
PARTICIPATION IN RURAL SETTLEMENT COOPERATIVES: A STUDY OF LABOR SENSES

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ABSTRACT. Researches from different areas have shown many problems in the organizational process of self-managed enterprises at rural settlements of the agrarian reform, including a difficulty for rural workers to participate actively in them. Thinking about this problem, our aim was to investigate psychosocial forces and senses given to labor by settled rural workers organized in cooperatives, which may explain modes of participation in these organizations. A case study was conducted in a cooperative located at Mário Lago Rural Settlement, in the Administrative region of Ribeirão Preto, state of São Paulo, Brazil. The qualitative research was built in three moments: theoretical/bibliographic/documental research, observation of meetings in the cooperative and semi-structured interviews with nine members. We analyzed the results through a triangulation between different sources of information. About the results, we highlight that instrumental participation was predominant in the cooperative, because there was an articulation of psychosocial forces that reinforced the group's economic and symbolic dependence. On the other hand, the cooperative gave its members a sense of belonging, but without connection with actual participation in the organization. Inconsistencies between the workers' everyday experiences and the way the cooperative movement was institutionalized and presented to cooperative members have brought about these different forces, which have as backdrop the reaffirmation of hegemonic interests in the rural world.

Keywords: Participation, meanings, cooperative movement.

PARTICIPAÇÃO EM COOPERATIVAS DE ASSENTAMENTOS RURAIS: ESTUDO SOBRE OS SENTIDOS DO TRABALHO

RESUMO. Pesquisas de diferentes áreas têm constatado uma série de problemas no processo organizativo de empreendimentos autogestionários em assentamentos rurais da reforma agrária, entre eles, a dificuldade dos trabalhadores rurais de participarem ativamente dessas organizações. Para pensar sobre esse problema, o objetivo do estudo apresentado neste artigo foi o de investigar as forças psicossociais e os sentidos atribuídos ao trabalho por assentados da reforma agrária organizados em cooperativas, que podem explicar as formas de participação dos cooperados na gestão dessas organizações. Foi realizado um estudo de caso em uma cooperativa localizada no Assentamento Mário Lago, região administrativa de Ribeirão Preto, Estado de São Paulo. A pesquisa qualitativa foi construída em três momentos: o levantamento teórico/bibliográfico/documental, as observações das reuniões da cooperativa e as entrevistas semiestruturadas com nove cooperados. A análise se deu pela triangulação entre as diferentes fontes de informações. Dos resultados, destaca-se que predominava a participação instrumental, produzida por uma conjunção de forças psicossociais que reforçavam as dependências econômicas e simbólicas do grupo. Por outro lado, a cooperativa cumpria a função de pertencimento para os sujeitos, mas sem ligação com a participação real na organização. Essas diferentes forças foram construídas na desproporcionalidade entre as vivências do

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cotidiano dos trabalhadores, as suas trajetórias de vida e o modo como o cooperativismo é institucionalizado e imputado aos sujeitos, tendo como pano de fundo a reafirmação de interesses hegemônicos no mundo rural.

Palavras-chave: Participação; sentidos; cooperativismo.

PARTICIPACIÓN EN COOPERATIVAS DE ASENTAMIENTOS RURALES: INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE LOS SENTIDOS DEL TRABAJO

RESUMEN. Investigaciones en diferentes áreas han mostrado una serie de problemas en el proceso de organización de empresas de autogestión en asentamientos rurales de reforma agraria. Uno de estos problemas trata de la dificultad de los trabajadores rurales en participar activamente en tales organizaciones. Para pensar acerca de este problema, este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar las fuerzas psicosociales y los significados dado por los trabajadores rurales de reforma agraria organizados en cooperativas, y que pueden explicar las formas de participación de los miembros en la gestión de la organización. Se realizó un estudio con una cooperativa del asentamiento Mario Lago, región administrativa de Ribeirão Preto, Estado de Sao Paulo, Brasil. La investigación cualitativa fue diseñada en tres etapas: la investigación teórica / bibliográfica / documental, las observaciones de las reuniones de los miembros de la cooperativa y entrevistas semiestructuradas con nueve miembros. Los resultados se analizaron por la triangulación entre las distintas fuentes de información. Destacamos que prevalecía entre los miembros la participación instrumental por la combinación de fuerzas psicosociales que han reforzado las dependencias económicas y simbólicas del grupo. Por otra parte, la cooperativa tenía la función de pertenencia para los miembros, pero sin relación con la participación real en la organización. Estas diferentes fuerzas se producían por la desproporcionalidad entre las experiencias cotidianas de los trabajadores y sus historias de vida, y por la forma como el cooperativismo se institucionalizó, teniendo como contexto la reafirmación de los intereses hegemónicos en el mundo rural.

Palabras-clave: Participación, sentidos, cooperativismo.

Introduction

Self-managed enterprises at rural settlements of the agrarian reform are part of a field of contradictions. Settlers are faced with a set of obstacles that determine the survival of these organizations, especially difficulties for one's actual participation in their collective management. Among reasons that contribute to this problem, the literature has highlighted inconsistencies between the self-management discourse, on which most of these organizations are based, and objective and subjective possibilities that settlers find to give another sense to this way of organizing work, since much of their labor trajectories have been built on a wage-earning system (Martins, 2003; Christoffoli, 2010; Scopinho, 2012).

Therefore, the aim of this paper was to understand what psychosocial forces operate concerning the workers' difficulties of actual participation in cooperatives, and what senses they attribute to this type of work, which may explain the cooperative members' connection with or detachment from the management process. We will present a case study conducted in a cooperative at Mário Lago settlement, in Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, which will hereafter be called "Cooperative". First, we present the origins and justifications of the study, the theoretical-methodological frameworks adopted to operationalize the research, and then the analysis of results.

Since 2012 the organization studied had been going through a crisis as its members were failing to participate in its management and in the marketing of what was produced in the settlement, the purpose for which the Cooperative was created and which is its only economic activity. Of all 147 members, 50% had commercial relationships with the cooperative and only 10% attended meetings regularly.

Management was mainly carried out by the president's family, and the positions of the board of directors were exercised by some members only formally. Despite it being a cooperative whose statute stated that it was a self-managed enterprise, we see a mismatch between the requirements of this type of organization to operate and the reality observed.

The settlement was inserted in a context of contradictions, given its location on the border with the urban perimeter of the city of Ribeirão Preto, which tensed even more the possibilities of existence of this type of organization, considering that the economy of this region is sustained by great circulation of capital and technology geared toward agribusiness. In addition, most subjects built their life trajectories in the city and in a formal and/or informal wage-earning system. Even though they had no previous experience working in the field, they saw the settlement as a chance to rebuild their lives marked by migration and poverty.

Data from the 2010 Census indicate that approximately 47% of the Brazilian population in extreme poverty lived in the countryside (IBGE, 2012). According to the National Plan for Sustainable and Solidary Rural Development [*Plano de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável e Solidário*] (PNDRSS), which sets goals and governmental actions for rural development in Brazil, this problem should be faced through strategies to combat inequalities in the countryside, generate income and preserve environmental resources, having as main axis the strengthening of family agriculture. Thus, one of the organizational matrices established by the country's rural development policies is the economic organization of families by means of associations and cooperatives which, according to the Ministry of Agrarian Development [*Ministério de Desenvolvimento Agrário*] (MDA, 2013), would have the objective of strengthening local markets, facilitating the control of producers over production chains and favoring solidarity networks in production, distribution and consumption processes.

Although scholars from various fields of knowledge have been discussing the role of self-managed cooperatives at rural settlements for at least 30 years, the literature also presents controversies and disagreements. Some authors have an optimistic perspective (Singer & Souza, 2000; Gaiger, 2006; Veronese, 2009) of the self-managed model as a viable solution to poor working and living conditions, which would allow individuals to experience feelings of belonging and establishing relationships of cooperation. Others argue that these organizational forms are actually mechanisms to take the state's responsibility for the agrarian reform and hide conflicts arising from the way the Brazilian agrarian issue has been historically resolved in favor of great landowners (Scopinho, 2012; Firmiano, 2014; Benini & Benini, 2015).

Because the creation of these organizations is an imposed condition so settlers can access lines of credit and other resources made available by public policies, the mandatory creation of these enterprises can be considered a political and economic control strategy for the application of these resources. In the opinion of Scopinho (2012), the imposed and compulsory cooperation, in addition to not organizing individuals politically, has little to do with their active and organized participation in the construction of settlement policies and only reproduces the patronage and productive sociability model of the land. Firmiano (2014) supports the idea that these policies are intended to reduce the action of social movements that fight for land to the institutionalization of entrepreneurship by settlers in order to delegate functions of organs responsible for the implementation of agrarian reform settlements to local initiatives, like cooperatives.

Benini and Benini (2015) consider that the relationship between cooperative work and State is contradictory and permeated by tensions. While workers seek means for the legal recognition of the enterprises, this institutionalized format can minimize the political potential of organizations. This is because the enterprises can both benefit from public support and resources and run the risk of losing autonomy, being subjected to and depend even more on the State. In the authors' opinion, this type of relationship is built by policies that supposedly stimulate the creation of these formats to rescue relationships of solidarity when, in fact, they weaken the cohesion between workers and organizations, besides intensifying competitiveness between enterprises in the dispute for public notices and resources.

Although there is no consensus in the studies, there is a set of barriers of objective and subjective order mentioned by the literature (Martins, 2003; Bergamasco, Oliveira & Souza-Esquerdo, 2011; Barone & Ferrante, 2012) that may explain the difficulty for workers to participate in these organizations.

The objective aspects refer to the lack of infrastructure of settlements, suffocating marketing, conditionality of access to lines of credit and federal programs for the creation of cooperatives, and the low financial return of these enterprises. As for the aspects of subjective order, migration paths, succession of weakened ties that carry marks of exclusion, internal fights, difficulty of identification among group members, previous experiences with the wage-earning system and feelings of uncertainty can also compromise permanence and participation in cooperatives. The emptying of meetings for decision making is also a reflection of the difficulties that settlers face in the organizational process of these enterprises. The Institute of Applied Economic Research [*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica e Aplicada*] (IPEA) conducted a survey with cooperatives in rural settlements and found that of the 78% of cooperative members, 52% claimed that they attended over 70% of all meetings held. In the state of São Paulo, 53% of the settlers were part of a collective organization, and only 34% said they had the same attendance at meetings (IPEA, 2013).

Authors who defend self-management as an alternative to this precarious scenario of labor exploitation, such as Gaiger (2006) and Veronese (2009), argue that control over management and production processes would enable the attribution of new senses to labor, in addition to rescuing relationships of solidarity between subjects. Besides being a distinct organizational model of hetero-management, self-management would be a political mechanism to question forms of domination and oppression of the capital. However, Lima (2010) refutes this idea and sustains that, although self and hetero-managements have distinct political-ideological projects, in the reality of labor relations both convey values of flexible capitalism and the managerial discourse.

Then could self-management overcome the contemporary labor crisis? Would this organizational model allow subjects to attribute new senses to labor indeed? Azambuja (2007) concluded that senses are built in the current contradiction between the self-management discourse and what is practiced in the routine of the organization. According to the author, the mere adoption of self-management does not guarantee that subjects will give meaning to labor only by solidarity values. This is because the capitalist economic model does not change and labor remains being hetero-determined. According to Oliveira (2014), the answer to these questions may be in the nature of affective ties with the organization, which will set the tone to the sense attributed to labor, and may be more or less aligned with self-management principles.

Rosenfield (2007) establishes three categories concerning workers' relationships with self-management based on the senses they attributed to labor: (a) engagement, in which workers have a clear knowledge of the political-ideological project and consider self-management an alternative to new relationships between capital and labor; (b) compliance, regarding cooperative members' involvement with the self-management proposal more instrumentally than ideologically, with the cooperative being a concrete alternative for job and income generation and referring also to a residual relation of hetero-management; and (c) retreat, in which inclusion in the collective happens individually, marked by survival strategies associated with the subject's personal journey. In this profile, the feeling of collective ownership is absent because the collective is only a means to achieve individual goals.

Scopinho (2012), when investigating the organizational process of Sepé Tiaraju settlement, located in the macro-region of Ribeirão Preto, found that for the settlers the sense that was closer to self-management was autonomy. However, it would be more related to miserable conditions once experienced by the settlers than to a political choice. For the author, the dimension of self-management in the everyday life of these subjects is still incipient due to the absence of substantial transformations in the Brazilian agrarian structure.

In short, there is no consensus in the literature about the impact of these organizational forms on the constitution of a rural worker's subjectivity, especially in the context of settlements. In addition, according to Vasquez (2009), this is still a research field little explored by Psychology and, according to Whitaker (2002), formulations about psychosocial processes related to labor in the rural world are elaborated, mostly, from knowledge produced in the urban world, decontextualized from the complexity of the rural reality.

Theoretical framework for the analysis of participation

The existence of self-managed enterprises can be problematized by taking as reference the combination of concepts from Social Psychology and Psychosociology for two reasons. First, because the concept of *sense* in Social Psychology, according to Nasciutti (2009), refers to a representation built mutually by objective and subjective conditions of individual and social life, expressed in various and contradictory sociabilities (practices, relations, discourses and institutions). This is a concept that is in line with what Whitaker (2002) says about studies at settlements. For this author, investigating the elements that compose the sociability of settlers requires a careful analysis of specificities of this context, as it is in this field of contradictions, in the combination of urban and rural standards, that subjects will seek to give another meaning to their labor and life experiences. The other reason is that the theoretical foundations of Psychosociology elect as object of study groups, institutions and concrete sets, mediators of collectivity and subjectivity (Enriquez, 2011). Although the analysis should not be reduced to the group, to its dynamic or organization, these elements can serve as a reference to understand how psychosocial forces operate in the relationships of subjects with organizations.

From this theoretical perspective, we regard contemporary labor as a producer of sociabilities mediated by capitalist and neo-liberal values such as competitiveness and individual merit to the detriment of solidarity and collective relations. A consequence of this individualist "ethics" is the lack of recognition of and responsibility for the other's reality. For this reason, affective bonds, when established, are temporary and weak in loyalty, but are useful to labor relations typical of flexible capitalism (Carreteiro, 2003; Gaulejac, 2007; Enriquez, 2011).

In this sense, it is important to learn how subjects relate and establish ties with each other and with the institution, and whether the constitution of a group is preceded, or not, by cohesion (Guareschi, 2001). For this author, ties have a dynamic character and can be built in different ways, at times fluid, at times very cohesive or maintained by a particular aspect of the group, and may change as its members acquire greater or lesser power.

In addition to affection, Barus-Michel (2004) considers that the analysis of relations is of fundamental importance to understand how the group relates. Power indicators can be in the expression or silencing of conflicts, which can cause crises or detachment. The author gives as example the invocation of the collectivity discourse that can be a mechanism for hiding differences and maintaining the concentration of power. The time and space of the institution are also elements of analysis, according to this author, because historical events that have marked the group's history and the very location of the institution reveal political, ideological and economic positions, whose senses may be forgotten but keep articulating with current conflicts.

Therefore, the aim of psychosocial analysis, for Barus-Michel (2004), is to explain these unique arrangements and their meanings, the confluence of powers and conflicts that engender the practice of the institution, organized at the following levels: (a) norms and laws of the institution; (b) functional and pragmatic organization of these norms by subjects, who can either practice or contradict them; and (c) the relational order, that is, confrontation between norms, practical arrangements and affections of the group. This latter goal seems important to study the issue of participation because, still according to the author, the more the subjects can express themselves in everyday practices, the more they will find beneficial mechanisms that ensure the emotional and collective support of the group.

Method and procedures

The research was based on the qualitative approach advocated by Whitaker (2002) and Minayo (2010) and operationalized through a case study conducted in one of the cooperatives at Mário Lago settlement, fifteen kilometers from downtown Ribeirão Preto, in the northwest of the state of São Paulo.

After pre-field incursions to define the issue, there were six visits to observe the monthly meetings of the organization. After the observations, we did a preliminary analysis of the contents recorded in the field diary and identified that complaints about the low participation of cooperative members were a recurrent theme in the meetings. We also found that only a small group, about 10% of the members, attended them regularly, corroborating initial information provided by the president about the cooperative.

We used these elements to organize semi structured interviews with subjects who participated, to a greater or lesser extent, in the meetings at the cooperative and in marketing relations. The sample followed the criterion of progressive inclusion of subjects, without prior demarcation of the number of interviewees (Minayo, 2010), until reaching the saturation criterion. Nine subjects were interviewed, being three men and six women aged between 35-55 years old, who had been members of the cooperative for at least five years, appointed by a key informant.

We audio-recorded the information obtained during the interviews, and information collected from direct observations was recorded in field diaries. The use of these instruments, in accordance with the ethnographic perspective of Whitaker (2002), helped describe the situations observed, the conditions of the space and our impressions. The field diary was an important tool in the analysis process, as it allowed confronting, preliminarily, the records with the theoretical and bibliographic framework and, in a second movement, with the contents of the interviews.

After the interviews were transcribed and the records about the observations systematized, the understanding of the senses attributed to labor by the subjects took shape through the triangulation of information coming from various sources. We articulated theoretical/bibliographic/documental foundations with the observations carried out in the field and with the reports presented by the interviewees. As pieces of information were decomposed and relationships between them identified, as well as repetitions and contradictions in the speeches, we systematized the results into categories of analysis that express combinations of group relations (cohesion – participation – marketing; cohesion – marketing; and dispersion) and categories of sense (economic, labor, affective, and political).

Results and discussion

We will present the results and the discussion about the issue of participation first by analyzing the objective aspects of the case study, with a brief characterization of the history of the organization and its economic and organizational structure, and then move on to aspects of subjective order of the group such as identified forms of participation and senses attributed by the subjects to labor.

Mário Lago settlement was recognized in 2007 after a long process of fight for the territory of the former Fazenda da Barra. After the signing of a Conduct Adjustment Term [*Termo de Ajustamento de Conduta*] (TAC) by the settlers, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform [*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária*] (Incra) and social movements responsible for the organization of families, the settlement model established was the Sustainable Development Project [*Projeto de Desenvolvimento Sustentável*] (PDS), which implied the adoption of agroecology and cooperation as productive and organizational matrices. This format was due to the location of the territory under a recharge area of the Guarani Aquifer, one of the largest underground water bodies in the world. The recomposition of vegetation would aim to protect the water reserve, degraded over the years by the monoculture of sugarcane (Gonçalves, 2010).

A total of 464 families were settled in the PDS da Barra, divided into three settlement clusters due to the fragmentation of social movements present. This fragmentation occurred for divergences and disagreements between members of Brazil's Landless Workers Movement [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*] (MST) who joined other social movements and fought against the MST for different political and productive organization projects for the settlement. Therefore, the PDS da Barra was composed of 264 families that formed the Mário Lago cluster, organized by the MST and

of which the studied Cooperative was part; 160 families that were in the Santo Dias cluster, led by the Movement for the Liberation of the Landless [*Movimento de Libertação dos Sem Terra*] (MLST); and 40 families that were part of an autonomous movement called Índio Galdino. This fact also brought greater complexity to the settlement, because legally the PDS da Barra was a single territory and, from a technical point of view, the Incra did not consider the differences between the organizational projects of each cluster.

As for infrastructure conditions, the settlers had trouble accessing basic devices for health, education, housing, sanitation and leisure and, for this reason, were dependent on services offered in Ribeirão Pedro. The lack of a water supply system caused conflicts between settlers and conditioned the production of fruits and vegetables to the rainy periods of the year, which made it poor and irregular. There were also few channels for the marketing of production, which was done individually in small fairs in the outskirts of the city by middlemen or mainly through participation in the Food Acquisition Program [*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos*] (PAA), a major device for the production insertion of settlers. This program was established in 2003 as part of Brazil's Zero Hunger Program strategies and, more recently, the Brazil Without Misery Plan. Its attributions include the promotion of food security and the strengthening of family farming through the acquisition and distribution of food produced for the public education network and social assistance institutions. The PAA is one of the public policies that also condition the participation of settlers to the creation of associations or cooperatives.

The Cooperative studied was founded in 2009 by a group of 23 families, according to this set of conditions established by the settlement project modality (PDS) and for the need to market the production via PAA. Before the Cooperative was established, marketing with the PAA was intermediated by the Dom Hélder Câmara Training Center, coordinated by the MST. Some interviewees reported that the origin of the Cooperative was also linked to dissatisfaction with the way the MST led the contract with the PAA, which, in the opinion of the subjects, did not provide information about the operation of the Program.

Formally, the Cooperative was characterized as a self-managed enterprise of family farmers, of cooperative basis, aimed at the production, consumption and marketing of products and services. Although it was described as a production cooperative, in the everyday routine there were no collective production activities, just marketing. Since its foundation, the enterprise was managed by the same board of directors, and the positions of the audit committee suffered changes annually for the fulfillment of legal formalities. Informally, the president handled administrative and accounting functions and his residence was used as temporary headquarters of the Cooperative. Among collective assets, the Cooperative had a truck to collect production when the contract with the PAA was in force.

Until 2015, the organization congregated 147 members, whose labor trajectories had been marked by several paid activities, formal and informal, including construction workers, carpenters, electricians, drivers, administration technicians, general services, domestic services assistants, among others. Of this total, approximately 50% of the members marketed their production with assiduity. Some members had already left the cooperative to set ties with other associations within the settlement itself. The disproportion between the total number of members and those who established some kind of relationship with the organization was also expressed in the participation of these subjects in the meetings. Among 10 and 15 members, approximately 10% attended the assemblies held monthly for the cooperative's deliberations of interest. At ordinary assemblies, which took place once or twice a year for rendering of accounts or mail delivery, this number raised to about 25 to 30 participants, which was still very low compared with the total number of members.

Regarding structural barriers that influenced the forms of participation of the cooperative members, the dependence on the PAA was one of the most frequent complaints of the interviewees, who considered that the Program was not enough to absorb the productive capacity of the lots and constantly delayed the transfer of resources derived from marketing, *"My husband is out. It's not the President's fault because we collect products and only get paid every three months... If we are to live on the lot we will starve"* (Interviewee 5). In the reports given, this was one of the main reasons for the detachment of members, because they needed to resort to working outside the lot to generate income, and because these hindrances discouraged them to search for other marketing channels. This detachment, consequently, affected the management of the Cooperative, since the bureaucratic and

administrative burden required by the PAA overburdened the president and consumed much of his time. This became a problem as the management work focused on requirements referring to the rendering of accounts to the Conab, which strengthened the dependence on the Program and compromised the search for other market insertion strategies. In addition, the participation in the PAA created between the different organizations at the settlement an environment of competition for the families' production. This internal dispute further divided settlers and made it difficult to create a network of mutual support between cooperatives.

Grisa (2012) works with the assumption that the Program contributes to the expansion of market practices and the strengthening of social ties between cooperative members, because besides supplementing family income and stimulating self-consumption, it opens doors to the insertion of producers in private markets. However, Antunes and Hespanhol (2011) assess that the qualitative leap of organizations participating in the PAA will only happen if certain conditions are met, such as a high level of resources and organization of cooperatives, as well as a good political articulation with bodies responsible for implementing the program. Otherwise, cooperatives may establish strong relationships of dependence on the Program.

The PAA was implemented in order to impose a model that made cooperatives adapt to technologies and qualities of products that could only be met with investments in infrastructure and the professionalization of management, because participation in the Program required knowledge of production planning, logistics, accounting and computing. However, in the case studied, the program was executed without investments in minimal structure for the cooperative, which suffered with lack of capital to invest, water supply to irrigate the production, paved roads, professional training for management, disarticulation between food demands of institutional markets and the specificities of items produced by the families, and lack of clear information about the Program.

Excess of meetings was also mentioned by the interviewees as one of the reasons for the detachment of members, who saw them as wasted time that could be used for activities in the lot. Absences reinforced the workload centralized in the president, who went to all lots to collect the signatures of cooperative members for the minutes of meetings and other documents instead of using the space of meetings for this.

With regard to aspects of subjective order that operated in the group dynamics, it is important first to clarify that the categories identified as to the modes of participation and attributed senses refer to an ever-changing group process permeated by tensions, contradictions, alliances and disputes. These relations were articulated and understood as elements of a single phenomenon and not as fragments of reality. The categorization was only a resource to highlight the elements that were repeated or contradicted in the process of analysis of the information obtained in the research. Thus, we will now treat of the three different combinations we identified in the group relations and which referred to forms of participation of subjects in the organization: (1) cohesion – participation – marketing; (2) cohesion – marketing; and (3) dispersion.

The first combination concerned the group that showed greater cohesion within the Cooperative, made up largely by members who took part in its foundation. These relations were characterized by a strong trust between members. Participation manifested in this group by meeting attendance and regular delivery of products for marketing through the PAA.

In the second combination, there was also a relation of cohesion, as in the first group. However, the ties were not shown by meeting attendance. The lack of interest in discussions on the cooperative was justified by the trust in the president who, in the opinion of the interviewees, would know how to make the best decisions for the group. Participation in this case was restricted to the regular delivery of products for marketing.

In the third group, dispersion, there was no relationship of members with the Cooperative, whether through meeting attendance, delivery of products for marketing or even ties with the group. Some of these subjects left the cooperative staff and then returned or also marketed their production by means of other cooperatives at the settlement. In this group, the main economic activity of the members was performed outside the settlement. Production in the lot was secondary and delivered to the cooperative sporadically. In other cases there was nothing to market because production was restricted to self-consumption.

In all three groups, families supplemented their income with activities outside the lot, rental of properties in the city or through welfare benefits such as retirement pensions and income transfer programs.

From the characterizations of group relations by forms of participation, we will discuss below the four categories of sense identified: (a) economic; (b) labor; (c) affective; and (d) political.

The economic sense referred to economic advantages and disadvantages identified by the members, linked to marketing and production. In all groups, the cooperative was seen as a channel that facilitated the flow of production through the PAA. Participating in the cooperative, in this case, meant marketing the production or not. For this reason, the dimension of participation was reduced to the economic sense, and only for the first group this sense included meeting attendance.

The labor sense related to the way the subjects understood the work in the cooperative. The meaning that the cooperative members gave to this work was always connected to individual activities in the lot and disconnected from the management work in the cooperative. Even for those interviewees who attended the meetings assiduously, participation in meetings was seen as a space to receive information about the PAA and not as a moment of discussion to make collective decisions. The subjects even recognized that, formally, the cooperative was an enterprise of collective ownership. However, when referring to “the President’s cooperative”, their speeches expressed that the adaptations of the group contradicted the regulations, because in the everyday routine it was the president who held the power and knowledge to lead it. These characteristics resembled what Rosenfield (2007) defined as “retreat” group, characterized by the absence of a sense of collective ownership, because insertion in the enterprise happens only for the achievement of individual goals.

The dynamics of the relationship between cooperative members and Cooperative was fueled by the convenience of the members, who had no responsibilities concerning management and could choose work and time control strategies required for the performance of activities:

... I worked in a place where you saw a strong oppression against the underprivileged, this power of agribusiness. So that made me suffer a lot and here is different, here we do our jobs, you know? You sow the seed in the soil and it yields three times more and for the common good, which is the big difference I see compared with the life in the city (Interviewee 2, 2013).

Although the figure of an oppressive leader did not exist in the Cooperative, this convenience presupposed that someone had to make decisions and execute them for the group. Nevertheless, for the organization, it was necessary to keep the cooperative staff big, though formally, to facilitate access to and participation in certain projects and lines of credit.

For this reason, the interviewees’ feeling of autonomy was not related to the way of leading the enterprise and to having a life less dependent on government organs. This way of being autonomous was disconnected from self-management principles and restricted to the individual work in the lot, to the convenience of not taking responsibility for the management and to the inexistence of an oppressive leadership. This way of understanding autonomy did not convert into an active participation of members to enable other marketing channels in the Cooperative, and prioritized individual work. This trend has been increasingly followed by subjects who are part of cooperatives, according to Lima (2010). The collective work project as a mechanism for social transformation is replaced by less far-reaching individual strategies “... as the only emancipatory possibility and the collective perspective as bureaucratic, authoritarian and outdated” (p. 160).

The group’s alleged autonomy in decision making in order to meet, at least formally, the requirements of the PAA was an emblematic example of this situation. On paper, decisions were made democratically, for that was what the statute set forth. In practice, just a few cooperative members attended the meetings and only agreed with the President’s decisions.

Another sense identified – affective – concerned trust and reciprocity ties that bound the group. In the history of the Cooperative, cohesion (Guareschi, 2001) seems to have been initially supported by the subjects’ dissatisfactions with the way the MST managed the PAA. Later, we saw that cohesion began to be maintained by the active, but also centralizing, role played by the president in the management of the organization. In the opinion of the interviewees no one would have enough

knowledge to take this position. As described by Barus-Michel (2004), the role played by the president can silence possible failures and disagreements between members and regarding the management for concentrating the power. In the case of the Cooperative, the fear of losing this reference was converted into unanimity and unquestionable trust:

We know that the president is an honest person and would cause no trouble for the cooperative members. Because everything he starts he finishes, so we knew he would not do that to us. That he would start, go through difficulties and all, but would not stop, would not let us down. (Interviewee 4, 2013)

The speech above illustrates that, in the face of threats of frustration, a usual feeling in relationships between settlers, the president represented someone who would not be capable of betraying the group's trust because it is in situations of need that bonds of trust are built and tested.

Participating in the Cooperative also gave the subjects a greater sense of identity and belonging for the first and second groups once they saw themselves as cooperative members and no longer as employees or settlers: *"We feel more respected, we go to places and say: 'we are from the Cooperative', it already has another...[connotation.] The cooperative is something to strengthen us"* (Interviewee 2, 2013). The subjects tried to give meaning to the image of settler which, in the social imaginary, was linked to misery and exclusion. According to Gaulejac (2007), the social subject who suffers humiliation on the one hand suffers the power of violence and, on the other, tries to reassert himself/herself and keep ties with his/her peers. For this reason, despite all constraints that the cooperative members have faced in the settlement, the Cooperative still fulfilled the role of strengthening their identities. The possibility to call themselves family farmers or cooperative members was projected as a means to leave behind the socially marginalized image of landless or settler. As for the dispersion group, the sense of belonging to the Cooperative did not appear in empirical elements as there was no relationship of the members with the organization. According to Rosenfield (2003), participation, even if instrumental, can still ensure that the group serves as an identity basis for subjects.

Finally, the fourth category of sense was related to the absence of a political project in the Cooperative. Among the members, politics had a negative meaning, justified by their experiences with the MST. There was resentment among the most cohesive members of the Cooperative and the social movement, perceived in the reports about lack of support from MST leaders for the foundation of the cooperative. This tension did not appear explicitly in the interviews and, when pointed out, was relativized subsequently: *"Of course I'm not here burning the MST. It's not that the cooperative is taking the lead... it looks like a fight. It's the cooperative working to improve things for members"* (Interviewee 6, 2013).

Just as in Scopinho (2012), the majority of the interviewees were unaware of the struggle for land, the MST or the cooperative movement, and the motivation to become a settler began to be rehearsed and developed in the settlement: *"At first I had not understood a thing, I didn't even know what agrarian reform meant, these struggles of people"* (Interviewee 6, 2014). The settlement was seen as an opportunity to conquer the land, a condition that was ensured by the organization of the social movement: *"That was what caught my attention, the system here, of companionship, my neighbor's problem is my problem too, you know?"* (Interviewee 2, 2013).

The expectation of having material and symbolic security of many families in the settlement gave way to a feeling of insecurity and defenselessness because of a number of promises that had not been fulfilled. The tension was relativized by those cooperative members who also recognized the role of the MST in the fight for land, whose ability to mobilize and organize families enabled the conquest and construction of the settlement. As Barus-Michel (2004) states, some senses built in the trajectory of an organization may even be silenced or forgotten; however, such conflicts remained articulating with the present time of the cooperative when the subjects manifested their contradictory relationships with the MST, of gratitude and suspicion. The settlers resented and isolated themselves in their individual

strategies as a way to protect themselves from successive frustrations. They took a passive role in relation to the President, regarding him as their salvation and the one to continue with the enterprise.

Therefore, the way that the subjects participated in the Cooperative and the senses attributed to it and labor were produced by a combination of psychosocial forces that strengthened the group's economic and symbolic dependence. These different forces were built on inconsistencies between the model developed and implemented by public policies and the daily life of settled workers. In the Cooperative, self-management appeared as a formal abstraction, and instrumental participation was the reflection of an organizational format that had not been decided by the workers. In practice, the cooperative remained tied to the compulsory and bureaucratic cooperation model defined by Benini & Benini (2015) that favored political demobilization, as it replaced the role of the social movement for cooperative organization, in addition to fostering the maintenance of a single power in the organization. Rather than being a device to promote the development of the settlement, the cooperative ended up being disarticulated from political actions and social movements and contended with other organizations. This fact leads us to corroborate the idea of Firmiano (2014) that the cooperative movement, the way it has been institutionalized, have as backdrop the reaffirmation of hegemonic interests in the rural world, since it serves as a mechanism to amortize the political fight for the agrarian reform and fragment social cohesion. Still following this logic, according to Maciel (2009), in case this format does not succeed, failure is credited exclusively to settlers, which minimizes the state's responsibilities for those considered "alienated" or disengaged.

Final considerations

The study corroborated literature findings on difficulties faced by settled rural workers in organizing self-managed cooperatives. In the case presented, participation in the organization was experienced and meant as synonymous with marketing, happened instrumentally and without the incorporation of a political project founded on self-management principles. The sense attributed to labor had no relationship with actual participation as a way to democratize decision-making processes and responsibility for the management.

The results also pointed to the possibility of the PAA being an example of policy that provides an alternative channel for the flow of production and guarantee of income supplement. However, in the case studied, the Program has not properly strengthened the organization and has become a decoy to restrict the management work to bureaucracy and marketing possibilities. Even though the discourse showed a decentralization of powers, the settlers did not participate effectively neither in the creation of these policies nor in the organizational formats that they imposed. For this reason, we deem important that other studies problematize how the PAA is being implemented in rural settlements in order to deepen knowledge about subjective effects of the participation of workers in this program.

We conclude that constraints of political, economic and social order that workers experience in cooperatives of rural settlements should be problematized, especially by Psychology, because these subjects still live with a social imaginary reproduced in social structures that marginalize and criminalize the agrarian reform. The survival of these subjects through the land may be threatened and ties weakened, extinguishing possibilities to build a concrete autonomy, less subordinate to the State, and a collective power to fight for public policies which are actually converted into effective changes in the settlers' living and labor conditions.

However, it is also important to recognize that this is an ever-changing process and that the settlement and the cooperative still bring to subjects the possibility to have some material security and leave the invisibility condition, which allowed them to learn about the operation of public policies, of other ways of working and organizing production. Being part of a cooperative, having some kind of control over their own work and accessing some public policies took the subjects away from their previous condition of invisibility and allowed, though in a timid way, their social recognition. Although in the social imaginary these workers still suffer with stigmatization and marginalization, the settlement gave them a chance to create networks capable of sustaining feelings of belonging and giving meaning to their

identities. For this very reason, such networks need to be protected, especially considering the strategic political and social role that the settlement plays in the adverse agricultural context of Ribeirão Preto, where the economic and symbolic power of agribusiness reigns.

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