



ORAL HISTORY, FIGURATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RUBBER TAPPER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION PRESENT IN THE RUBBER SQUARE SQUARE, IN PORTO VELHO.

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Summary

The present study aims to present an analytical outline about the interpretative and polysemic possibility of the figure of the rubber tapper. In this sense, the general objective is to analyze how the representation of the rubber tapper is transfigured into symbols and historical meanings in a specific square in Porto Velho. The specific objectives are guided by the presentation of the implicit discourses of symbolic representation present in the rubber tappers' square; in the description of how the statue of the rubber tapper present in the square translates the history of the rubber plantation as a spatial and temporal mark of discourse and identity. The theoretical foundation will be supported, mainly, by Joutard (2000) and Caldas (1997), with regard to oral history; by Bakhtin (2003), about text and discourse; by Nora (1993), regarding symbols and memory of places; and also by Foucault (2008), in archeology of knowledge. In the area of methodology, the research was developed through bibliography, whose nature of texts and literature can be located in the premises that meet the scope and object of the study. As a result, it appears that there are a variety of possibilities for interpreting the rubber tappers square, with regard to the representative symbols marked by the aforementioned statue. Thus, it was concluded: what has been written about the story told through the oral history of rubber tappers still endures as a symbol of social resistance and identity of the historical character, created throughout the period of rubber extraction in the Amazon.

Key words: Oral history. Rubber tapper. Speech analysis. Porto Velho.

Abstract

The present study aims to present an analytical sketch about the interpretative and polysemic possibility of the figure of the rubber tapper. In this sense, the general objective is to analyze how the representation of the rubber tapper is transformed into symbols and historical meanings in a square in Porto Velho. The specific objectives are guided by presenting the implicit discourses of the symbolic representation constant in the rubber tappers' square; and describe how the statue of the rubber tapper present in the square translates the history of the rubber plantation as a spatial and temporal mark of discourse and identity; The theoretical foundation will be subsidized, mainly, by Joutard (2000) and Caldas (1997), regarding Oral History. Bakhtin (2003) about text and discourse, and Nora (1993), about symbols and memory of places. In the area of methodology, the research was developed via bibliographical research, whose nature of the texts and literature it is possible to locate the premises that meet the scope and object of the study. As a result, it can be inferred that there are a variety of possibilities for interpreting the rubber tapper square, with regard to the representative symbols marked by the rubber tapper statue. Thus, it was concluded that what has already been written about the story told via oral history of the rubber tappers still remain as a symbol of social resistance and identity of the historical character that was created throughout the period of rubber extraction in the Amazon.

Keywords: Oral history. Tapper. Speech analysis. Porto Velho.

Introduction

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Due to the conflict that lasted from 1939 to 1945, the Amazon suffered relevant changes with regard to its territorial occupation, which resulted in a new social, economic, cultural and historical configuration of this Brazilian region. This feat was accomplished, as Teixeira and Dante (2000) point out, with the insertion of the United States as yet another allied country against the Axis countries, in that historic conflict known as World War II.

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In this area, the Amazonian territory found itself populated by thousands of people coming from many regions of the country, mainly in the Northeast, to provide labor for the extraction of Amazonian latex. These workers became recognized as rubber tappers and also as “rubber soldiers” (TEIXEIRA, DANTE, 1998).

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the due focus of the scope of this research is limited to pointing out how it is possible to interpret the figure of the rubber tapper as a historical and symbolic constituent, reproduced through transfigured oral history reports and represented in the rubber tapper square. , in Porto Velho. Beforehand, however, it is revealed that this theme originated from the following problem question: which aspects of oral history can be attributed to the reading and interpretation of the imagery symbols of the Amazonian rubber tapper present in a statue of a rubber tapper in a public place?

In this sense, the general objective is to analyze how the representation of the rubber tapper is transfigured into symbols and historical meanings in a square in the capital of Rondônia. The specific objectives are guided by presenting the implicit discourses of symbolic representation present in the rubber tappers' square; and in describing how the statue in question translates the history of the rubber plantation as a spatial and temporal mark of discourse and identity.

The theoretical foundation will be supported, mainly, by Joutard (2000) and Caldas (1997), with regard to Oral History; by Bakhtin (2003) about text and discourse; by Nora (1993), regarding symbols and the memory of places; and by Foucault (2008) in Archeology of Knowledge.

In the methodological field, the research was developed through bibliographical consultations, whose nature of texts and literature allows locating the assumptions that meet the scope and object of the study. The selection of texts, in turn, followed a time frame of writings on the topic whose keywords are: Gifts from rubber tappers; Rubber plantation; Rubber soldier and; Oral history.

2 Oral history and discourse: elementary concepts

The so-called oral history is recognized, in its main manuals, as a procedural and methodological mode that strives for the reconstruction of sources and documents, for their updating and recording, through narratives provoked, stimulated and induced by testimonial facts, individualized versions and polysemic interpretations and subjective (JOUTARD, 2000).

Furthermore, according to the author, this procedure enables the creation of strategies, both methodological and analytical, with the aim of promoting bases of information extracted from what was narrated and, as a result, cataloged as an integral part of the story not yet revealed by other means. Linked to this methodological guideline, the ideal of this way of researching and seeking truths, or ways to obtain them, comes to appear as a facilitating process between what the researcher seeks to know and what the speaker and/or oral history narrator has to declare, inform and tell (JOUTARD, 2000).

Furthermore, and considering that this speech/narration of the active subject of the story, when producing these reports he is producing text, initially in the oral modality, when transcribed into written modality it is configured in the process of communication via speech uttered by the subject who produced it through of lexical and prosodic resources. In this regard, Bakhtin (2003), in his famous work “Aesthetics of verbal creation”, argues that the subject, when producing texts, whether oral or written, is, first of all, generating and disseminating the discourse in which his/her actions are located. brands, their social and cultural signs, through what had already been constituted in the social interaction of this subject with the other.

In this way, in line with what Bakhtin (2003) proposes, it is entirely understandable to infer that the discourse present in the speech/text of the subject who utters it brings with it traces of his marks, his idiosyncrasies, his way of living and, mainly, of the content extracted from the experiences through which this subject was situated within history.

Thus, one cannot deny the assumptions pointed out by Caldas who, when teaching about interpretation and reality, based on oral reports, are confirmed as an express attempt by the speaking subject to present himself as a social, historical and cultural protagonist, giving clues that his reports have absolute veracity as they are treated by those who lived and talked with other participants who contributed to his formation as a being with identities.

2.1 The rubber tappers square: memory, representation and symbolic interpretation of the rubber tapper subject

It is stated in the official reports available on the Porto Velho city hall website that Praça dos

Seringueiros was inaugurated on November 8, 2018. The public space is located at the intersection of two important avenues in the capital of Rondônia, Amazonas and Nações Unidas avenues, which are in the Nossa Senhora das Graças neighborhood.

Furthermore, according to the official communication vehicle of the municipal executive:

The monument pays homage to the pioneers who, through latex exploration, explored the Amazon and helped develop the region, including Porto Velho. It is also noted that the square is a great deference to all those who contributed in some way to the development of the Amazon Region, especially the rubber tappers and their wives who worked hard collecting rubber during World War II (PORTO VELHO, 2018).

It can be seen that, as found in several other writings, including academic works and scientific research, the figure of the rubber tapper is always told by someone. It is the gaze and interpretation of the other that brings to light the events experienced by the rubber soldiers. Thus, it is worth mentioning that there is an elementary rule regarding the propositions discussed by epistemology, as well as the need to develop the main activity of research. Basically, the researcher adopts the idea of being able to trace the most appropriate methodological path in which, throughout the scientific experiences that this path provides, he extracts from it the essence and the result resulting from the analytical perspective that was sought as a metric to achieve the results.

Thus, given that the object of this study is, in short, to analyze how the representation of the rubber tapper is transfigured into historical symbols and meanings in a square in Porto Velho, it is evident that the framework brought by other readings, giving an account of As the history of the rubber tappers is faithfully reported by them, it remains to be seen that the evidence of translated memories is strengthened with each story and each statement about facts and versions experienced by them.

It is from this perspective that Nora (1993) makes valuable contributions regarding how one should interpret reports of memories, inserted in territorial fields and subjective places that can only make sense when told by the protagonists of these experiences. In this current of thought, it can be inferred that, when one “reads” a statue that reproduces the figure of a being so important to the history of the Amazon, it is because in that image there are so many other possibilities for attributing meanings, in addition to those that the Official writings present these as absolute truths, but in fact, they did not take into account what was actually experienced and reproduced as history at the time of latex extraction.

One cannot, therefore, deny what is disseminated by Foucault (2008), when the thinker, in his work “Archaeology of knowledge”, talks effectively about the possibilities that language in its effective use can surprise with regard to the effects of use given to the users who carry it out. Foucault himself asserts that there is a consistent theoretical and methodological foundation for the exercise of a so-called “archaeological” analysis, a metaphor that can be understood in the sense of an investigation of the historicity of statements, an “excavation”. Although it has already been shown that Foucault does not conceive of language as his object of study, the concept of utterance developed throughout this work offers tools to researchers who work with language from a Foucauldian perspective.

And if we think that Foucault's proposal alludes that language is not in itself a status possessing semic stability, as well proposed by structuralist theorists with their network model in which the process of constructing the reference of things and objects meets a prerequisite -training already established by the operators of the communicative process. This is, therefore, what Foucault (2008) insinuates in his archaeological thought: the knowledge transmitted by the executors of the language obeys a previous ancestry that says a lot about what has already been experienced and what has been done as an active subject.



Source: Collection of Porto de Velho City Hall.

From this statue, which is not only a symbolic figuration representative of the man from the rubber plantation, but is also a text-image of vast semic possibilities, it is clear that in it there is information, content and narratives that not even official writings could describe. . What is known about the rubber tappers' original experiences can only be reproduced by them, in an autonomous and authentic way. This is in line with the assumption of belonging proposed by Nora (1993), since according to the author, the aim is, above all, to understand the trajectory of life and what meaning it has for rubber soldiers, in addition to seeking to understand how the real and symbolic or official formation of this group took place, against the backdrop of their own speeches and narratives about the meaning and relevance of each experience at the time of latex extraction.

In the words of Teixeira and Dante (1998), "a relevant fact that must be highlighted concerns why the definition of the rubber tapper being called a rubber soldier". This researcher's question can also be illustrated by the statue present in the square, describing these elements as strong, pioneering and fearless men, as seen in the image above. However, this northeastern man, who came to the Amazon in search of dreams and escaping the drought, established himself as a true being capable of withstanding the elements of nature and adversities not yet known to these workers until then. In this sense, those who migrated to the Amazon therefore arrived with the epic task of occupying the region's rubber plantations, representing the courage of the northeastern man who, with his pioneering instinct and encouragement from the Vargas government, would rid the region of the image of "Green Hell". An undertaking that was understood by Vargas' political thought as part of nation building, since the "importance of space territorial as a constitutive element of national identity".

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These representations were constructed in line with the premises of building a new State, combining ideals of modernity and tradition. However, despite the heyday of the rubber cycle, this cycle began to decline and reduce its production demands, resulting from rubber production in other territories and outside Brazil. Therefore, those who remained in the Amazon had to adapt to the jungle and find a way to survive the harsh weather they encountered.

The decline of the rubber cycle for export, in Rondônia and Acre, occurred between 1948 and 1950, as a result of Malaysian production satisfying the demand for raw material for international trade, despite local trade in Rio Branco and Porto Velho still have small-scale output until

mid-1980s (TEIXEIRA, 1993).

Let us, therefore, look at the image below and try to verify which aspects have already been mentioned here in this writing in relation to what has already been reported in other studies about the story told by the rubber tappers about their economic, social and cultural lives represented in the statue's exhibition.

Image 02: Statue of the rubber tapper



Source: Collection of Porto Velho City Hall.

The image shows a semantic representation of a rubber tapper man with his characteristic clothing: *poronga* (kind of lamp) on the head; syringe knife (also known as *soga*). It is; a pair of rubberized boots. About the lexicon of words *poronga* it is *soga* their definitions are recorded in a study carried out by Macedo and Macedo (2020), whose work proposed to describe a glossary with the name of the instruments used by an Amazonian element.

It is evident that the image displayed in the rubber tappers' square reproduces, in theory, the imaginary representative figure of the man who was the rubber plantation man, and that his clothing further reinforces the hypothesis that, through them, the marks can be elucidated. Linguistics revealed by the names given to work instruments, as described by Macedo and Macedo (2020). The nomenclature *poronga* it is unlikely to be located in a traditional dictionary with the meaning lamp that rests on the rubber tapper's head. This highlights the linguistic and cultural richness carried by the men responsible for producing rubber in the Amazon.

Regarding linguistic variety, Macedo and Macedo (2020, p. 56) discuss:

In this way, it is understood that it is through language that human beings express the ideas of their generation and the community to which they belong. At all times, language is used in accordance with the tradition that was transmitted to them and, in this way, contributes to innovation, conservation or variation and/or change of language, as it studies regional speeches with their geographical delimitations, characterized by their own differences whether in phonetics, lexicon or in morphosyntax.

Substantially, another aspect that can be seen in relation to the image of the statue in the square concerns the idealized physical trait of the rubber tapper as a strong, muscular man, denoting that such strength would be linked to the issue of the dangers and adversities he faced in the jungle Amazon. Like this,



although the majority of immigrants at that time came from the Northeast, where poverty and hunger prevailed due to drought, the artist who created and sculpted the statue of the rubber tapper gave it a physical and robust appearance, as a way of representing pioneering spirit and spirit. of courage to explore not only latex, but the fearsome jungle that is still little known.

Final considerations

It is a complex whole to reach the end of a research where it was necessary to consult a vast literature on a topic that has always caught the attention of researchers, mainly historians and geographers, and need to detail the topic, reducing it to what was interesting for its object and for its problematization. However, this intention does not stop here. On the contrary, the intention is to present how, based on the material collected in the bibliographical research, the imagetic reading of the rubber tapper statue present in the rubber tapper square was completed.

We saw that the research method, still very effective, is present in the framework of the assumptions of oral history. Through it, it was possible to verify in other writings how the rubber tapper evaluates the historical moment he went through, how he describes it with his life knowledge and what the golden period of rubber represented socially and culturally for his maintenance as a being, as a citizen.

Furthermore, and the main point of the research was found in the typology of the analysis that was allowed to be made of the statue in Praça do Seringueiro: a statue semantically full of polysemy and symbolically rich in languages from the place where the rubber tappers lived to, involuntarily, fulfill the wishes of the lords of the Second World War.

It is also worth highlighting that the research developed showed that in the Amazon the rubber tapper's battle for life continues in the face of adversities experienced, the resilience of the individual and/or social group provides the basis for the emergence of exploitation and resistance to the plots imposed by the logic of production that shapes the space, according to each period in which the market requires demand for rubber. This process destabilizes identities and metamorphoses people's ways of life in their lived territories, moving them to other spaces.

To produce this study, with the narrative told by the rubber tapper, it was necessary, first of all, to delve into his world. Listen to the voice and give a turn to a past and a culture that is, day after day, becoming silent. Remembering the history experienced by rubber soldiers is understanding it in its most intersubjective and plural dimension; is to go through lived experiences, life constructions, learning and knowledge.

The statue in the square, although built and represented with a look of greed, exudes through its history a past of misery and suffering that still plagues many rubber tappers who survived this dark past.

Today, the rubber tapper, expropriated and excluded from his place of belonging, seeks, through resilience, to give new meaning to life in other spaces, which, for the most part, take place in the urban context. Illiterate and without professional qualifications, they are on the margins of the system and seek to assert themselves in the face of basic survival needs. They can hardly keep up with and understand the demands of urban professional activities. Some women seek to work in family homes and in restaurants and men, in turn, in sawmills or carrying out "contract" work on farms. They have no intention of accumulating wealth, they remain with their serene life in the city and, in some cases and periods of the year, they cross the Abunã River and penetrate the Bolivian forests. Their knowledge and practice belongs to another world, that of connection with the earth, with nature, with fresh air and water. Older people say they feel suffocated in the city, but, due to illness and not having anywhere else, they prefer to be closer to resources such as doctors and hospitals. They are not agitated; some try to raise their voices to say they want to return to the land, while others live off their pensions, helping and being helped

for their children and grandchildren without thinking about the accumulation of assets.

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In this way, an identity is consolidated, as this makes them different from other groups in the way they are and act in life. This identity is not fixed, as when they leave their habitat they receive new customs, beliefs, language and habits that are also transmitted to their own. It is an exchange of experiences that combines, consolidating a hybrid culture. No group completely separates itself from its knowledge.

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