had loaned some copies that were not returned to him.

When analyzing the private collection of Nei, composed of books, magazines and newspapers, in addition to their report, it was noted the diversity of themes and media used by him. The small number of written materials found in his home does not reveal his extensive relationship with the written culture, seen during the interviews, but it shows that the practice of reading has always been present in his life; among the copies found, there are editions from 1929, 1947 and 1960. There are no periods in which the provision was put into “waking state” (LAHIRE, 2002), or reactivated by certain context, which is confirmed in his report, especially in the sentence: “I have lived with a book in my hand, now I grew older, I have been growing older and reading.” [“Vivia de livro na mão, agora envelheci, fui envelhecendo e lendo.”] Nei’s private collection corroborates Darnton’s (1995) argument that the number of books present in a particular library may not directly correspond to all of the books read by an individual.

Antonio, one of the readers interviewed, resides in a house carefully decorated with objects that are a constant reminder of the past. With his wife, they currently preserve and rescue family and community history through collecting objects, photographs and books. For him, the main basis of reading is books, and it was recorded 131 of them in his private collection, as listed in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**ANTONIO'S PRIVATE COLLECTION**

SPHERE OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION	NUMBER OF BOOKS
Historical Sphere	75
Didactic Sphere	15
Literary Sphere	24
Journalistic Sphere	2
Religious Sphere	2
Books in German	13

Antonio says he is an individual who seeks “to know the history” [“conhecer a história”], in particular the history of German immigration in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. In his report, he makes clear that history is the main motivation for his readings, which is confirmed in the analysis of his private collection. The historical sphere is prevalent among his books, and also the books of the didactic sphere largely correspond to historical themes. Another aspect that characterizes this set of titles is the very old edition years; several books dated from the first half of the twentieth century. Antonio was unable to specify the origin of most of the copies, saying only that he has purchased or has won them, but Antonio remembers that two books were part of his childhood

and adolescence. One of them is *Manuscrito brasileiro*, from 1935, used in school, which covers the history of Brazil, especially from the biography of “the greatest” as Pedro Álvares Cabral and Tomé de Souza, for example. The other book is *A juventude no Estado Novo*, composed of texts taken from speeches and interviews of President Getúlio Vargas exalting Brazilian nationalism. He won this book in an event in which he participated in Porto Alegre, during the festivities of Homeland Week, organized by the New State, which aimed to propagate the principles of nationalism, or, as Antonio said, “to teach to be Brazilian” [“ensinar a ser brasileiro”].

The 13 German-language books from his collection were gifted by his relatives and people who inherited them but did not know the books’ language. When referring to this set of books, Antonio said to be proud of reading German, including in Gothic letter: “I learned here at São Domingos School, I studied until the third book in Gothic script, I still know how to read, when it was spelled out letter by letter.” [“Aprendi aqui na escola São Domingos, estudei até o terceiro livro em letra gótica, eu sei ler ainda, quando se soletrava letra por letra.”] He has a significant number of photos that portray several generations of his family and families from the place where he resides and a considerable collection of documents - inventories, passports, territorial maps, among others - as well as various objects that remit to sociocultural practices experienced by him, showing great concern for safeguarding family and local history. Bosi, resuming Halbwachs, refers to the social role of “the individual who remembers”:

There is a moment in which the mature man ceases to be an active member of society, ceases to be a life propeller of his group: in this time of social old age, it is left to him; however, a specific function: to remember. To be the memory of a family, a group, an institution, a society. (BOSI, 1994, p. 63)

Antonio currently plays this social role of remembering, storing objects and historical documents, turning back to the past from the reading, motivated to “apprehend the past” Thus, the analysis of his collection and report converge; his reading preferences are specifically directed at issues that allow him to relive events and reconstruct his memories.

In the case of Ismael, who stated, whenever referring to his status as a reader, to be “an almost illiterate person” [“um quase analfabeto”], reading and writing take up much of his time today. He did not attend formal school and says, with some sadness, not knowing what it means to go to school, regretting not having any documents from his school report card. Due to the lack of schools in his place of residence, he was taught by a lay teacher (without pedagogical training), who lived for one

year in his parents' house in order to teach reading to the neighborhood children. His collection, organized after his retirement, consists of 17 books, according to Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**ISMAEL'S PRIVATE COLLECTION**

SPHERE OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION	NUMBER OF BOOKS
Historical	8
Didactic	7
Literary	1
Agricultural	1

Ismael says that his favorite readings are those related to historical themes; among the books, it is predominated subjects related to the history of Rio Grande do Sul and towns within his region. The history textbooks are also widely used by Ismael for their reading and writing, because through them, he takes notes and writes summaries about different topics. But it is evident that he read more than 17 books he has; his knowledge of the historical and geographical events confirms his status as an assiduous reader. As Chartier says (2001a, p. 160), "we must remember that there are other ways to get to a book in addition to private possession, that printed texts are not all books read in private spaces" Besides the books, Ismael has a number of documents and photocopies of books' texts that have been loaned to him for some time.

The majority of books in his collection have a dedication, especially in those which have been given to him as a gift by his daughters, grandchildren, friends and other family members. Gifts certainly express what symbolically Ismael is for people who live with him. This can be seen by observing the themes of the books that he gets, that do not vary substantially. Although Ismael likes reading, it was noted that he does not have the habit of buying books or subscribe to newspapers or magazine. When reporting that a while back he told his daughters about his desire to have an updated map book, he showed his inability to buy it on his own. This fact can be attributed to the lack of bookstores in the urban area of the town where he resides and the distance from a larger urban center. However, it must be considered the existence of a public library a few blocks from Ismael's house, a place that was never visited by him. When he was questioned about his possible visits to the public library, he says: "No, no, I'm an old man, almost an illiterate person!" ["Não, não, eu sou um velho quase analfabeto!"] It is understood by this that his non schooling citizen condition makes him not feeling able to attend certain specific spaces of literacy, which probably also explains the fact that Ismael did not buy his own book.

Meanwhile, Tecla attended school until the fifth grade, having, since childhood, contact with books, magazines and newspapers around

her father's home. Currently, she organizes her private collection into three distinct groups: the books that belonged to her father, her sister's and her own. The set of books that were her father's is composed of 25 titles, all in German, and according to Tecla, "they are literature, religion and even children's stories books, some in Gothic script." ["são de literatura, religião e até de histórias infantis tem, alguns em letra gótica."] The collection which belonged to her sister consists of 12 titles, all of the literary sphere. Among those who were acquired by Tecla, there are different spheres of social circulation; however, it also dominates the literary sphere, as shown in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**  
**TECLA'S PRIVATE COLLECTION**

SPHERE OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION	NUMBER OF BOOKS
Literary	23
Administrative	3
Religious	4
Others	4

The interviews with Tecla revealed that, after her 50 years of age, when she became a widow, she went back to reading with more intensity and assiduity, as Tecla did when she lived in her father's house. Thus, in recent years, she had the opportunity to acquire more books; 13 titles from her collection were published between 2002 and 2010, therefore indicating more recent acquisition. These books were not purchased in the conventional way, in bookstores, as she explains, "Do you know where I have purchased them from? From Avon [laughs]. Now, lately it has not been very good, what it comes the most is self-help books." ["Sabe de onde eu tenho comprado? Do Avon [risos]. Agora ultimamente não tem vindo muito bom, o que vem mais é de autoajuda."] Tecla said that buying through the Avon Catalog<sup>4</sup> is a way to facilitate the purchase, because she does not need to go to the city of Pelotas (RS) to acquire a book. Besides, the price offered by Avon also motivates the acquisition: "Sometimes there are very cheap books from Avon." ["Às vezes são bem baratos os livros do Avon."] In the town where he resides, even in the urban area, there is not a bookstore, what makes difficult to access written material and requires her to adopt other buying strategies, such as the purchase through the Avon catalog.

Besides the books she owns, Tecla reads ones which she gets from the town's library, place that she goes assiduously after widowhood: "After 50 years that I have started going to the library, I have always taken something." ["Depois dos 50 anos que eu comecei a ir na biblioteca, eu sempre tirava alguma coisa."] In all her interviews, she referred to the Municipal Library<sup>5</sup> as a place of many reading options which have contributed significantly to her access to different titles. Tecla seems

<sup>4</sup> The Avon company, known for its cosmetics sold door to door, has been excelled, in recent years, in the bookselling segment, operating in regions where access to books is virtually nonexistent in other ways. (News on *Exame* magazine "Como a Avon se transformou numa máquina de vender... livros," 21/04/2011).

<sup>5</sup> This is Canguçu (RS) public library, county with about 53,000 inhabitants. According to information provided by the librarian, the library has been opened since the year of 1945. Currently, it has a collection of approximately 12,000 titles, maintained and updated with municipal funds and with the help of federal government programs.

to have found in the library a place of freedom, of discoveries, and to meet with books read for pleasure and delight. According to Petit (2008), the reason for the libraries is just “to allow everyone the access to their cultural rights, the access to a wider cultural universe” (p. 177).

Besides book, Tecla reads *Zero Hora* newspaper and *Veja* and *Seleções* magazines. According to her, these are updated and essential readings: “We received the newspaper on Saturday and Monday, on Tuesday, it comes the magazine [Veja] and then once a month, it comes *Seleções*. And when the newspaper arrives, I do not leave it, and what I like the most is Donna’s<sup>6</sup> section.” [“Nós recebemos o jornal sábado e segunda, na terça vem a revista [Veja] e depois, uma vez por mês, vem a *Seleções*. E quando chega o jornal eu não deixo, e o que eu mais gosto é do caderno Donna.”] Reading newspaper and the presence of magazines and books are not something new in her life. She mentioned that in her childhood she witnessed her father’s anxiety awaiting the arrival of the newspaper and its importance, given by her father, as a mean of information. Tecla inherited not only the collection of books that belonged to her family, but also the willingness to practice reading to pursuit knowledge and citizenship. As Lahire states (2005, p. 21) when socializing or installing body habits have occurred early, regularly and intensely, the greater will be the likelihood of someone having a strongly internalized disposition. Tecla’s report shows that she embodied in her father’s house “inventory of provisions”, according to the expression of Lahire (2002), which, although it was in “waking state” during her married life, Tecla found updated and reorganization context after her widowhood.

Ondina, another research participant, is a reader of the Bible (“My book is the Bible” [“O meu livro é a *Bíblia*”] she says) who comprehends reading as a practice of reverence and faith. Her trajectory was marked by the family’s religiousness, her submission to the mother-in-law after the wedding and the double shifts at work – at home and in the farm. Intensive reading of the Bible has begun after the age of 60, when she became unable to work due to an illness. When she was questioned about reading other literary genres, Tecla said: “No, not another book, because if I want to read anything else I will find it, but my reading is the Bible.” [“Não, outro livro não, porque se eu quiser ler outra coisa eu arrumo, mas minha leitura é da *Bíblia*.”]

Ondina has a small collection of books, composed of eight titles, all from the religious sphere, such as prayer and daily devotional books. All titles were published in 2000, which, according to her report, it is justified by the difficulty that she previously had to access the titles. But it is also noticed that there is a culture of not saving books, and she said that received or acquired leaflets in the church with time “they were left out and were lost,” [“eram deixados de lado e se perdiam”] revealing the habit of not saving or reserving specific space in the house for the organization

<sup>6</sup> Donna is a special Sunday section of *Zero Hora* newspaper that addresses topics such as beauty, fashion, relationships, behavior and health.

of written materials, which still seems to occur nowadays. However, her first Bible was preserved even after being replaced, certainly because it is recognized as different, sometimes not considered as a book itself, but as a sacred object.

The first Bible that Ondina got in Portuguese, as in her parents' house there was only a Bible in German, was a wedding gift from the minister who performed the ceremony. In 2007, her daughter gave Tecla a new Bible, published in 2001 by the Sociedade Bíblica do Brasil, with a new updated translation into current language. This is the Bible that Ondina currently reads and that was in her hands during the interviews. The first Bible, which was read in full four times, was only shown during the fifth interview. It was later noticed that one of the reasons for this reservation, even though she had been asked to show it before, was its poor condition. The Bible was kept in the bottom of a wardrobe without cover, with many folds and with yellow, stained and loose sheets; its materiality demonstrated how much it had been handled. As Chartier stated (1994, p. 8), a work does not exist outside of its physical reality. In the case of Ondina's Bible, its unrestricted, daily and intensive use is seen in the wear condition of the book.

Ondina's constant practice of reading happens in two ways: through the full reading of all the books of the Bible and the eventual re-reading of some books. She justifies these two intensive reading practices as being different. As for the full reading of the entire Bible, she says that is only motivated by faith, "because I have a lot of faith, then my religion is to read the Bible. [...] It brings me joy, I am so happy. When I was really sad, the Bible boosted me." ["porque eu tenho muita fé, então a minha religião é ler a *Bíblia*. [...] Me traz alegria, eu fico tão feliz. Quando eu estava ruim mesmo, a *Bíblia* que me levantou."] Regarding the rereading of a few texts, she explained that there is another purpose: "I am cutting grass, weeding, I am working on the field, and I am thinking what I read yesterday. [...] I wonder what it was like, how it is, then I have to read again." ["Eu estou cortando pasto, estou capinando, estou trabalhando na lavoura, e fico pensando o que li ontem. [...] Fico pensando como é que foi, como é que é, aí eu tenho que ler de novo."] Thus, Ondina distinguishes the intensive act of reading motivated by faith, that relates to her innermost feelings, from the reading of some texts, which occurs in order to remember or to seek a better understanding of what had been read.

The private collections of the six participated readers allow the researcher to view, in all the titles listed, the profile of the interviewees. Among the social circulation spheres present in the studied books - historical, literary, didactic and, in particular, religious - it is enabled to understand the reading preferences of the participants. The greatest interest topics for their readings refer to the aspects related to family



background, to events that shaped their trajectories, and to facts that connect to their regional or local history. It is the topic readings that allow the readers, as Petit stated (2008, p. 78), “to think about its own life, with the help of fictional texts or testimonies that touch the deepest of human experience.”

According to Lahire (2002), there are varied factors that produce the literary preferences of readers. Professional, social and economical aspects do not act alone, but they depend on the amount of “summaries of embedded experiences” (LAHIRE, 2002, p. 96), in which it is the range of individual life situations, when together, they produce their social experiences.

## MODES OF READING IN THE EXPERIENCE OF READERS

According to Chartier (2001b), in the analysis of collections, it is needed to understand the groups’ usage and consumption of books before linking them directly to certain social groups. As the author says, it is necessary to add to the knowledge of books’ presence the modes of reading (2001b, p. 79). When referring to research related to the history of reading practices in the European society under the Old Regime, Chartier states that “lack of enumerations of printed books or possessed a central issue, of the uses, of the handling, of the forms of ownership of the printed materials” (CHARTIER, 2001b, p.78). Thus, it is crucial to understand that the act of reading produces plural and movable senses that are related to the “collective or individual, inherited or innovative, intimate or public ways of reading, and of reading protocols deposited in reading object, [...] in accordance with the habits of the time” (CHARTIER, 2001b, p. 78).

In an earlier work (CHARTIER, 1994), the author discusses the changes in which the ways of reading have gone through over the years. According to him, the first revolution of reading practices would be related to the physical and body modality of the reading act “that focuses on the decisive importance of passing from a necessarily oral reading, essential to the reader to understand its meaning, to a possibly silent and visual reading” (p. 98). The shift from oral reading to silent reading would have occurred during the long Middle Ages, becoming standard practice in the fourteenth century among the lay aristocracy. This revolution was followed by a second one, on reading style, situated in the second half of the eighteenth century, in which intensive reading, limited to a select number of texts that are read and reread, is changed by an extensive, avid and rapid reading practice, that consumes significantly number of titles.

However, with the revolutions in the modes of reading, there was not a replacement from one practice to the other, but there was a magnification from one in relation to the other, as Chartier explains



(2001b, p. 89): “Would it mean that the old style was disappearing in the course of the eighteenth century and that only existed earlier? Certainly it would not be necessary to reinterpret the opposition between the two modes.”

The analyzed readers reveal, in the narratives about their practices, that they perform reading in a silently and extensively way, with the exception of Ondina, the Bible reader, who reads in an extensively and silently way. For Nei, silent reading is agility: “I read only with the eyes, there are people who read aloud, in a low volume of voice, pronouncing the words, so there is a reading that a person does little by little per day.” [“Eu leio só com os olhos, tem pessoas que leem baixo pronunciando as palavras, aí fica uma leitura que o sujeito lê um pouquinho por dia.”] None of them made any mention about moments of collective reading aloud, done during family gathering to substantiate the representation of reading as an oral and own collective practice of peasant groups, recurrent in studies of reading practices in ancient society (CHARTIER, 2001b, p. 93).

Even for those who grew up in families whose parents had the habit of reading, as in the case of Tecla and Nei, reading is not remembered as a collective and oral practice. And they claimed to have never read aloud to their children. Henrique said to have had great concern about the teaching of writing culture for his 12 children. In his reports, he repeatedly remembered the moments when the children were placed seated around the table to learn: “While my wife cooked dinner, I taught.” [“Enquanto a mulher fazia a janta, eu lecionava.”] Even in those opportunities, Henrique did not read to his children, but only taught them to read, write and use the four mathematical operations. The readings, which he read, was individually done for his own learning: “There I drank the knowledge to then teach the children.” [“Ali eu bebia do conhecimento para depois ensinar os filhos.”] So, the family only witnessed reading as an example of instruction to be followed, but as a silent and individual practice.

Ondina, when reading the Bible, never had the habit of reading aloud to her husband, children and grandchildren: “Always in silence, I do not read aloud, always quietly.” [“Sempre em silêncio, não leio alto, sempre quietinho.”] However, the biblical teachings are transmitted orally to the family: “Many times I explain everything, but the children do not pay attention, I have explained many times the book of Job, how it happened, how is that happened, for him too [husband], but reading is in silent.” [“Muitas vezes eu explico tudo, mas as crianças não dão muita atenção, eu já expliquei muitas vezes o livro de Jó, como aconteceu, como é que aconteceu, para ele também [marido], mas a leitura é em silêncio.”]

For Chartier (2001b, p. 84), “this heard reading does not distinguish read from tell and feeds itself on the same texts often heard”. Thus, it can

be considered that, in the telling of the biblical passages from the printed text, Ondina would not be conducting an oral reading, but a reading oralization. However, the ways to read are not limited to these two major models; there are other aspects to be analyzed, as for example, reading protocols (CHARTIER, 2001b, p. 89). Thus, the reading is a practice which involves the body reader that interacts with the text, which takes up space, time and requires a determined body position.

Goulemot (2001) discusses about the rite of reading, the body institution that reads. Over the years, reading practices were developed in different body positions and by alternating technical support for assistance with this practice (candle, oil lamp, lampshade): “We are a reader that gets tired or sleepy, yawning, experience pain, tingling, suffers from cramps” (2001, p. 109). The books also determine the position and the place of reading, for example: “Read in public a philosophy title or a pornographic text is recognized through provocation, that such books are themselves the scope of their readings” (p. 109). Thus, for the author, the behavior of readers is much as an imposition as a free choice, and it is from these readers attitudes that the senses are constituted and employed in the reading texts.

The readers analyzed in this research also report changes for which their modes of reading went through over the years, particularly in relation to the time spent reading. Henrique, for example, said that currently does not have a time or a place to read, making the books his main entertainment, but prefers reading during the day due to the lighting, sitting on the shade of a tree in the summer months; different from the time he had a professional life, when he was only available at night and used to read on the table, with an oil lamp.

For Antonio and Ismael, after retirement, the main entertainment is books. In their reports, they did not mention a preferably place or position to read; they just remembered that during their professional life, the night period was intended for this practice. And they mentioned the postures and places that they believe are not consistent with the attitude of a reader. For example, both stated that they have never read sitting on the bed. As Darnton stated (1995), beyond their own attitudes to the generations, there is a personal disposition of each individual in relation to the proper reading position.

In the statements of Tecla, the father figure as a reader is always remembered, even in relation to the body posture assumed by him when reading. According to Tecla, her father sat after his rural work, covered his legs with a blanket, and, thus, delighted over his books. In two of her interviews, Tecla was sat with her legs covered with a blanket, and in one of this occasion, she recalled: “Just as I am, with covered feet, he covered them, he sat there and read.” [“Assim como estou, com os pés tapados, ele tapava, sentava e ali ele lia.”]

This was also one of her preferred postures to read, sitting on the couch with her legs covered with a blanket. It is observed that the modes of reading present in the parents' house were embedded and maintained, including with regard to the time spent reading. During childhood and adolescence, Tecla learned that this is a practice to be done when the day comes to an end and work activities were finished. In relation to the time spent in reading in her parents' house, she said, "It was at night, because at that time we had many obligations, not like nowadays..." ["era de noite, porque naquele tempo a gente tinha muitas obrigações, não é como hoje"]. Tecla is currently retired, lives alone and does less daily chores. Yet, reading is a practice that continues to be held in the evening: "During the day, I knit and crochet, sometimes I listen to the radio. But I always read at night, and on Sundays afternoon, then I sit on my bed and read." ["Durante o dia, eu faço tricô, crochê, às vezes escuto rádio. Mas sempre leio à noite, e nos domingos de tarde, aí eu sento na cama e leio."] During the day, knitting and crochet are allowed activities and "well seen" as a right conduct to a "housewife," dedicated to an useful activity.

Michele Petit, when referring to the practice of reading from rural residents of France, mentions the interdiction of reading as an idle practice:

When reading, a person indulges in an activity whose "usefulness" is not well defined. Our interlocutors referred to this secular prescription as follows: "One must not waste time", "one should not be vacated", "one should not stand by and do nothing." They remembered this shared ethic that, for long time, it was the guarantee of survival across rural France, doing the work the highest value and rejecting idleness. (2008, p. 105)

In addition to a recreational activity designed as leisure and that, therefore, it should be performed at specific times, it is understood that the time spent in reading is more restricted, particularly for women who are daily engaged in household chores. Tecla, for example, stated that, in her father's house, they only read at night, because they had many obligations. However, even being currently retired and having less housework, she does not read during the day, but only at night, except on Sundays, day that she reads in the afternoon. Therefore, it is clear that there is a relationship between reading practices and gender. The representations of reading practices of men and women in society can vary, even among the readers themselves, like Tecla, who has revealed a controlled and careful conduct with her practice of reading by being a woman.

The same occurs in the case of Ondina in relation to the time spent reading. In the period in which the job was done with her in-laws, the reading time was quite restricted: “I read, when it was possible, on Sundays and rainy days.” [“Eu lia, mas conforme dava, aos domingos e dia de chuva.”] The daily involvement with the household chores and with the work on the farm was seen several times on her reports when referring to the double workload of rural women. Ondina said to have had full time for reading only when she was sick and could not work in the field or at home: “That time I had cancer, I spent the day reading and doing what I could.” [“Aquele tempo que eu estava com câncer, eu passava o dia lendo e fazendo o que podia.”] Once cured from the disease, even retired, she returned to perform all the tasks which was dedicated earlier, reserving a few moments to read: “Now I read on Sundays afternoon, [...] at night and on Sundays, because it is not possible, during the day I still go to the field.” [“Agora leio domingo de tarde, [...] de noite e nos domingos, porque também não dá, durante o dia eu vou pra lavoura ainda.”] So, sitting on a beach chair in the kitchen, with the Bible in her lap, Ondina enjoys the night hours devoted to reading.

In the case of the four men readers, with the retirement, the time spent reading was enlarged. For those who read especially at night, because it was a time to rest from the rural work, the reading schedules have become more flexible, with the act of reading assumed as leisure practice, carried out at any time, without embarrassment. In contrast, for the women, who take numerous domestic responsibilities, the retirement does not seem to have significantly changed their routines, and, so, the reading remains a night practice. In the case of Tecla and Ondina, the social construction of this image and of this representation of women linked to domestic chores and the constant performance of activities considered useful seems to resist retirement, helping to establish prohibitions against reading practices understood as practices of idleness.

When observing the means and modes that involve the reading practices of the surveyed readers, as well as the behavior connected to their act of reading, it is possible to understand these individuals and their reading practices that characterize their trajectories. These are reading external aspects, that according to Darnton (1995), can answer questions related to “who”, “where” and “when”, which contributes significantly to answer more complex questions about the “how” and “why” of reading. Lahire (2002), when referring to the sociology of reading, says that the analyses were always very focused on the cultural consumption, and that “the meaning of the readings, or rather, the experiences that readers live with books, are questions that sociologists virtually left out” (p. 95).

## CLOSING REMARKS

Paraphrasing Dr. Assis Brazil:

Welcome to this mansion which ends,

End the hard work and sweet calm;

House the plow that tills the land,

And the book that educates the soul. (Nei)

[Parodiando o Dr. Assis Brasil:

Bem-vindo seja a esta mansão que encerra,

Encerra dura lida e doce calma;

Abriga o arado que lavra a terra,

E o livro que educa a alma.]

These Nei's verses, said when he left at the end of his first interview in 2007, represent the six surveyed readers' acceptance, receptivity and willingness to "tell" their stories. Tecla, Nei, Ismael, Antonio Henrique and Ondina, through their reports, showed the visibility of the written culture among the residents of rural areas, enabling that the representation of rarefaction of these practices in the rural context could be questioned and problematized.

Individual trajectories revealed the strategies of access to books, magazines and newspapers, especially when considering the geographical distances, characteristics of the rural environment. It is possible to observe the written culture in the practices of individuals within the rural areas, in the first half of the twentieth century, even when the presence of the school was still quite discrete, as the reports show. What confirms the presence and the uses of writing culture is the presence of newspapers as a main means of communication in this period. According to the narratives, the newspaper was sent by various means; sometimes the recipients received several editions at once, making difficult the practice of reading, because of the sequence to be chosen. However, it is clear that the newspaper, even coming late to the rural areas, did not fail to arouse interest in articles, essays, crosswords and even the "latest news". Thus, the newspaper was not confined to the brevity of dated news, which makes previous day edition an outdated source. In the reading practice of these readers, the newspaper was a source of information which allowed access to the news, even if they were from the previous week.

For all of the interviewees, to attend school between 1920 and 1940 meant overcoming obstacles or creating strategies to face the distance, the absence or the cost of tuition, in the case of parochial schools. The difficulties of access to school were many, and the school trajectory, when there were schools in the localities, did not exceed an average of five years, during the first half of the twentieth century. However, the value assigned to the school practices reveals the belief in

writing culture as fundamental to civic education, which is observed in the reports that pointed to the initiation of children in written culture even before school entry.

Through the analysis of collections of private books, classified according to the spheres of social circulation and reports that were collected, it was identified the topics of greatest interest to the readers that, in general, are related to what was characterized as the historical, literary and religious spheres. For male readers, they read particular texts on historical topics, even though, in some cases, the text is literary and fictional, but presents in its story plot a particular historical event or personality. In these historical readings, the most read texts are those that focus on topics that relate to family history, ethnic or regional and local origin. When talking about modes of reading, it is important to reaffirm that surveyed readers have silent and extensive practice of reading. Except Ondina, who reads intensively and silently, all the other readers read extensively, but also in a lonely and silent way, what enables agility in reading, as they report.

It was further observed that the literary taste and sensitivity are linked to the point in the life cycle of the readers and to the social experiences that they absorb during the reading, as well as, their sex belongings (LAHIRE, 2002, p. 96). The six analyzed profiles reveal that the topics of privileged reading are those which connect to social experience and to memory of public and private events; they are readings about the past through the eyes of the present. It is also relevant to emphasize that literary taste is also related “to the sex belonging”, to the questions about gender. Women readers seem to conceive differently the experience established with the texts they read. Tecla, for example, reads especially literary texts in order to gain knowledge about other places, other ways of life, which demonstrates the practicality and utility of her readings, at the same time, the reading is done by the literary emotion, the delight. Men readers say not read literature, although some historical texts are literary. There are also varied strategies to access the printed material, and there are several networks of socialization established to access them: buying books at bookstores, used books shops, and even through the Avon catalog, magazine and newspapers subscriptions; lending books from friends and public library; receiving books as gifts, among others. Readers have also shown that they had interlocutors of reading, people who provide access to books, exchange information and indicate readings, motivating and enabling new practices.

Considering what was presented and questioned, it is necessary to stress that the work on an individual scale makes possible to visualize the variation of practices and preferences in the same social group. By analyzing the profile of the surveyed readers, it was not the aim to make the generalization of reading practices in rural areas, limiting the analysis

to a single cultural record, but rather, emphasize the reading practices in this context, noting the specifics, variations and ambivalences of each social trajectory. Thus, it can be stated that reading as a cultural practice is permeated by social experiences that intervene in the modes and in the appropriations made by the social individual, being a creative practice that allows the development of an identity that goes beyond the previously established models and allows the construction of meaning of its own existence.

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