

Rural-urban migration, youth, and higher education

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, the proportion between rural and urban population has been significantly altered in the last decades (nowadays, less than 20% of Brazilians live in rural areas); the migration movement towards the city is composed of a younger group than in the past, and mainly by women. This selective migration has assumed important proportions in regions of primarily family farms in the south of the country. This article deals with the relations among social transformations in rural areas, demand for higher education, and socio-professional destinations of children from small farms. The results that guided the analysis were supported by sociological studies that approach the above themes, and interviews with undergraduate students from rural areas of eastern Santa Catarina (from 2011-2012), enrolled on different higher education courses.

KEYWORDS

higher education; rural-urban migration; youth and education.

MIGRAÇÃO RURAL-URBANA, JUVENTUDE E ENSINO SUPERIOR

RESUMO

No Brasil, a proporção entre a população rural e a urbana foi alterada de modo significativo nas últimas décadas (menos de 20% residem no meio rural), e os movimentos migratórios em direção à cidade são formados por um público mais jovem e mais feminino que no passado. Essa migração seletiva vem assumindo proporções importantes nas regiões de predomínio da agricultura familiar, como o sul do país. O presente artigo trata das relações entre transformações sociais no campo, demandas por escolarização em nível superior e destinos socioprofissionais dos filhos e das filhas de pequenos produtores rurais. Os resultados que nortearam a análise estão apoiados em estudos sociológicos que abordam os temas antes relacionados e em entrevistas com universitários de diferentes cursos, procedentes de áreas rurais do oeste do estado de Santa Catarina (período 2011-2012).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

ensino superior; migração rural-urbana; juventude e educação.

MIGRACIÓN RURAL-URBANA, JUVENTUD Y ENSEÑANZA SUPERIOR

RESUMEN

En Brasil, la proporción entre la población rural y la urbana fue alterada de modo significativo en las últimas décadas (menos del 20% vive en el medio rural) y los movimientos migratorios en dirección a la ciudad son formados por un público más joven y más femenino que en el pasado. Esta migración selectiva viene asumiendo proporciones importantes en las regiones donde predomina la agricultura familiar, como el sur del país. El presente artículo trata de las relaciones entre las transformaciones sociales, las demandas por instrucción superior y los destinos socio-profesionales de los hijos y las hijas de pequeños productores rurales. Los resultados que guiaron este análisis se apoyan en estudios sociológicos que abordan los temas anteriormente mencionados, y en entrevistas con universitarios de diferentes cursos, procedentes de áreas rurales del oeste de Santa Catarina (período 2011-2012).

PALABRAS CLAVE

enseñanza superior; migración rural-urbana; juventud y educación.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1970s, during field research, a small farmer I was interviewing observed: “Write it down there: here in the countryside there is tremendous dormant power, it needs to be awakened. There needs to be more education here”. At that time, most schools in the region of the study worked with multi-grade classes and school was only available from the 1st to the 4th grades. The study found that school attendance was high at this educational level, (between 90 and 100%), but parents and teachers reported that after these early grades, most children left school, usually because there were few schools close by. The lack of public transportation to schools with better infrastructure was another obstacle to the continuation of studies.

This brief synthesis helps us to understand the meaning of the farmer’s words, unhappy with the government’s neglect of one of the most fundamental rights: the right to education. This was not, however, only a local reality. In the 1970s Szmezcányi and Queda (1979, p. 226) observed that more than 45% of the Brazilian population lived in the countryside and suffered from a considerable disadvantage when compared to the urban population: among young people 14 or older, 42% in rural areas were illiterate compared to only 16% in urban areas. For children from 6 to 13, the levels were 55% and 27% respectively.

A few decades later,¹ the relation between the rural and urban populations had changed significantly (today, less than 20% of Brazilians live in rural areas), accompanying a worldwide trend. Although there are variations, there has been a global increase in the urban population: while in 2010 53% of the world’s population lived in cities, the forecast for 2050 is that this share will reach 75% (Gauthier; Luginbühl, 2012, p. 36). In Brazil, “the proportion of people living in rural areas decreased from 32% in 1980 to 17% in 2004, i.e. a decrease of almost 50% in the last quarter century” (INEP, 2007, p. 11).

Brazil’s rural regions have undergone profound changes, due mainly to capitalistic modernization policies for agriculture that privileged large and mid-size farms, over small ones. Demographically, among other transformations, migration from the country to the city intensified, accompanied by a decreasing fertility rate, aging and masculinization of the rural population (Camarano; Abramovay, 1998). Similarly, families are undergoing transformations, both in terms of the values of each generation, and the loss of autonomy of farmers, given the dependence on financial capital and agribusiness, generating uncertainties about the inheritance of the property and the future of the children.

1 Camarano and Abramovay (1998) observe that the importance of the rural exodus is confirmed when examining the census data (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE) since 1950.

Educationally, the number of schools with multi-grade classes, although still significant,² has declined and many students, due to a policy of grouping rural schools and school transportation subsidies, travel from rural to urban areas to continue their studies.

Despite the policies adopted, studies continue to reaffirm broad inequalities between rural and urban education, in all regions of Brazil, in terms of access to education, quality, school infrastructure, teacher education, illiteracy, and the discrepancy between students' ages and their grade (INEP, 2007). If it is almost possible to say that education until the 8th grade is universally provided in cities and rural areas, at the high school level we find the largest distortions between the schooled and non-schooled. Data from the National Household Sampling Study (PNAD) 2004 "show that the average [years of] schooling of the population of those 15 or older that live in rural areas (4) corresponds to half of the estimate in urban areas (7.3)"(INEP, 2007, p. 14).

Based on educational statistics and the results of empirical research, it is possible to affirm that the continuation of schooling beyond the eighth grade³ is relatively recent among the children of small farmers. There is little information about the access of rural youth to higher education, their plans, their schooling conditions, and professional opportunities, precisely because there is a tendency in education to focus on urban areas, in relation to both children and youth. In this sense, this article⁴ aims to contribute to academic production in the field of education and to the working group in the sociology of education of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação em Educação (ANPEd)).

GUIDING ISSUES AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In a publication on issues related to family farming,⁵ the authors observe that "there is no economic activity in which family relations are as important as in agriculture." (Silvestro *et al.*, 2001, p. 25). This statement is supported by a variety

2 According to the School Census 2011, 45,716 schools in Brazil still had multi-grade classes, with students from different grades and ages in the same room. Of these, 42,711 are in rural areas and 3,005 in urban areas .<http://educacao.uol.com.br/noticias/2013/01/15>. Accessed January 16, 2013.

3 In 2009, the distribution of the total urban and rural population by schooling was the following: 1) high school graduates: 20% of the urban population versus 8% of the rural; 2) incomplete higher education: 3.9% of urban population versus 0.8% of rural; 3) completed higher education: 7.6% of the urban population versus 1.2% of the rural (DIEESE, 2011, p. 75)..

4 Study originally presented to Working Group 14, Sociology of Education, at the 36th National ANPed Meeting.

5 There is no consensus about the definition of family agriculture. In this article I use Abramovay (*apud* Stropasolas, 2006, p. 115) who "understands family agriculture as one in which the management, property and most of the work is provided by individuals that have blood or marriage connections."

of factors, particularly because the work is done predominantly by family members and because the professional activity and property are passed from generation to generation. The children begin to do household and farm chores at an early age and gradually learn about production techniques and property management. But this precocious socialization in the world of work and to its responsibilities does not guarantee that they will continue their parent's activities. According to Silvestro, "if in the late 1960s, continuation in the agricultural profession still had a moral obligation, this pressure no longer exists" (*idem*, p. 28).

In recent decades, migration from the countryside to the city involves a younger population and more women than men (Camarano; Abramovay, 1998). This selective migration is assuming important proportions in regions dominated by family farming of southern Brazil (Stropasolas, 2006, p. 173).

The data that support this text are part of a study about the relations between social transformations in the countryside, schooling, and the social destinies of children of small farmers. I do not intend to analyze the profound changes in family farming due to global social processes, and policies of capitalistic modernization of Brazilian agriculture, whose impacts on the concentration of land and income, and the deterioration of working conditions and the maintenance of farms, have been extensively analyzed in the field of rural sociology.

Without ignoring the structural conditions at the base of these transformations and the economic and social inequalities in the countryside, this study focuses on an analysis of the educational demands of young people and their perspectives on migrating and remaining in agriculture. It is based on the hypothesis that economic, social, and cultural changes in rural areas, combined with the policies of education expansion (for basic and higher education), and greater professional demands for school diplomas, produce new configurations and demands regarding the schooling of farmers' children.

According to another study (Silvestro *et al.*, 2001, p. 51), youth migration from agriculture to urban areas is not necessarily related to the continuation of studies and confirms that the educational level among children of small farmers is low, which reduces their chances to enter the urban job market. The same study shows that there are strong evidences of permanence in family agriculture of young people with low levels of schooling; that migration is provoked less by an idealization of the city and more by a lack of opportunities in rural areas; and that young rural women have a higher educational level than men⁶ and express a stronger desire to abandon agricultural activities (*idem*).

Are these also the characteristics found in the families of the university students interviewed? What common points and differences can be seen in this group in relation to their permanence in agriculture or migration to the cities? Are

6 This last data is the same nationwide. In Brazil, considering the level of schooling, according to sex and residence, the difference in favor of women increases after primary education in both rural and urban settings. (DIEESE, 2011, p.76-79).

the young people who continue their studies isolated cases in their families? What are the reasons that led them to continue their studies until higher education?

The results that guided these questions are supported by quantitative and qualitative information from: 1) the literature consulted that addresses themes related to rural transformations and social problems among youth, such as schooling and work; 2) field research conducted with university students about their families' social and economic characteristics and issues related to professional occupations, migration, and expansion of educational capital.

The research was done in 2011 and 2012. The main instruments of data collection were interviews and questionnaires⁷ given to 5 men and 7 women, most between 20 and 25,⁸ enrolled in undergraduate courses in different fields in public and private universities. All came from rural areas in western Santa Catarina, a region with a strong tradition of family agriculture.

Another characteristic of the context is the cultural influence of European migration, especially by Italians and Germans. Farm production in the region is diversified, aimed at both subsistence and the market: and includes corn and soybeans, poultry, pork, and dairy cattle. The region is "characterized by a strong agrofood industry, historically based on family production units", in five decades it has become "the largest agribusiness center for poultry and swine in the country" (*idem*, p. 32).

On the other hand, financing policies and the system of integration of family farms with agribusiness have accentuated the difficulties in maintaining the properties, mainly due to debt and greater dependency on the demands of capital. The 1990s were marked by the effects of modernization on family farming, accompanied by various adverse factors (inadequate agricultural policies; low financial returns, lack of their own land for production, among others) that deepened the crisis of family agriculture (Cancelier, 2013, p. 125).

It is in this context of uncertainties for future generations that our interviewees talk about their perspectives for work and life. An analysis of the set of interviews allowed us to identify common elements in the issues studied; while the analysis of particular situations provided a more detailed observation of the configurations of each family, according to the problems investigated.

7 This was a socioeconomic questionnaire designed to collect information about the families of the students (family composition, regarding number of people, age, sex, marital status, housing situation and occupation) and about their farms (size of the land, crops and products, people employed, income, etc.). The interview was guided by some open questions on school history, access and permanence in the university, family and continuity of study of the children, work and study, rural-urban migration, and socio-professional perspectives for young people.

8 Only two interviewees were older.

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROJECTS

With the parceling of rural properties, the traditional practices of land transmission to maintain children in the agricultural activity have become more and more limited and created a "problem typical to developed countries, particularly in European societies: the rising number of productive units whose future is questioned due to the lack of a successor" (Silvestro *et al.*, 2001, p. 19).

According to a 1999 study of 15,293 family properties in western Santa Catarina, at least 12% were inhabited by couples over 41 years old with no permanent presence of young people. The same research found that 69% of young men and 32% of young women interviewed wanted to stay in agriculture, however "the intention to continue the parental profession clashed [...] in most cases, with the small size of the family land" (*idem*, p. 21).

The data presented in this text, obtained through interviews with undergraduate students from this region, reinforce this youth migration phenomenon, which will certainly have implications on inheritance processes. It also provides information on the demographic transformations and their impacts, such as population aging and the significant decrease in the number of young people in rural areas. The statement of this student echoed those of most interviewed:

In the community where I lived [...] many families had left; whole families. The community was getting smaller and smaller. The older ones stayed, but their children were leaving, as there was nobody to take care of the property, they ended up selling it and going to the city [...] 90% of my high school friends have the same plan, they left to study and don't intend to go back. (Lucia, psychology student, 22 years old).

By analyzing the number, gender and age of the siblings we discovered different family configurations, which revealed schooling situations, probable socio-professional destinies, and the presence of higher education in their projects. Although the family units do not all have the same configurations in relation to these questions, the results identify a dominant trend in behavior in the group researched, that is, the pursuit of a higher level of education and difficulties in the succession of the rural property, following the trend in the region studied.

MIGRATION OF YOUNG MEN AND PROLONGED EDUCATION

We found the following configurations in the ten families interviewed:⁹ in five of them only the parents lived in the rural area¹⁰ or with an underage child; in one, following the retirement and migration of the parents, one of the children kept the land; in the other 4 families there were adult children in the house, but in two cases this was a temporary situation. From the total of 28 young people in these 10 families, only three young women and two young men regularly worked in agriculture. The data presented confirm the trend indicated in the literature consulted related to the difficulty in maintaining families' properties as working farms. The following description is a typical case of this characteristic.

The family is composed of the parents and three children, two sons and a daughter. The father, 62 years old, studied until the third grade, the mother, 53 years old, studied until the eighth grade. They are small farmers working in an integrated system with large agribusiness. Due to bank loans to increase productivity on their property, the couple is having difficulty keeping its land. This is not an isolated case, as showed by other studies in the region.¹¹ During the interview, the father¹² firmly expressed his disbelief in the viability of the agricultural activity and explained the efforts he took so that his children would not follow in his footsteps, but look for other alternatives. Both sons reinforce this objective. One of them said:

A good part of the farmers are in debt, they sought financing, but couldn't pay the loans. This is his case [the father]. He was one of the founders of a leftist party, of the union; he was always involved in social movements. Today he doesn't participate anymore, he got tired, he says that it was not worthwhile. There was a manifesto about the farmers' debts, but in the end what they got was emergency credit [...] These policies, he says, are not the solution. (Douglas, geography student, 20 years old).

Since they were children, the kids studied and worked in agriculture, a situation that continued until they finished high school, when they moved to the city, in large part due to the lack of professional perspectives. Parents and children have a very critical understanding of the reality of the family and their social surroundings. They consider the social degradation that they experience not as a unique case, but as the result of economic policies that changed, by all their

9 The twelve students that participated in the research are from 10 families. Two of the families had two children interviewed and the others only one.

10 The fathers' ages varied from 46 to 64 and the mothers' from 41 to 58.

11 In a study in western Santa Catarina similar situations were identified: "A large number of family farmers could not maintain the rhythm demanded by the market, for which reason their income frequently frustrated their expectations. With the reduction in income sources, the farmers cannot pay their debts, many abandon their properties, others sell them, thus losing the only source they have to guarantee their survival" (Cancelier, 2013, p.126).

12 In this family the parents were also interviewed.

determinations, the conditions for work and survival of family farming. In the rural area they come from, one of the sons estimates that “95% of the young people have left”, remaining only “an elderly couple and a property with deteriorated structures due to the lack of opportunities”. The same young man added:

My point of view is that one of the major contributors to the deterioration of the properties is agribusiness. They demanded investments, more investments, sure, to improve the quality of the final product, but many people couldn't keep up and stopped, many others got bank funding and ended up in debt, which is the case of my father. (Raul, geography student, 24 years old).

The migration of the children and the investment in university education are not isolated from the social conditions of the reproduction of farm families, from the strong social appeal for an increase in formal education, and the new demands of the urban job market. The two brothers adamantly affirm that the extended studies by their generation is not the consequence of an individual issues, but of social demands and a strong social and family appeal. When speaking about other youth from his region, one of the brothers affirmed:

Almost everyone has this idea that one needs to study [...] You have to go to college to be someone in society, to have a better job, to have better living conditions [...] You have to keep up with the evolutions, you can't fall behind, otherwise, you will quickly be excluded, you will have to work in construction (Douglas, geography student, 20 years old).

Young people leave the countryside to work or to work and study. In the situation above, the brothers Raul and Douglas¹³ migrated, also moved by the father's wish to break from the family tradition of low schooling and farming:

He [father] said that he didn't have the chance; he always had to work since he was a child. He stopped going to school in the third grade, but he wanted his children to go to college. My mom has also always encouraged this, but not as much as my dad. (Douglas, 20, geography student).

Different from the tendency found in studies on family-school relations that give visibility mainly to the role of mothers in the children's schooling,¹⁴ the recognition of the major role of fathers in the investment in schooling for the children is recurrent among the students interviewed. Although the mothers are not absent, when the students speak of the importance of the family in the children's

13 The students' names are fictitious.

14 Romanelli (2013, p. 53) when analyzing studies in the field of family-school relations in online journals, also calls attention to the absence of the father in empirical studies. This finding indicates the need for studies on family educational practices that consider the father's participation in the schooling process, in both rural and urban areas.

studies, the paternal guidance has a more important place. Without ignoring the influence of other dimensions of the social and cultural reality, it is possible to draw the hypothesis that the small farmer, noticing that he cannot pass along the land to the next generation, as is the cultural tradition in southern Brazil, reinforced by the sense of crisis in family agriculture, feels responsible for guiding his children to another profession. In the group of families studied, the fear of a non-qualified job and of social degradation in the city reinforce the idea of professional reconversion based on a school diploma to broaden the possibilities for insertion in the urban job market.

However, since most family farms in the study had low income, the parental effort is more in the form of symbolic encouragement than as economic investment in this project of extended schooling. The students who took part in the study had problems in meeting their basic living expenses and continuing in higher education.

In the situation reported above, the three siblings tried to establish themselves in an urban profession. In the city, they survive with the little money they earn from their jobs and, to stay in the university they must make concessions.

The oldest sister, 29, studied agronomy in a private university, but, for financial reasons, stopped taking the course and enrolled in an online course on cooperative management.

Douglas, 20, finished high school when he was 17, studied geography in a public university, but had to interrupt his studies due to the difficulty in conciliating study and work. At the time of the interview, he worked as a receptionist in a hotel, but had plans to change jobs and affirmed his intention to return to the university course at night.

His brother Raul, 24, finished high school when he was 19 and worked in the family farm until that age. After a few years, he passed the college entrance exam and enrolled in a federal university that recently opened in the region in a course to become a geography teacher. When he moved to the city, he worked as a driver, and later he changed to a job more compatible with his university degree. At the time of the interview, he was earning 2 minimum wages per month. In his case, as for most of those interviewed, it is only possible to stay in university when conciliating work and study, with a considerable personal effort, as he observed: “you need a lot of will, sometimes you want to give up, but one [brother] helps the other, one supports the other, let’s carry on”.

The possibility of going back to rural work is not discarded by Douglas, although he is very unsure: “I intend to, but I don’t know how long I will have this idea, but I still plan to”. His brother is more certain: “for now I have no intention of going back home [...] It is very hard there, it is a job with little return and a lot of work”.

The reasons that led them to invest in the studies are not unilateral, they are both objective and symbolic. Higher education, according to Raul, is a necessity faced by young people when competing for a place in the urban job market, to not reproduce in the city the same condition of hard and undervalued work found in the rural area. But studying in a university is also a reason for social recognition and

identification or, as he said: “there is a question of pride, really, that I am studying, I’m growing as a person. I am very proud to say that I study in the federal university”.

A similar situation, with a permanent presence only of the parents on the property, can be seen in families with children from both sexes or children of only one sex. In some cases, the parents and one school-age child remains on the farm, as is the case of one of the families in the study. The couple has two children, André, the oldest is 22 and the other, who is 10, is a student in the 4th grade. André is in the 5th year of the agronomy course in a private university. His parents are farmers in an integrated system with agribusiness, raising pigs and dairy cows.

According to André, his school peers and especially his father were the biggest influences in his decision to go to college. Parental transmission of the importance of study is not a recent practice in the family: “my grandfather asked my father if he wanted to study or work, he decided to stay home and work. Today, he tells me he regrets it.” The father, 50 years old, studied until the 4th grade, and the mother, 45, finished the 8th grade and was now enrolled in high school, in a youth and adult education program.

While his father opted to stay on the farm, André decided to follow the advice he was given: “my father has always wanted me to go to college [...] He always said that someone with no education has no future, you know?” Like his father, André also worked in agriculture since he was a child, but he, as well as other youth of his generation, had other influences that came with the expansion of education and the higher flexibility of the borders between the rural and urban.¹⁵ Although André’s undergraduate course is directly related to farming, he does not show, as in the previous situation, a desire to follow his father’s profession, since he considers that it demands a lot of physical effort, dedication and is socially undervalued. Like others interviewed, he wants a job in which he can have vacations, more free time, as in other salaried jobs, and autonomy attained with his own income. He explains:

You want to be more free, to have vacations, a 13th salary [...] the rural worker is not valued [...] When you have production, you can’t sell your product for a price that covers the production expenses. You have a financial loss. It oscillates a lot. There should be a greater incentive” (André, Agronomy student, 22 years old)

Both these situations reveal that socioeconomic conditions are not homogeneous in the group, but there is a very similar tendency when the youngsters evaluate the future of family agriculture and the opportunities for young people in this field.

15 If these frontiers still exist, observes Carneiro (2005, p.251) they become more tenuous with migration, exposing young people to new experiences, values, and aspirations that are typical of urban middle class youth. Modernization in agriculture has equally produced transformations in the relation between the local and the broader universe. Family agriculture in western Santa Catarina “is strongly connected to the economic dynamic of the national and international market, which, in turn, transforms this territory into a space where global tendencies are manifest on a local level” (Cancelier, 2013, p.125).

When explaining the economic conditions and infrastructure of the family farm, André affirms that he could work as an agronomist there, but this is a hypothesis on-hold and not yet a decision, but an exclusively personal desire. His comment clearly shows this: “I wanted to go back home, but my father, we talked and he encouraged me not to return, he thinks it will be easier somewhere else”. In this case, the position is not the result of a lack of land or material conditions to continue in agriculture, but the desire for change, even though we can see in his discourse some hesitations between going back home or staying in the city.

There is a large group of young people in the same situation, they are children of farmers with a certain stability that leave the fields for salaried work, as seen by Renk (1999, p.43) in a study in the same region. According to this author, youth migration “can be perceived as the denial of a farm project”, different from a historic tradition of migratory movements in which mobility “reproduced farm labor”.

In the arguments of the young people interviewed about the themes of migration, work, and study, many elements are associated, but mainly the hard economic and labor conditions that make it unviable for those who want to continue their parents’ activity. It is not, however, a one-sided perception: the countryside which excludes them is, at the same time, idealized for offering “a better quality of life, less pollution, healthier food”, but is also an environment of adversities, of “hard work, with no vacation and low income”. The youngsters are faced with this ambivalent situation of a better quality of life in the field and a horizon of few future perspectives.

LOOKING FOR NEW HORIZONS: THE PERSPECTIVES OF FARMER’S DAUGHTERS

The literature consulted about social transformations in the countryside indicate a migratory movement from rural to urban areas that is more accentuated among girls,¹⁶ while young men express a higher interest in staying in agriculture. According to the references indicated in this text, this selective migration has two associated phenomena as a consequence: the permanence of an older population in the countryside and bachelorhood (Camarano; Abramovay, 1998; Silvestro *et al.* 2001).

In the families of the young women interviewed, Considering all the siblings In the families of the youths interviewed, a total of 11 women were in higher education and one had already graduated, four are in high school or have graduated and one had a middle school diploma. Of this total of 17 young women, only three stayed in the rural area, two of whom married farmers. This data, together with the interviews, are very revealing of the feminine refusal to reproduce the condition of rural workers.

This portion of the text will describe two situations that show what moves these women in the search for new horizons and higher education. In the first, the couple has 4 daughters, all in non-agricultural professions, and only the parents

16 According to data presented by Camarano and Abramovay (1998) the higher number in rural areas of young men in relation to young women is a reality in Brazil since the 70s.

work on the farm; the father is 55 and finished the 8th grade, the mother is 47 and studied until the 4th grade. The oldest daughter is 26, finished high school, is married and works in commerce. The second daughter is 24, has a college degree in physical education and works in this field. The youngest is 20, she is a student of civil engineering and is in a paid internship. Marilene, the student we interviewed, is 22, single, in the 4th year of an undergraduate biology degree program and works at the university where she studies.

Study and farm and house work have been part of her life since she was a child (“I started working in the fields when I was 6 years old”), but after she finished high school, at the age of 17, she followed her university degree project, always as a student-worker. Her initial job was as an intern in a school, but the income was not enough to support herself and pay for her studies, for which reason she began to work full-time in a slaughterhouse. Later, she began to have health problems and, as she affirmed, “my grades were falling behind, I couldn’t study well, I was too tired”. Her next job was more compatible with her condition as a student and her field of study, which makes her think about continuing her studies after she graduates.

Access to higher education is a recent condition in the extended family: among her cousins on her father’s side, “nobody has gone away to study, they want to stay in the countryside, the men followed this path. Not the girls, the girls didn’t want to weed, to be under the sun”. She also revealed her personal wish to be financially independent of her parents and live in a less isolated place, broadening her social circle and leisure opportunities. According to this biology student: “there is nothing to do in the countryside. Those who stay in the rural area are the old ones, the young ones don’t stay anymore”.

In four families, some children left looking for work, while others stayed in agriculture. These different circumstances in the destinies of the young people portray the female condition and its mobilization, as shown by the following situation.

The father is 64 and the mother 58, both studied only until the early grades of primary school. They are retired farmers and four years ago moved to a small town in the vicinity. They have four children. The oldest daughter, 39, finished 8th grade, married the son of a farmer and moved in with her husband’s family. She enrolled in a distance education course, but did not complete it. The second child, 33, did a high school equivalency program, married the daughter of a farmer and, similarly to his sister, moved to his in-law’s property, because, as reported by the sister interviewed: “he [the father in-law] had a lot of land and there are no sons in his wife’s family”. She also reported that her 26-year-old brother, the third among the siblings, went to high school and succeeded the parents on the family property. He wanted to join the army, but due to an accident with the father “against his will, had to stay and take care of the land, he started doing it and ended up liking it”.

Lúcia, the youngest daughter who gave the interview, is 20, single, and is in the 5th and last year of a major in psychology. She is the only one, among those interviewed that could reasonably rely on family financial aid to survive in the city and study. Similarly to other female students in the study, she opted for higher education and her decision is related to a professional project and a desire

to not reproduce the condition as a woman in a rural area, about which she has an unfavorable opinion: “if she [the woman] stays on the property, she will generally be a housewife and take care of the children [...] she is not recognized in the countryside as men are”.

With this critical perception about the unequal position of women in the management of the property, together with the opportunities provided by high school (broader knowledge and friendships), among other influences from the rural and urban universe, Lúcia began to realize “There is a world beyond the one we live, you know? That is what provoked in me the desire to go out, work, to have my own money, to study [...] I want to have my independence; I’ll work hard to study”.

The decision to follow her studies was planned and had full support of her parents:

My father and my mother have always supported me a lot, even when I decided to go to university. My father said ‘research well what you want to do, go to the Internet, look, research, so you won’t regret it later’. He knows that undergraduate courses cost a lot of money, and for a number of years, so, about five years before I graduated from high school he started to save money because he knew about this expense. He always said ‘we didn’t have the chance to study, but I want my children to’ (psychology student, 20 years old).

The financial investment in their children’s studies represents a material and symbolic inheritance. As this student reported, when her siblings finish higher education they will receive part of their inheritance in cash while she, who received family resources to pay for her studies, will receive a different amount. She said. “he [her father] will see how much I’ve spent and maybe I’ll get a part too”. Her statements about family strategies regarding division of the inheritance and responsibilities on the property reveal the continuation of practices based on hierarchical differences of gender and authority, as demonstrated in other studies,¹⁷ although some studies show signs of change in these cultural patterns (Stropasolas, 2006; Silvestro *et al.*, 2001).

FINAL REMARKS

By relating the data from the interviews with the literature consulted, the analysis allowed us to identify, precisely because of the effects of global factors on agricultural policies and the social transformations of the rural world, close relations in the results of this study and those in the literature concerning the perspectives for young people in the context of family farming. The aim of the study was not to generalize the situations identified in the field research, but to show a strong tendency, which has been developing in the country, regarding the social condition of youth in the countryside. The study indicated current and pertinent questions for

17 Among other authors: Stropasolas (2006) and Brumer; Pandolfo; Coradini (2008).

the sociology of education in Brazil, especially considering the gaps in production about schooling and its relation with the destinies of farmers' children.

Considering the schooling level of the university students interviewed and their siblings, it was possible to see that it was not a question of a deliberate choice of one of the children to study, while the others stayed on the farm, as in the past. Of all the siblings of those interviewed of high school age or older, only two have not continued their education beyond middle school and only one has not finished this level. All the others are in high school or have already graduated (8 cases) or are university students (5 cases).

Although the research focused on families whose children have a schooling level higher than the average of Brazil's rural area population (INEP, 2007), the reality we found shows changes in the needs and schooling practices of both the children and parents, and increased time in the schooling system, regardless of sex and position in the family. The expansion of educational capital is a necessity for responding to the transformations in the labor market, and increasing the possibilities for social insertion of youth in urban occupations. It also represents the need to overcome the historic low level of schooling among the rural population and the taint of being branded "*colonos*", a term used to identify small farmers, which is normally associated with a lack of sophistication and other pejorative connotations.

All of the university students interviewed came from public schools and are children of low-educated small farmers.¹⁸ Limited by the opportunities for schooling in rural areas, most of these young people studied the last years of middle school and high school in the city, using school transport subsidized by the government. This policy of support for school transportation is controversial, as we can see in the following passage:

[...] the offer of school transport is the object of an intense debate, because while social movements and a series of governmental policies aim to fix the rural worker in the field and insure land ownership for those who want to cultivate it, school transportation acts inversely, taking the child of this farmer to the urban centers (INEP, 2007, p. 37).

The testimonies of the young people who migrated to the city to broaden their school formation show that keeping young people in agriculture is a complex task and depends on more than just educational policies. The transfer of a student from a school in a rural area to another in an urban area certainly leads to new social and cultural experiences, which can broaden their interest to other possibilities, as reported in the interviews, however it does not seem to be the determining factor for migration. Therefore, to understand the problematic of the current exodus of young people, it is necessary to consider micro and macro social aspects of reality,

18 Among the 10 families researched, only one father and two mothers had finished middle school and one father had finished high school. All had a maximum of four years of study.

in an analysis that considers the social transformations in the countryside and their relation with society as a whole.

The university students' perceptions about youth migration from the rural areas to the city are supported by the small amount of land for the children who want to stay in agriculture, the low financial return that impedes the modernization of the property and, especially the lack of incentives to family farming and the adverse working conditions. If those circumstances are at the base of their dissatisfaction and challenge farmers' confidence in the future of the profession, they cannot singly explain the youth exodus. Other social and cultural dimensions, such as family practices of division of labor and income among members, the unequal gender relations in the distribution of inheritance and the still restricted leisure opportunities are present and have an important place in the youngsters' evaluations of life in the countryside and their future projects.

Although the analysis considered a small sample of young people, the results offer important indicators of the social transformations in rural areas and the meaning of education for the next generations.

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