



# Work and intersectionality: a study with elderly women living in the rural space of a small municipality

  10.56238/homeinternationalanais-067

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**Keywords:** intersectionality, social markers, rural.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The article aims to understand, from the narratives of elderly women who live in the rural context of a small town, which are the different social markers that intersect with the marker work, and how these intersections are expressed in the lives of these women. This is a qualitative, descriptive, field research, which was developed in the municipality of Coxilha, state of Rio Grande do Sul. The methodology adopted for data collection was the application of 10 semi-structured interviews with elderly women residents of the municipality, preceded by a literature review on the theme. As an analytical concept, intersectionality is used to explore how gender, generation, and territory create fundamentally different experiences, but also inequalities. The main axes for grouping the data are the sexual division of labor, care as work, and rural work. According to the results, we can assess the singularity that the territory creates in the formation of the work experiences of the group of elderly women. Despite being a group where different social markers are present (such as race, social class), rural work, care work and the sexual division of labor are expressed in the same way in this group of women. There is the permanence of asymmetrical relations between men and women (gender) in relation to work, which are configured through their relationship with the studied territory. The findings indicate that the social markers identified (gender, generation, race, and religion) are directly crossed by the manifestations of the territorial context, more specifically, that the social marker of the territory is a catalyst for the other markers.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in the municipality of Coxilha, located in the northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, which has the municipality of Passo Fundo as its territorial boundary. According to the Portal Cidades (IBGE, 2022), the municipality has an estimated population of 2,731 inhabitants, 353 of whom are elderly, 51% are women.



In the territory of Coxilha, a small town located in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, the landscapes and habits of the countryside are not limited to the areas far from the urban center, such as rural areas and the limits of the urban perimeter. They enter the city where there are large plots of land, idle spaces, and houses with spacious backyards. In this way, one can say that in the study space one can find people with habits, customs, and traditions from the countryside, amidst elements that are usually associated with the city. Authors such as Wanderley (2001) and Silva (2002), in order to mark the complexity of what has been named as rural and urban, named these spaces as rurbans, i.e., spaces of confluence in which relationships emerge that bring characteristics and habits from both urban and rural spaces, reflecting in an imbrication of the configurations of city and countryside.

The population of the municipality is composed of descendants of Italian, Portuguese, German, and Afro-Brazilian immigrants who arrived in the region from the eighteenth century (SARTORI, 1996). Still according to the IBGE, the municipality's development index in 2010 was equal to 0.706, keeping the average of the state. The per capita GDP of the municipality is R\$79,144.17, and the average monthly salary of formal workers in 2019 was 3.4 thousand reals, minimum wage (IBGE, 2021).

To achieve the objective proposed in this work, a methodology that encompasses the complexity that exists in social relations and that constructs reality becomes necessary. Thus, a qualitative research was carried out, which aims to thoroughly interpret the information collected. It attaches great importance to the context of the universe investigated and their cultural meanings, advocating greater proximity of the researcher in relation to the phenomena studied (Lima and Moreira, 2015). For data collection, the semi-structured interview technique was used. The interview provides flexibility to data collection, as well as greater openness to the interviewee, thus making the answers more reliable. In this type of methodology, the information that is sought is in the quality, depth and extension of the answers given by the interviewees.

In this sense, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 elderly women in the rural context of the municipality of Coxilha, RS. The definition of the sampling of these women followed the saturation criterion (Minayo, 2017) and was not based on any statistical style. The elderly women interviewed were made up of elderly women participating in a research being developed in the municipality of Coxilha/RS. This research conducted a census of the entire elderly population of the municipality of Coxilha and is characterized as the second wave of a survey conducted in 2010, in the study "Life and health conditions of the elderly in the municipality of Coxilha-RS".

The questions in the interview script were related to the meaning of what it is to be a woman, her life as a woman, and her perception or not of violence and prejudice in her life history. For the data analysis we used the "discourse practices analysis" (from Spink and Medrado (2000)). Discursive practices refer to language in use: to the moments of re-signification, ruptures and production of meaning, when people position themselves in everyday relations (SPINK; MEDRADO, 1998; SPINK, 2000). Thus, for the analysis of the answers, the following steps were followed and structured: (a) the context of the discourse, analyzing the senses and meanings of the answers of the elderly women (b) the interpretation of the



perceptions by the researchers and the articulation with other studies and research. It should be noted that the analyzed answers relate to the perceptions of the interviewees, validating this understanding for the public who participated in the research and not expanding it to the elderly women in general, since each territory presents a distinct conformation.

The group of interviewed elderly women that made up the research sample was quite heterogeneous:

Identification	Color (self-declared)	Religion	Individual monthly income	Dwelling zone (urban or rural)
Carnation	brown	catholic	Less than or equal to 1 MW (R\$1,302.00)	urban
Marigold	black	catholic	less than or equal to 1 MW	urban
Pansy Flower	brown	catholic	less than or equal to 1 MW	rural
Amaryllis	brown	evangelical	less than or equal to 1 MW	urban
Chrysanthemum	brown	catholic	less than or equal to 1 MW	rural
Geranium	white	catholic	less than or equal to 1 MW	rural
Begonia	white	catholic	over 3 MW (R\$ 3,906.00)	rural
Rosemary	white	catholic	over 3 MW	urban
Rose	white	catholic	over 3 MW	urban
Camellia	white	catholic	over 3 MW	rural

The analysis is based on three main axes for grouping the data: the sexual division of labor, care work, and rural work.

### 3 CONCLUSION

Intersectional approaches share the growing recognition that different social markers can interact in complex ways and fundamentally alter the meaning of belonging to a social category. Originally developed within Black feminist studies to explain the severe oppressions suffered by Black women in many domains of life, the intersectional perspective has emphasized the social construction of race, gender, and other markers that are best understood in relational terms and not independent of other. For Hirata (2014, p 66) "intersection is of varying geometry, and can include, in addition to social relations of gender, class, and



race, other social relations such as that of sexuality, age, religion, etc." The thread running through much of this literature is the expectation that social identities intersect and can offer a configuration of disadvantage that cannot be captured by just one type of discrimination.

The rurban women of Coxilha/RS constitute a heterogeneous group in terms of social classes and colors. Their interests also differ, depending on their age, their origins, the size and composition of their families. With due regard for the specificities, both in the rural and in the urban areas of the town of Coxilha, the places of all the women interviewed are associated with rural work (making the use of the term rurban pertinent), and to the private space of the home and its surroundings, protagonists of daily narratives that involve production, subsistence, family, and caring for children and for others. This allows us to see that there is the permanence of asymmetrical relations between men and women (gender) in relation to work, which are configured through their relationship with the territory studied. That is, territory is a fundamental category and shapes distinct intersectional experiences and this reality is constituted from the configuration of this space.

In this sense, a study developed by Rizzatti (2019), revealed the different specificities in the way gender inequalities, the reproduction of patriarchy, and religious influences are spatialized in the area. For the author "the exploitation and oppression that occur at the local level have specific characteristics that are largely due to the spatio-temporal situation that we call the 'geographical situation of places'".

According to Camilo(2021), in research conducted between 2017 and 2020 on social exclusion and COVID-2019, "the intersection of gender, race, and class marks the territories of social exclusion, especially in a country that carries scars of patriarchal and capitalist coloniality in its structures, as is the case of Brazil".

Lima (2018) demonstrates that black lesbians have their body-subjection crossed by three axes of oppression that act very strongly: race, gender and sexuality, marking a triple oppression that, when coadunated with other categorical markers such as class, generation, territory, among others, intensifies the processes of exclusion.

Under this approach, one can think of the rurban territory as a social construction, especially since there are differential experiences of space among men and women, distinct from an urban reality. The constitution of the rurban territory has significant differences, especially if we understand that this space - besides the fact that on a local scale it involves the dynamics of the use of everyday space - occupies the historical space of immigration and rural subsistence in its entirety. What is being enunciated here is how this territory directly influences the composition and combination of the other social markers; and how (simultaneously) they can configure the perceptions of territory as a social relation marked by power relations and in intersection with the economic and cultural dimensions of this society.

Marcelo Lopes Souza (2005) emphasizes the territory marker, pointing out that it exists being built and deconstructed in the most diverse scales, and may have a permanent character or have a periodic existence:



In any circumstance, territory contains the materiality that constitutes the most immediate basis for the economic sustenance and cultural identification of a group, discounting exchanges with the outside world. The social space, delimited and politically appropriated as a group's territory, is the material support of existence and, more or less strongly, the cultural-symbolic catalyst - and, as such, an indispensable factor of autonomy. (SOUZA, 2005, p. 78)

In this sense, all individuals in a territory present similarities, either because they are subordinated to the same type of power relations, or because of the real action of difference that, in some way, is established between those who are inside and those who are outside its limits. In this regard, for Sack (1986), territoriality is linked to power relations, constituting a strategy or a strategic resource that can be mobilized according to the social group and its historical and geographical context.

The diversities and differentiated and situated lifeworld realities of rurban groups and communities are often unrepresented. This definitely has a significant impact on understanding the voices and lived experiences of rurban communities and how we understand their dynamics, and about rurbanity itself. For Pinto (2014), in the rurban space, the elements that make up the understanding about the supposed separation between "rural" and "urban" are treated and conceived as approaching factors, according to him "the theory of the rural-urban continuum substantiates the idea that urbanization in its process generates evident changes in society, crossing the boundary of the rural, which in turn approaches the urban reality" (2014, p 61).

Thus, despite the fact that life in the countryside denotes relations of the population with a territory with specific physical characteristics, often marked by great distances and a smaller number of people than in the urban context, the inexistence of fundamental differences in ways of life, social organization, and culture characterizes it as a rurban continuum. There are several manifestations that involve this space: material, cultural, and economic elements; the result of the articulation and interaction between what is urban and what is rural. The urban configuration and manifestation of this area is the result of the growth of the urban limits of the municipality.

It is significant the singularity of the situation under analysis, which demonstrates through the lenses of intersectionality, the possibilities of intersections of social markers are not static and that effectively situations can be composed where social markings are less rigid from the point of view of these materialities, and also the fact that they can destabilize the prescribed relations of gender, age, race, class.

The findings indicate that the social markers identified (gender, generation, race, and religion) are directly crossed by these manifestations of the territorial context, more specifically, that the social marker of territory is a catalyst for the other markers. Within this territory, older women occupy similar positions with regard to work, despite the other social markers, diminishing potential disadvantage arising from race, class, or gender. Rural, caregiving, and household work is common to all to a greater or lesser degree. One can observe elderly women in the urban context of Coxilha, taking care of the vegetable garden and small animals in the backyard of their homes, as well as observed in the more distant areas of the center. Also in



their life stories, the pertinent accounts of work are common, as performed from a very early age in the context of rural production, caring for the home and surroundings, and caring for others.

The findings add nuance to analyses of intersectionality: we emphasize the need to consider how multiple and intersecting dimensions of difference and inequality inform constructions of realities in rural contexts as urban communities remain connected to the rural. Second, and related, we illustrate the perceived similarities between rural and urban spaces belonging to the rural, which inform constructions of intersectional identities and inequalities, as rural and urban places are increasingly linked, materially, through political-economic processes such as labor and immigration. The results can be seen as indicative that a particular pattern is valid for specific territories, but caution should be exercised in emphasizing these findings due to the sample size.

Thus, support is found in Auad (2016) and Gonçalves (2021) who note how territory influences the combination and composition of social categories and point out that social relations not only develop but also depend on territory. There is an intangible dimension of interactions that reaches its materiality in a specific space, that is, space is a fundamental element in the configuration and organization of social relations.

It is necessary to highlight another peculiarity found in the research: the data did not allow us to identify, among the women who live in rural areas, any differentiation in terms of social class, race and place of residence when it comes to care work. That is, all the women interviewed assume caregiving for others as one of the basic and main tasks, and their daily activities are largely related to this. According to Aguiar (2018), this care is based on social and cultural values built on the interaction between family members. Thus, the cohabitation of family members with elderly people becomes fundamental in the process of intra-family transfers of care and support. As for the care of elderly people by others, it was confirmed in the research of Andrade (2009), Hedler et al. (2016), Fonseca (2014), Mazza (2008) that caregivers were predominantly middle-aged or already elderly women, and they were daughters, spouses, daughters-in-law, and/or sisters of the person cared for. Although the intersection between the other markers and race was examined in detail, the interviewees in the study did not provide any information about racial discrimination in this territory.

In addition, it is important to point out that in this context, although there is class difference among women, they do not delegate tasks of managing their homes to others, as present in other findings in the literature especially when it comes to city life (Melo and Di Sabbato, 2011; Fontoura et al., 2010). Apparently, the tendency to reproduce orientation values linked to rural culture still plays a strong role in the lives of these women.





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