

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

Acceptance date: 16/01/2025

IMAGE AND WORK IN THE FIELD IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC: THE FLOUR MILL AND THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD DERIVED FROM MANIOC

Rosinda da Silva Miranda
Federal University of Pará

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: The aim of this work was to carry out a study that leads to reflection on visual culture and its interface with traditional culture and the role of images produced amateurishly in people's daily lives and their importance for recording the memory and documentary production of traditional cultures. This work was based on the day-to-day activities carried out in a rural environment, specifically in and around the flour mill, where cassava-derived food is produced. Food products derived from cassava are widely consumed in the north and northeast of the country. This happens in various ways, as they are a significant part of the local cuisine. The images were taken at the Varginha site, located in the village of Mutucal, in the municipality of Curuçá in the state of Pará, 136 km from the capital, Belém. We also used images from the collection produced by the members of the group studied. The results point to the importance of images in traditional communities, as they significantly elucidate the cultural transformations that take place within these communities. In addition to the importance for the group itself due to the affective memory relating to an ancestral past that shows images as a way of existing and resisting time.

Keywords: Visual culture. Traditional culture. Photography. Flour mill. Mãe Grande de Curuçá Extractive Reserve.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to reflect on visual culture and its interface with traditional culture and the role of amateur images in people's daily lives and their importance in recording the memory and documentary production of traditional cultures. Right,

Everyday life is what is given to us every day (or what we share), it pressures us day after day, it oppresses us, because there is an oppression in the present. [...] "Everyday life is what binds us intimately, from the inside". [...] "It's a story on the way to ourselves, almost in

retreat, sometimes veiled". [...] Perhaps it's not useless to emphasize the importance of mastering this "irrational" history, or this 'non-history', as A. Dupont puts it. "What interests the historian of everyday life is the Invisible... (CERTEAU, 1996, p. 31).

Therefore, in an attempt to understand the existence of images in this invisible form that is everyday life, the following problematizations arise that revolve around the visual culture present in contemporary society, based on the use of smartphones and digital cameras and the possibilities of capturing images using these types of devices. The questions then arise: why photograph? When to photograph? What to photograph? How to photograph? The answers are not always clear in the consciousness of the person capturing the images, as there are many different motivations, ranging from the aesthetic conception present in the unconscious of the individual making the image, to documentary photographs that can be used in academic and scientific research.

When we look at contemporary society, we can see the presence of visual culture in various areas of social life. This stands out due to the insertion of visual elements into people's daily lives, and here we emphasize photography as something elemental that is present in society at all times and in a generalized way. With this in mind, it can be seen that, with technological help through smartphones and digital cameras, amateur access to photography has become increasingly easy, which has caused profound transformations in the way we understand visual aspects, both as a source of cultural transmission and in the relationships and interferences that provide understanding and identification with reality.

Therefore, Nicholas Mirzoeff's (1999) assertion that postmodernity is marked by the visual is assertive. Although images are a set of symbols and meanings that will be interpreted according to the culture and time in which individuals are inserted. In addition,

the gaze and cut-out given by the subject who takes the photograph is highlighted, which is why for Andrade (2002, p.31) “photography has a participating observer who sniffs out the target and the object of his lenses and his interpretation with his gaze”.

In this sense, the relational nature of human beings with images means that photography as an artifact or support of visual culture has gained a lot of relevance in different eras, spaces and moments, since its origin in 1826, by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, passing through various phases, from analog to digital, photography has become something necessary and indispensable to life, because it has driven, according to Meneses (2003, p. 21):

Greater investment in documentation, with the organization of databases, most of which have already been computerized (large institutional collections of urban iconography, family albums, documentation of social categories, events or situations such as wars, conflicts, migrations, famines, etc.)

In order to explain the relationship between visual culture and traditional culture, using images, we immersed ourselves in a universe where we imagine that photography is not part of the daily life of these individuals, in this case in rural communities. The subject of this study was the Varginha site, located 11 km from the town of Curuçá in the state of Pará, 136 km from the capital Belém. The site is located in the Mãe Grande Extractive Reserve on the Atlantic coast.

Getting to the site is a little difficult due to its geographical isolation. Once you arrive in the municipality of Curuçá, you head for the port of Abade, where you will need to take a motorboat to cross to another village called Pedras Grandes and continue for another 7 km through forests, piçarras and capoeiras with flooded terrain or many sandy spots, which make access difficult until you reach the Varginha site. The scenery is very interesting, as you can see a bit of the sea and rural life, the large and small

boats at anchor, the fishermen in the ports leaving or arriving, as well as the transportation of cargo that supplies the communities on the island, which has other villages and also the traffic of people coming and going.

On the roads you can see the houses and their respective flour mills alongside the green forests and branches that lead to farms and plantations, or areas where wood is harvested for fishing. A scene full of life, but one that doesn't hide its difficulties.

The methodology for this study was as follows: In the first phase, the images were captured - which were produced through an experience of social isolation due to the pandemic of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19). The consequences of the pandemic were felt in Pará on March 18, 2020, after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the state. Health measures to contain the virus led several cities to adopt sanitary barriers restricting the entry of outsiders to the municipalities, Curuçá being one of them.

For workers in the countryside, the news of the pandemic seemed surreal and was somewhat minimized, making the risks to health increase. However, many families began to live in isolation and this was the case for the residents of Sítio Varginha, Mr. Delfim and Mrs. Oneide. As a result, the elderly couple needed help to carry out their farm work, as well as health care, as the disease spread throughout the municipality. That's why their relatives came to help them, which allowed the author of this article to be with them at that time.

In the second phase of this work, some photos were selected from the family group's collection. The images, both those captured by the author and those selected, show the reality of life in the countryside and a very traditional way of life, although the people who frequent the place don't live there all the time, but there is a whole adaptation to this culture which, through the written report and the images, has very traditional habits. It should

be noted that due to the limited number of pages, it will not be possible to describe who the people in the images are. Therefore, the images basically show the family group, due to the pandemic and its measures to contain the spread of the virus, but the ranch usually also includes workers from neighboring villages.

With the awareness that these images are important for a number of issues, the group agreed to share the images, which will be systematized as follows: first, a brief text will show some details of daily life in the place, and then the images with their descriptions. Remember that the photos chosen focus on the flour mill and its surroundings. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the results and finally the conclusions.

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE AT THE SÍTIO

The couple, Delfim Miranda (Zito, 88) and Lúcia Oneide Miranda (73), have been married for 53 years and have been working the manioc plantations since they lived with their parents, raising six children on the land and making a living from it. Flour production on this farm follows traditional and contemporary forms, alternating manual and manual labor, with mechanized processes that make the work less cumbersome. The daily life of these rural people is very different from urban life, although some elements of urbanity are already a reality in many rural places, as they already have piped water and electricity. This has led to the mechanization not only of rural activities but also of domestic activities, entertainment and communication through TV and cell phones.

On the Varginha site, they practice the traditional Igarapé bath at the end of the day, even though they have piped water from an artesian well. Before the bath, the chickens are fed, then they go to the hen house, and once they are warmed up, the doors are closed to prevent them from getting out and roosting elsewhere. Dinner is served at around 7pm,

and the people in the house spend some time chatting and watching TV. Before long, tiredness sets in and whoever is in the house retires to their rooms to sleep. This is the routine that surrounds the farm surrounded by forest.

After a peaceful night's sleep, lulled by the sound of the birds and the wind, at four in the morning the roosters begin to crow, announcing that the day is coming. It doesn't take long for Mrs. Oneide to get up, make breakfast and prepare for the day's activities. She continues her chores by feeding the chickens and collecting their eggs. Meanwhile, Mr. Zito and his helpers wake up, sit down to drink coffee, talk about various subjects and then each one goes on to do their own thing. One of the main activities on the farm is making flour and other foods derived from manioc. These are produced in the flour house, as you'll see in the pictures.

FLOUR MILL

The flour house is a place where manioc flour and other derivatives are produced. It houses all the materials that will be used during food production. It is a large, open space with plenty of light, as it has no side walls or partitions. This makes it a public space and during work activities it maintains a very intense sociability.



Figure 1 Mrs. Oneide and her granddaughter in the old flour mill (2007)

Source: Family collection/Thiago Azevedo

The flour mill is not just a place for work, but also for exchanging knowledge, maintaining memories, sharing experiences, counseling, laughter and other forms of sociability that are part of the rural universe. As shown in the images below, the first shows the relationship between Mrs. Oneide and her grandchildren. In image two of the same picture, the group's spontaneous interaction during work stands out.



Figure 2 Exchange of knowledge and sociability (2016 and 2020)

Source: photo 1: Family collection/Thiago Azevedo; photo 2: Raiene Miranda

In the vicinity of the flour house, objects are made that will be used in the work of the fields, such as tipiti, sieves, pans and others. This type of utensil is produced by hand using the braiding technique, using natural materials such as: talas (fibers) taken from the wild (guarumã or jacitara); “polyethylene terephthalate” (PET) material, which is reused in this production. In the image below, Mr. Delfim (Zito) is preparing the material to make a sieve.



Figure 3 Seu Zito weaving with fiber (2012)
Source: Family collection/Thiago Azevedo

PRODUCTION OF CASSAVA FLOUR

In the flour house, the main activity is the production of flour, which takes place in various ways, but in this study the technique most used in the place studied stood out, following the step by step as shown in the images. To make flour, the manioc is removed from the ground and then transported to the flour mill, where it is scraped/peeled and soaked. In some communities the manioc is soaked with all its peel in a stream, and only after five days when the manioc is wet is it removed and peeled. At Sítio Varginha they peel/scrape the manioc while it's still hard and put it in tractor tire basins to soften it.



Figure 4 Scraping manioc (2020).
Source: Author's collection

When the manioc softens, it's time to make the flour, i.e. the manioc is removed from the basins and placed in the cevadeira, a place that has an object called a catitu. In other times, this object was operated in a very manual way, because there was a pulley system where a piece was turned to put pressure on the catitu so that the manioc could be crushed. To do this, two

people were needed, one to turn the pulley and the other to place the manioc in the crusher. Nowadays, the system is similar, except that it requires less force because it is operated by a gasoline-powered engine that helps to grind the root, turning it into dough, so only one person is needed to put the cassava to grind. Image 1 shows part of the first description and image 2 the second description.



Figure 7 Raquel and Ronilda toasting flour (2020)

Source: Author's collection

Other foods that are also produced from cassava include three products that are widely consumed by traditional communities and urban societies in the north and northeast of Brazil.

TUCUPI

This food is the liquid removed from the cassava mass. In the images below, it has been removed and cooked to make it ready for consumption.



Figure 5 Zito digging cassava (2005 and 2020)

Source: Photo 1: family collection/ Thiago Azevedo; Photo 2: author's collection

Once the dough has been barleyed, it will be pressed in a special machine or placed in a tipiti, which will also remove much of the water, which will make it easier to sieve (as shown in fig. 2 by Mrs. Oneide and her grandchildren) so that it can go into the oven to be toasted.



Figure 6 Mass in tipiti (2020)

Source: Photo: 1 and 2, author's collection; Photo 3: Family collection/Raiene Miranda

The activity of toasting the flour has very manual characteristics, so it has always been the men who have played a leading role in these moments, since the tasks of the farm in the traditional way have been divided by gender and age group.



Figure 8 Removing and preparing tucupi (2020)

Source: Family collection

TAPIOCA

This is the product obtained from tucupi. It can be consumed in various ways. The images below show the production of tapioca flour.



Figure 9 Cassava flour production (2020)

Source: Family collection

BEIJU MADE FROM SOFT CASSAVA DOUGH

This food is produced from the cassava mass, after it has been pressed and the tucupi removed, it is mixed with grated coconut, glued to the banana leaf and taken to the oven, the same oven where the flour is roasted. This food is consumed in a more traditional way, usually as an accompaniment to coffee, breakfasts or snacks (merenda).



Figure 10 preparing Beiju (2020)

Source: Author's collection

DISCUSSIONS

As mentioned, these images were produced for a variety of purposes, but in this work we want to reflect on their importance for visual and traditional culture, where the day-to-day life of the flour mill and its nuances are valued: the cultural transformations related to scenes, scenarios, the objects and the material culture (changes in the material used in craft production, which are gradually being replaced by synthetic materials and industrial appliances), the work done with the hands, the peculiar food of these of the traditional peoples and its production, the dynamics and sociability of the place, the interaction between generations and the local aesthetics, among other issues that can be observed by the reader.

Although the production of the images was not for research purposes but to record activities related to the pandemic period, the others were present in the group's collection and thus demonstrate the experiences lived at various times. The photographs and remembrances activated from them lead us to reflect on how they revisit spaces and reveal cultural transformations in the historical process.

From this perspective, everything and any moment can be photographed. The way in which humanity has related to images has also changed and documentary production has increasingly intensified, moving from the professional to the amateur and from the occasional to the frequent. This has led to the creation of

image archives that are related to the field of ancestral and affective memories that help in the process of resistance and existence over time.

From this angle, images are becoming more and more a part of people's lives. So this reflection demonstrates the multiple visual experiences of everyday life; the importance of images for traditional cultural studies, based on their transformations; an archive of affective memory beyond the edge of the image or, as Berger (2017) points out, to understand a photograph beyond the surface of the image.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For Sontag (2004, p.14-15) "Photographed images don't seem like manifestations of the world, but pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make", using this same logic, for the group studied, images are always present. This points to the importance of technology in rural areas, among other issues related to local particularisms and identity characteristics and the affection for all this and not only the transformations, but also the resistance.

REFERENCES

ANDRADE, Rosane de. **Fotografia e antropologia: Olhares fora-dentro**. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade; EDUC, 2002

BERGER, John. **Para entender uma fotografia**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017.

CERTEAU, M. **A invenção do cotidiano 1: as artes de fazer**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1994.

MENESES, Ulpiano T. Bezerra de. **Fontes visuais, cultura visual, História visual. Balanço provisório, propostas cautelares**. Revista Brasileira de História, São Paulo, v. 23, n. 45, p. 11-36, 2003. Disponível em: <<https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbh/v23n45/16519.pdf>> Acesso em 02 de janeiro de 2021.

MIRZOEFF, N. **Na Introduction to visual culture**. London: Routledge. 1999

SONTAG, Susan. **Sobre fotografia**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004

In the case of the Varginha site, these images are records that gained even greater value during this pandemic period, because on August 13, 2020, Mr. Delfim couldn't resist the complications of Covid-19 and died. Dona Oneide had to move to the city, as she couldn't live alone in this area, which is quite isolated, especially during the Amazon winter, since most of her children don't live in Curuçá. After Delfim's death, the activities at Sítio Varginha continued through his children, but not as often and it is not known until when.

However, the memories of this place, this couple, the activities, people and objects that surround the life of this community are preserved in the photographs, in other words, their history endures, what the group itself calls memories and recollections, both for those who took part in the moments recorded here, and for those who didn't and for future generations.