

# Women teachers from the Acre Amazon: life trajectory and beginning of teaching career in Feijó, Acre, Brazil

Professoras da Amazônia Acreana: trajetórias de vida e de iniciação à docência no território de Feijó, Acre

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## Abstract

The objective was to identify aspects of the personal, family and school trajectories of teachers from the Acre Amazon that had an impact on the decisions taken by those women to beginning of teaching in rural schools, in Feijó, Acre. The analysis was guided by the 10 interviews carried out with research participants. Data analysis revealed a common profile for most interviewees: they were born and grew up in the used territory of Feijó; they and their mothers faced struggles to guarantee their communities' right to Elementary Education; they sought more schooling and migrated to the urban environment of Feijó; performed domestic work. In this context, entering teaching became a viable alternative to escaping domestic work, these being the main activities carried out by women in the territory. The choice for teaching was also influenced by the decisions of their companions to migrate, work and live in the territory, with the interviewees being responsible for accompanying them. Patriarchy is strengthened in the territory and in the lives of teachers in the Acre Amazon.

**Keywords:** women teachers; Acre Amazon; used territory; beginning of teaching career.

## Resumo

Objetivou-se identificar aspectos das trajetórias pessoais, familiares e escolares das professoras da Amazônia Acreana que repercutiram nas decisões, assumidas por essas mulheres, para o ingresso na docência em escolas do campo, localizadas em Feijó, estado do Acre. A produção e a análise de dados se orientaram a partir das 10 entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com as *sujeitas* da pesquisa. A análise de dados revelou um perfil comum à maioria das entrevistadas, sendo este: nasceram e cresceram no território usado de Feijó; suas mães e elas próprias enfrentaram dificuldades para garantirem o direito de suas comunidades ao Ensino Fundamental na multissérie; prosseguiram a escolarização ao migrarem para o meio urbano de Feijó, exercendo trabalho doméstico. Nesse contexto, o ingresso na docência tornou-se alternativa viável à fuga do trabalho doméstico. A escolha pelo Magistério também foi influenciada pelas decisões de seus companheiros, em migrar, trabalhar e viver no território, cabendo às entrevistadas acompanhá-los. Reconhece-se o fortalecimento e a consolidação do patriarcado na vida das professoras e no território da Amazônia Acreana.

**Palavras-chave:** mulheres professoras; Amazônia Acreana; território usado; iniciação à docência.

## INTRODUCTION

The recognition of the teacher as a person allows us to understand her/him as a social being, who carries with her/him a life trajectory that influences her/his professional development. In

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Study conducted in the municipality of Feijó, state of Acre, Brazil. It composed the doctoral thesis of Letícia Mendonça Lopes Ribeiro, supervised by Lorene dos Santos. Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brasil.



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fact, it is possible to admit that the professional development of teachers, from the moment professionals enter the Magisterium, influences and is influenced by their life trajectories.

If such trajectories are experienced by (women) teachers from the Acre Amazon, it is believed in the need to emphasize which territory is being talked about. A territory that imprints, on those professionals, “[...] identity with the culture and history of the communities settled in the state of Acre, more specifically in the rural area of the municipality of Feijó” (Ribeiro, 2023, p. 30). Therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind that each woman, identified as one of the 10 *women research subjects*<sup>1</sup> in question, has the Amazon forest as a territory of life and teaching work, seeing the colony<sup>2</sup> (her own or that of a family member) as the ideal place to shelter and consolidate her family.

It is in this context that the present study aims to identify aspects of the personal, family and school trajectories of teachers in the Acre Amazon that had repercussions on the decisions made by those women to enter teaching in rural schools, located in Feijó, state of Acre. Such aspects will be addressed from the analysis of the reports of those women, *subjects* of the present study, who participated in a larger research, named “Teachers of the Acre Amazon: teaching work and living conditions of women who teach in the rural area of Feijó, Acre”, carried out in 2022.

It is interesting, then, to answer the following question: why were (women) teachers (and not women and man teachers) chosen as *research subjects*? The justification: because it is believed that “[...] the teaching work appears as constituted by the genre and constituent of the gender” (Souza, 2016, p. 379). It is true that, in the classes of the Brazilian rural environment, the masculine regency is more numerous, when compared to the statistics of men teachers, working in Basic Education, in urban areas. Even so, the undeniable prevalence of women teachers of children throughout the country is recognized.

This finding, which is dominated by women among Basic Education teachers, supports the assumption that the care dedicated by the teacher to the students can be linked to the following images: of the feminine being, of motherhood and, consequently, of the characteristics that are expected and commonly socially imposed on women. So, it is interesting to observe the particularities of the professionals in the Acre Amazon who chose – or even had as their only choice – teaching as a profession.

As they are teachers from rural areas, many have developed specific practices of unidocence, exercising teaching as the only professional who teaches various subjects in Elementary School I (initial years – 1st to 5th grade) or even in other stages/modalities of Basic Education, such as Youth and Adult Education (Educação de Jovens e Adultos - EJA). In addition, those teachers organize their work in order to meet the multigrade class, which is understood as a form of school organization in which students, of different ages and different years of schooling (grade), occupy the same classroom, under the responsibility of the same teacher, and this organization is frequent in the Brazilian rural environment (Janata; Anhaia, 2015).

In addition to the specific conditions of unidocence in the multigrade program, there are also the conditions of action of those women who, when teaching in the rural territory, exercise much more than teaching. In the schools where they work, they are almost always also responsible for lunches, cleaning, janitorial and many other activities. They are thus configured as the only professionals in their schools, which commonly leads them to work and reside in the school themselves (Martins, 2015; Ribeiro, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> The expression *women research subjects* is corroborated by the work of Teixeira and Silva (2020), who dedicated themselves to knowing the reports of the daily practices, strategies, and tactics of domestic workers. Based on the authors, it is justified that the neologism was used because only women are referenced in the study and, therefore, this is a way of imposing against the normalization of the male designation as representative of human universality. Regarding the presentation of the word always in italics, it was perceived that it was convenient to avoid that the designation of the *women research subjects* referred to a condition of subjection (for example: women are subject to risk).

<sup>2</sup> According to Ribeiro (2023), the word «colony» is the most used by the people of Acre to designate areas, of small rural production, far from the urban environment of the municipalities. Most of those areas are legally recognized, with the issuance of definitive land titles and other documentation of settlement projects coordinated by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária - Incra). Such projects are identified with the names of rubber plantations throughout the state of Acre.

The panorama, described so far, allows us to glimpse a very brief portion of the experiences of those women. In order for this glimpse to deepen, as an understandable view of the reality of those professionals, it is essential to (re)know greater details not only about the trajectories and constraints of those women's professional entry, but also to (re)know how such trajectories and constraints are established in the rural environment of the Acre Amazon, in its portion of Feijó, considering Feijó as the largest municipality, of the state, in territorial dimension (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2021).

Figure 1, presented below, demarcates the municipality of Feijó and presents the scenario of enrollment by school in the 22 municipalities of the state of Acre. It portrays that Feijó is one of the five municipalities in Acre where more than 70% of schools have up to 51 students enrolled. This indication allows us to infer that those small schools are mostly schools in rural areas and maintain Elementary School I classrooms organized in multigrade classes.

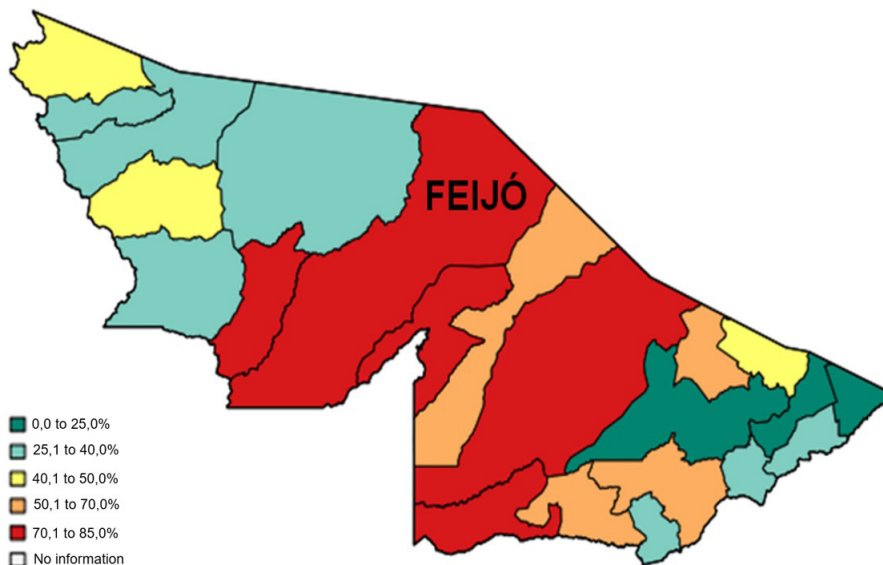


Figure 1. Small schools (up to 50 enrollments) by municipality in Acre (2020). Source: [National Institute for Educational Education and Research] – Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (2021) – nominal indication of the municipality of Feijó made by the authors.

According to the School Catalog (2019)<sup>3</sup>, among the 142 schools in Feijó that maintained enrollments for Elementary School, – disregarding, in this case, the schools that offered only Youth and Adults Education (EJA) – were seven urban schools (all with more than 201 students); 34 indigenous (19 with less than 51 students); 101 rural (87 with less than 51 students). Among the rural schools, 11 were state schools and 90 were municipal schools. It should be noted that, in 2020 (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2020), the state of Acre had 1,561 Basic Education schools, 57.7% of which were municipal and 39.3% state – while the remaining 3% corresponded to private schools and a federal institution.

It is recognized, then, that the territory of the rural area of Feijó is marked and demarcated by the schools of the settled communities (named by the rubber plantations). Therefore, this territory used carries with it “[...] the foundation of work, the place of residence, of material and spiritual exchanges, and of the exercise of life” (Santos, 1999, p. 8).

This preliminary scenario makes it possible to understand how the text on screen will be organized after this Introduction. Next, in “Methodological construction of the study”, the study design, the territory referenced here and the aspects related to the production of data will be presented, based on the interviews carried out with *women research subjects*. The next section, “The used territory of Feijó: where the *women research subjects* come from and where they teach”, will address the central aspects that describe the used territory of the Acre Amazon, in its portion of Feijó, as well as the historical organization of this territory until the current structure of the Agrarian Reform settlements. The penultimate section, “Teachers of

<sup>3</sup> The School Catalog is fed with data from the 2019 School Census and accessible by InepData (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2020).

the Acre Amazon: who are these women and how they became teachers” will present the synthesis of results, arising from the analysis of the reports of the interviewees, with a specific focus on the biography of those women and on the memories that rescue the conditions of initiation to teaching, in order to analyze the repercussions of personal trajectories, family members and school students (as students of Basic Education) for the choice of teaching by those professionals. Finally, the “Final Considerations” will bring signals, judged as the most important, about the study now proposed, indicating the need for more work and research approaches that reveal the protagonism of those women who live, work and wish to continue in the Acre Amazon.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE STUDY

This is a qualitative research that includes a universe of meanings, motives, values and attitudes that have a link with the processes – in this case, experienced by the teachers of the Acre Amazon – which cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables (Minayo, 2002).

The research was developed in two stages. The first was based on the application of questionnaires, answered by 28 students of the Teaching Degree in Pedagogy, promoted by the National Program for the Training of Basic Education Teachers (Programa Nacional de Formação de Professores de Educação Básica - Parfor), in partnership with the Federal University of Acre (Universidade Federal do Acre - Ufac) and offered on the premises of the center of this university, in the municipality of Feijó/AC. The second stage focused on conducting interviews with a small part of the *subjects*, selected from the answers presented in the questionnaires applied in the first stage.

Thus, the questionnaire allowed us to obtain data that greatly contributed to the identification of all the teachers in the first stage and, especially, to the distinction of the characteristics sought for the interviewees: non-indigenous teachers with four or more years of teaching experience in schools in the rural area of Feijó/AC – that is, professionals who had overcome the first years of teaching initiation and remained in the profession. Of the universe of 28 *women research subjects*, only 10 were selected, according to the profile previously described.

Therefore, the production of data was established between March 28 and 31, 2022, in the last week of classes at Parfor/Ufac. The choice of this period is justified by the study and work scenario of the *women research subjects* and their colleagues from Parfor/Ufac. The classes, of the Pedagogy course, are concentrated (on average, 12 weeks of exercise), being held between January and March in person. This is the rainiest period in the region (the so-called Amazon winter), when schools in rural areas are closed.

It is important to note, then, that Parfor/Ufac students study while they are not working as teachers. So, most of them do not have any source of income during the course months. This happens because, being teachers still without specific qualification for teaching (they have only completed high school), they teach in the state or municipal education network on a provisional basis, that is, they are not qualified to participate in public exams. They have employment contracts, reaffirmed annually for a little more than eight months: they start their activities in April, moments before the Amazon summer (the least rainy period of the year) and end them in mid-December, already in the Amazon winter (the rainiest period of the year).

Returning to the description of the production of data, specifically in the interview, it is observed that the script made it possible to include questions as new thoughts and needs for attention to a certain question were identified, as is assumed in the semi-structured interview (Minayo, 2002). The authorization for the use of data, maintaining the anonymity of the participants, was signed by the students in the Informed Consent Form [Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido (TCLE)]. To record the interview data, it is indicated that they were recorded in audio, according to the authorization of the interviewees and, later, transcribed.

Finally, the answers given by the interviewees were organized, having certain categories of analysis as guides. Both the treatment of the data from the questionnaires and the interviews was supported by the content analysis technique, based on the assumptions of Bardin (2006).

It is also noteworthy that the tabulation of the questionnaire data and, especially, the careful verification of the transcribed interviews, were supported by the QDA Miner® software, a

qualitative analysis tool that allows the analysis of documents (articles, books, text files in general), as well as paintings, drawings, photographs and visual materials. In this study, the QDA Miner® Lite was used because it has a free version, with a permanent license, despite the limited resources, but which did not compromise the quality of the analysis performed.

To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, it was decided to present them by compound names. They are all Marias – believing that they all have the “strange habit of having faith in life”<sup>4</sup>; but each one of them is also a common fruit in the Brazilian Amazon: Buriti, Ingá, Jambo, Guaraná, Bacuri, Tucumã, Cupuaçu, Abiu, Açaí and Graviola. The fruits sought to reinforce the singularities that Amazonian women have in their life trajectories.

The next section will be dedicated to understanding part of the results. This part focuses on understanding the territory used in the Acre Amazon, more specifically the municipality of Feijó. It was believed that this first presentation is important that the understanding of the characteristics of initiation to the teaching work, experienced by the *women research subjects*, be expanded.

### **THE USED TERRITORY OF FEIJÓ: WHERE THE WOMEN RESEARCH SUBJECTS COME FROM AND WHERE THEY TEACH**

The state of Acre is in the westernmost portion of the Brazilian Amazon, making up the Northern Region of the country, which is also home to the states of Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins.

With an area of 164,840 km<sup>2</sup>, Acre has 22 municipalities, comprised from its hydrographic basins in five regions: Alto Acre, Baixo Acre, Purus, Tarauacá-Envira and Juruá. The state’s vegetation cover corresponds to 88% of its entire area. This scenario also assumes that the state “[...] represents one of the largest remaining blocks of tropical forest and is considered a high priority area for conservation” (Daly; Silveira, 2008, p. 24).

Its territorial area [...] represents 4.26% of the Brazilian Amazon and 1.92% of the national territory. The state has international borders with Peru and Bolivia and national borders with the states of Amazonas and Rondônia (ACRE, 2006). Of the 22 municipalities that make up Acre, 17 of them border neighboring countries. However, only seven are headquartered near or on the border line (Acrelândia, Plácido de Castro, Capixaba, Epitaciolândia, Brasileia, Assis Brasil and Santa Rosa do Purus). (Santos, 2015, p. 105).

By highlighting the importance of rivers in Acre, Santos (2015) highlights how vital they are to the general configuration of hydrography and the economy of the region. The land connection is still quite uneven in the municipalities farthest from the capital and, therefore, a good part of the population of Acre carries out essentially river transport – when this is not just the only existing one. In addition, the rivers have a large oscillation in the volume of water, influenced by the winter and summer periods, which significantly reduces the transport capacity. Many communities, particularly those in the border region, are isolated when the waters of the rivers recede in the dry season (Amazon summer).

Feijó/AC, the municipality where the study in question was developed, belongs to the Tarauacá-Envira hydrographic basin, with Rio Envira (river) as its main fluvial route. Rio Envira is a tributary of Rio Tarauacá (river). This, in turn, is a tributary of Rio Juruá (river), one of the main tributaries of Rio Amazonas (river). In this scenario, it is recognized that the residences of those who live in the non-urban area of Feijó – and, therefore, where the schools in the rural area of the municipality are located – are referenced according to the distance of rios Envira, Jurupari and Paraná do Ouro (rivers) (the last two tributaries of Rio Envira itself).

In the case of Feijó, it was through Rio Envira and its tributaries that the people of the state of Ceará (one of the nine states in the northeast of Brazil) reached the rubber plantations for rubber extraction at the end of the nineteenth century and, especially in the twentieth century, the Second Rubber Cycle. The latter was established through the National Rubber Campaign, which began in 1939 and was strengthened by the workers who became known

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<sup>4</sup> Verse from the song “Maria, Maria”, by Milton Nascimento and Fernando Brant, from 1978.

as *the rubber soldiers*<sup>5</sup>. Those *soldiers*, who came from families in the Northeast of Brazil, occupied the states of the northern region to extract rubber from the Amazonian rubber plantations during World War II (1939-1945) and then to keep U.S. troops in the fighting. This brief historical passage is responsible for the configuration of the current population of Acre, which is mostly a descendant of Ceará who, seeking to escape “[...] the drought and the war front, were lured with promises of gain and riches” (Santos, 2021, p. 1).

Returning to the rivers of Acre, it was also under the guidance of those rivers that the families of Ceará settled and established their colonies, encouraging many northeastern family members to also migrate to Feijó. If the establishment of those colonies was not once legitimized, with the creation of Incra in 1970, several actions were taken to legitimize it. Oliveira (2006), when describing some of the actions of Incra in Acre in the last three decades of the twentieth century, made the following considerations:

The land issue in Acre, like other regions of the Amazon, is complex, requiring actions under the competence of the Federal Union, since its lands are located in the border strip of Brazil with the Republics of Peru and Bolivia, as well as in the national security strip established in its own legislation. Following the guidelines issued by the military governments, to occupy demographic vacuums in border and national security areas, notably in the Legal Amazon, Incra has been present in the state of Acre since the mid-1970s [...]. The official colonization actions were materialized through the creation and implementation of the Directed Settlement Projects (Projetos de Assentamento Dirigido - PAD). (Oliveira, 2006, p. 93).

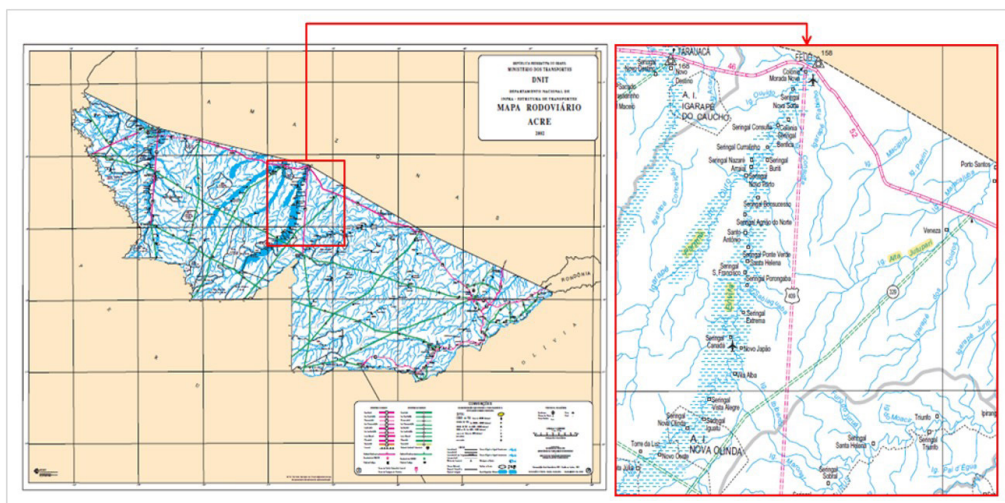
Those descriptions confirm the family situation and the places of residence of most of the teachers, *women research subjects*: they were born, lived and currently live, with their partners and children, in colonies located in the territory of the Acre Amazon, in Feijó. It is in this way that the characterization of the territory used is valued. According to the works of Milton Santos (1999, p. 8), the territory used is the conjunction between “the ground plus the identity”. It reflects the identification of a space capable of presenting a structure endowed with its own movement, of its own nature. In the case of the territory used, here in prominence, it is reinforced that it is recognized by the location of the rubber plantations – which name the main PADs in the rural area of Feijó.

Part of those settlements is more than 400 km (by river) from the urban district of Feijó. In other words, the journey between those two territories (urban and rural) can take up to three days in some locations. It is also noteworthy that the transit of passengers to several rubber plantations is done exclusively by smaller boats. During the droughts of the rivers, in the Amazon summer (between May and September), many localities are absolutely isolated.

For a better understanding of how the rubber plantations are presented in Feijó, **Figure 2** is shown, which is presented in two associated images. The first of them, on the left, is the map of the state of Acre and the second image, on the right, is the cut of part of the municipality of Feijó (demarcated by the red rectangle on the original map), highlighting its hydrography and highlighting some of the rubber plantations present in the extension of Rio Envira. In those images, the rubber plantations on the banks of the other two most important rivers of Feijó were not identified: Rio Jurupari [river which can be demarcated along the entire length of Riacho Alta Jurupari (creek)] and Rio Paraná do Ouro [river identified only as Riacho Paraná do Ouro (creek)].

According to data from the Demographic Census (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010), the population of Acre is 733,559, with Feijó being the fifth largest municipality in the state, in terms of population (32,412 inhabitants). Among the states of the North Region, Acre has, proportionally, the largest number of indigenous people, that is, 28.2% of the entire population in rural areas and 16.6% of the urban area is indigenous. There are 16 ethnic groups of indigenous peoples in Acre, which suggests great diversity, but “[...] makes the educational reality even more complex, implying greater challenges for policies aimed at the countryside” (Santos, 2015, p. 110).

<sup>5</sup> It was decided not to make the distinction of gender [(female) soldiers and (male) soldiers], since the expression *rubber soldiers* carries a historical identity. In this sense, its presentation always appears in italics.



**Figure 2.** Acre and part of the rivers and rubber plantations of Feijó. Source: Departamento Nacional de Infraestrutura de Transportes (Brasil, 2002).

It is also reaffirmed that, according to the IBGE's Cidades portal, data from 2021 Feijó is the municipality with the largest territorial extension in the state (more than 27,976 km<sup>2</sup>). Data from the Acre in Numbers Bulletin (Boletim Acre em Números, Acre, 2017) indicate that, of the total population of Feijó, 48.67% (15,776 inhabitants) live in rural areas, which justifies the great need for schools and, consequently, for an Education that is concerned with the specificities of the Acre Amazon in its portion of Feijó.

Like the entire state of Acre, it is reaffirmed that Feijó was also a municipality that was born from the extraction of rubber – and survived the difficulties implied in the weakening (current closure) of this productive activity in the region. The municipality is known as the *Land of Açai (Terra do Açai)*, holding a great festival in the month of August. However, “[...] a large part of the local income is maintained through the civil service and the service sector, while agribusiness, especially beef cattle and timber extraction, is consolidated throughout the Acre Amazon in Feijó” (Ribeiro, 2023, p. 60).

At the same time that cattle and logging companies advance throughout the state of Acre, several problems in the territory “[...] such as conflicts over land ownership and deforestation” call into question the need to promote initiatives and actions “[...] notably related to sustainable productive alternatives to rural family production” (Machado et al., 2017, p. 128). It is in this context that traditional communities still resist in the rural areas of several rubber plantations in Feijó.

If those communities persist (and many of them are still strengthened), it is essential to recognize those who teach in schools located in the most distant regions of the urban environment. For this reason, it was decided to have as *women research subjects* the teachers who worked in the rural area of the Acre Amazon in the municipality of Feijó.

By corroborating this context of teaching in the Acre Amazon, the following results will seek to offer greater breadth to the biography of the *women research subjects*. Therefore, identity characteristics common to all of them – and some important specificities among few of them – will be addressed to show the conditions under which the territory used by Feijó printed, prints and will certainly have repercussions on the trajectories and life choices of the *women research subjects*.

## TEACHERS OF THE ACRE AMAZON: WHO ARE THOSE WOMEN AND HOW DID THEY BECOME TEACHERS

The teachers interviewed are of varying ages (between 25 and 45 years old) and most descend from large families with few financial resources. Several mention that their parents are illiterate and/or have not had concrete opportunities to study in the rubber plantations where they lived. At least three of them – Maria Ingá, Maria Guaraná and Maria Cupuaçu – said that their partners are illiterate.

This condition is similar to what was described by Araújo (2010, p. 306), when presenting the family situation from which the teachers of the islands of Belém, in the state of Pará, originate. In the author's words: "Strictly speaking, those (women) teachers are part of a group of exploited women in the region, coming from families subjected to conditions of extreme poverty".

Regarding the current family structure of the interviewees, nine declared themselves married, and eight of them have children. Only Maria Ingá and Maria Bacuri do not have children, and the latter was also the only one who declared herself single at the time of the interview. All of them were born in the rural area of the municipality of Feijó and, in order to identify their places of birth, they cite the name of the rubber plantation or even the name of the river that bathes the area where the rubber plantation is located – always in the territory of the Acre Amazon, in Feijó. It is in this territory of the countryside, which, therefore, encompasses the territory of waters and forests, that the identification of a used territory is considered, as proposed by Milton Santos (1999). In the present study, the rural environment of Feijó is considered as a territory used by it to carry, in the conception of the *women research subjects*, *the identity of housing and affectionate home – especially in childhood, considering that all of them were born and lived in this territory while they were children*.

Among the interviewees, only Maria Tucumã and Maria Abiu revealed that they did not descend from a family from Ceará, confirming the important role of Brazilians from the state of Ceará in the occupation of the Acre Amazon, especially in the middle of the twentieth century, twenty-first century and for life.

Although not all the people from Ceará who migrated to Acre came as *rubber soldiers*, during the Second Rubber Cycle driven by the emergence of World War II (1939-1945), it is necessary to recognize the great influence of this war on the displacement of families of rural workers from Ceará to the state of Acre – both in the demarcated years and in the following decades. The trajectories of the families of the *women research subjects*, reported by themselves, make this very understandable. Maria Buriti's account stands out, when she tells part of the story of her maternal grandfather:

*[...] he came [to Acre] because he was a rubber soldier, with his cousins. And how... As he knew how to read, he did not collect syringes. He was a bookkeeper<sup>6</sup>. [...] Then he opened his business. I think he was the oldest [merchant] in Feijó, oh! [...]. He died at the age of 101!*

Throughout the twentieth century, after World War II, a significant contingent of migrants from different states in the Northeast chose the North Region of the country to go in search of better living conditions, fleeing unfavorable situations caused by drought and/or extreme poverty. This way, Acre represented, for many of those people, the promise of a colony (rural property) where they could live and produce (Souza, 2011).

The search for the colony was already a real scenario before 1970, with the establishment of the so-called squatters: individuals who take possession of the land, generally without the complaint of any possible owner. After the 1970s, this panorama was legitimized by the PADs, led and organized by Incra, created exactly in 1970. Such projects were widely publicized by government propaganda during the Dictatorship (1964-1985), in *slogans* that "[...] trumpeted the integration of the landless men of the Northeast with the lands without men of the Amazon" (Barquete, 2006, p. 81).

Therefore, for the families who currently reside in the territory treated here, the desire to live in the Acre Amazon comes from a long time. In many reports presented, the brothers/sisters of the interviewees left their families' colonies in adulthood and formed new families in their own colonies. Maria Buriti and Maria Bacuri, the two teachers who, at the beginning of 2022, already lived in the urban environment (and the only ones who intended to live in this territory), tell similar stories about the experiences (and permanence) of their sisters in the colonies, legitimately documented by Incra, recording the desire of those other women to always live in the rural area of Feijó.

<sup>6</sup> According to Brito (2017, p. 43), "[...] in the logic of the operation of the rubber plantations, the bookkeeper meant the security of writing". The bookkeepers were responsible for writing down everything that was consumed or done (such as the work performed) by the rubber tappers to the rubber tapper families.



"Returning home", that is, resuming life in the rubber plantation of origin, was also a very common reality in the reports of the interviewees, especially after spending time in the urban area of Feijó. Only Maria Tucumã and Maria Graviola did not have a stint in the urban district of Feijó, nor do they have this plan for the future. Only Maria Cupuaçu lived, temporarily, in a municipality other than Feijó, residing in Rio Branco, capital of Acre. Also noteworthy is the specific case of Maria Buriti, the only one (among the eight other women who lived in the urban area of Feijó) who, before having a relationship with her current partner, never expressed the desire to return to live in the rural environment.

Among the eight interviewees who lived at some point before adulthood in the urban district of Feijó, seven justified this displacement in view of the lack (or even the absence) of schools, for students after the 5th year of Elementary School, in the rubber plantations in which they lived. This need for commuting and also for interruptions in the schooling path (something that had not been experienced, among all the interviewees, only by Maria Buriti) reveal the absolute lack of schooling in the rural area of Acre (Santos, 2015; Martins, 2015). In addition, in order to live in the urban environment, those women performed domestic work, even at the end of childhood or at the beginning of adolescence. They reported several situations in which they reconciled work and housing, in the "family homes", with their studies. Such reports, recalled with gratitude to the families who "welcomed" them in the urban district, portray various situations analogous to slave labor.

Only three interviewees had never performed domestic work. Only Maria Guaraná still performs this activity, even though she is a teacher in the morning shift. However, Chaves (2021), when studying the living conditions of women in the Acre Amazon, highlighted that domestic work – including unpaid work – still appears as an alternative for some teachers in the Acre Amazon, in view of the instability of hiring in the teaching profession. At the same time, the possibility of working as a teacher, in alternative educational programs (such as an adult literacy program, mentioned by Maria Ingá) ends up being a way to escape from domestic work, even if the scholarship received is only R\$ 400.00 per month. In her words, Maria Ingá evaluates: *"You know what? Better like this than working in a family home again! [...] Money is little, but it's certain!"*.

Still regarding the interruption of schooling or the non-provision of classes that serve students from Acre communities, the most frequent justification, presented by the interviewees, was not the absence of actions by the government, but the low number of probable students who would continue in the higher stages of education. As a result, some interviewees had to wait for years to resume their studies, depending on favorable circumstances – such as the accumulation of a sufficient number of students to open a class or, in some cases, a school (10 students) – for the arrival of a teacher in their communities. This evidences, once again, some of the injunctions and difficulties that contribute to the non-guarantee of the right to education, especially for women from lower classes (Araújo, 2010).

Regarding the opening and closing of rural schools in the territory of Acre, it is worth noting that this configuration differs greatly from what is experienced in the management scenario of rural schools in Pará, often portrayed in the works of Hage (2008, 2014), Hage and Reis (2018), Hage and Corrêa (2019). According to Ribeiro (2023), when studying the Acre Amazon, the condition for maintaining a rural school is to have 10 or more students and to pressure the government to get a (male or female) teacher to teach there. In this scenario, the school (and the only (male or female) teacher who works there) will serve students from Elementary School I, Elementary School II or EJA, always in multigrade organization classes. The studies of Hage (2008, p. 8), in locations in the Amazon of Pará with minimally organized river access and with active public power, demonstrate another reality: the "[...] closure of small unidocent schools, added to the transportation of students to better structured and complete schools, which fulfill the function of administrative and pedagogical nucleus" imprint, in the population of the Amazon of Pará, the belief that schools considered to be of good quality are those that are serial.

The issue of seriation, as a more viable alternative to the schooling of children in rural areas, was not expressed by the interviewees. It is inferred that they did not express this belief because all of them attended schools in rural areas, and nine of them attended Elementary School I (all or part of it) in the organization of the multi-grade. That is, they are graduates of

multigrade classes and are, for the most part, teachers of multigrade classes. Therefore, it is perceived that they believe in multigrade as a viable, valid and valued organization for the schooling of children in rural areas, especially among those enrolled in Elementary School.

Another inference, which reflects the appreciation of multi-grade among the interviewees, is the protagonist posture, conceived by themselves and especially by their mothers, for the conquest of the offer of education (opening of schools or classes) in the rubber plantations farthest from the urban environment. Those women gathered (and still gather), on their own initiative, documentation capable of proving the demand for schooling in the rubber plantations. That is, they are responsible for all the stages, prior to the students' attendance at schools: they attract potential students (number equal to or greater than 10 students), take the documentation to the urban district of the municipality, enroll them (at the city hall) and wait for the hired teacher – often, they themselves exercise this regency, guaranteeing their children schooling. “The strength of those women has often filled the void left by the government, which has failed to map demands, provide supply, and guarantee compulsory Basic Education in the Acre Amazon” (Ribeiro, 2023, p. 182).

It is those schooling difficulties that also justify lightened paths for the basic education of the interviewees. Except for Maria Buriti and Maria Graviola, the other interviewees completed part (or all) of Elementary School II and/or High School in EJA programs, which are more accelerated and with fewer pedagogical resources. This panorama was also evidenced in the research by Martins (2015), carried out in the Acre Amazon, in its Juruense portion (municipality of Cruzeiro do Sul and other cities bathed by Rio Juruá (river).

The subjects who need EJA in rural areas are generally adults who have already started families or young people who have not been able to enter the formal school process for various reasons, such as the lack of schooling in the rubber plantations, the distance from schools, the lack of transportation to go to school and, mainly, the need for daily hunting work, fishing and agriculture, which guarantee the survival of the family (Martins, 2015, p. 156).

In addition to having studied at EJA, several interviewees taught in this modality. Regarding the stages of schooling with which the interviewees worked, only Maria Buriti taught only in EJA and Maria Guaraná taught in EJA and Early Childhood Education. Therefore, only those two *women research subjects* were not multigrade teachers in Elementary School I classes. It is also noteworthy that five interviewees taught only in multigrade classes throughout their careers.

As for the moment of entry into teaching, seven teachers took over the classroom soon after completing high school. It is noteworthy that Maria Cupuaçu started teaching activities (literacy of adults) even before entering as a high school student. One of the justifications presented by the teachers for this early entry into teaching is the reaffirmation of teaching as the only professional activity available and, mainly, the only alternative to domestic work. Those two professions are markedly seen as the rare “women’s jobs”, especially in the Brazilian rural environment (Ferreira, 2014), consistent with the context of the Acre Amazon.

It is true that the “dream of being a teacher” was cited by Maria Açaí and Maria Cupuaçu as the main motivation for entering the teaching profession. However, most of the teachers mentioned, among other motivations, circumstances imposed by family and/or marital arrangements. Such arrangements conferred on many of those women the need to live on the premises of the schools in which they taught, especially when they began their teaching careers. With this, it is recognized that, despite the numerous difficulties faced by teachers, the condition of working and living in school is not felt as a hardship, but as something commonplace in the Acre Amazon (Lima, 2012; Santos, 2015).

This organization of housing and work together, on the school premises, is something well accepted by families, by other teachers and, especially, by the teachers themselves. Some of them lived with their husbands and children – who were usually their students in multigrade classes. At this point, it is highlighted that the decision to live, with their families within the schools, is linked to aspects of very strong influence for the desire of those women to continue as teachers in rural areas: the way they face motherhood and, especially, marriage, as well as the (non-negotiable) decisions of their partners.

Only Maria Tucumã lives in the rubber plantation where she was born, since her husband has always lived and has their colony in this same place. The other interviewees entered the teaching profession in different rubber plantations, from where they initially lived. The justification, presented by nine interviewees, for at least one change of residence – especially from a rubber plantation, close to the urban environment, to another more distant – was linked to the patriarchal need to “accompany the husband”, especially when there was an expectation of work for the partner. In the case of Maria Buriti, Maria Guaraná, Maria Jambo and Maria Bacuri, their entry into teaching was essentially influenced by the motivations of their companions and by the change of residence, decided by them. They had a certain job in the new rubber plantations, especially as day laborers (professionals who provide care to a colony for an entire day, clearing the land, harvesting açai – at the right time – and opening the land for sowing, among other activities). They also had possibilities for the conquest of a colony by the PADs. They, as wives, were sure of wanting to continue with them and the uncertainty of their own income, which motivated them to enter teaching. Also in this context, it is possible to observe the reports of Maria Ingá and Maria Cupuaçu, who had to interrupt their studies in more than one stage of Basic Education, because their companions decided to migrate more than once.

In the rural environment, the importance of discussing the repercussions of patriarchy on the lives of women – and, therefore, also on the lives of teachers in this territory – is recognized. They still obey a “[...] patriarchal-based relationship system, since the State itself does not yet provide these women with the possibilities for greater autonomy in their social relations” (Faleiro; Farias, 2017, p. 838).

As the most illustrative example of this reality, there are the experiences of Maria Graviola, who moved in 2022 only because of the need to live next to her husband, even if it meant not teaching. Her justification: *“If it doesn’t work out [to continue teaching], it’s bad. But, I have to stay with him [husband] because I got married. [...] I? I love teaching! But if I got married, then I have to think about him [husband] first”*.

This context reveals that those women were led by the same thread: under the pressure of current cultural values, they prioritized being by their husbands’ side, even if this implies adapting or interrupting their study/work paths (Bezerra; Vieira, 2013). For them, accompanying their husbands is imperative, because getting married means being together, including geographically (Duarte, 2015).

It is true that some interviewees, because they have been in the profession for four years or more, have already overcome the initial hardships of teaching in the rubber plantations and the first years of waiting for the legitimization of the land where they lived. Most of the families in the rural areas of Feijó live in settled communities, but not all of them have (yet) the proper documentation, issued by Incra, which corroborates the ownership of the property. Despite this situation, most of the interviewees said they lived in their own colony or in the colony of family members (their own or their husbands’) at the time of the interview. As a result, the interviewees who were unable (or would not be able, in 2022) to renew their employment contracts did not intend to teach in schools further away from their communities. Once again, this scenario reinforces the importance of maintaining the patriarchal family structure for these women: if the family is the highest priority, paid work is a supporting role.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By recalling the objective of the present study, considering the search to identify aspects of the personal, family and school trajectories of teachers from the Acre Amazon that had repercussions on the decisions made by those women to enter teaching in rural schools, it is admitted that this objective was achieved.

It was observed that all 10 *women research subjects* are born in the rural area of Feijó and coming from settled families, thus considered, in this research, with or without definitive land titles. Most descend from a family member from Ceará, which reinforces the idea that rural workers from Ceará were the main occupants of the territory of Acre in the twentieth century, consolidating numerous families. It is in this context, which combines ground and identity, that the territory used in the Acre Amazon, in its portion of Feijó, carries the belonging of most of the interviewees.

The vast majority have lived most of their lives in the rubber plantations of Feijó and have a schooling trajectory full of difficulties and interruptions, with multigrade as the main form of school organization of Elementary School I in the territory researched. It is observed that many of them had to move from the rubber plantation to the urban district of Feijó to then continue their studies. To this end, they worked in domestic work, often in conditions analogous to slave labor. This was the only way found by many of them to stay in the city and continue their studies. This way, patriarchy and other forms of oppression and social exclusion, present in the peasant culture of the rural area of Feijó, showed the two main – and often only – female professional occupations: maid and teacher. Becoming a teacher is also expressed as an escape from domestic work.

The research brought several evidences of the struggle of women – the interviewees themselves and many of their mothers – to ensure the schooling of their children in the rubber plantations. To this end, those women adopted different strategies to open/reopen a rural school in Feijó. Stories of women who say they are strengthened as daughters, in the face of the countless struggles (and victories) of their mothers to see them studying. Daughters who have become teachers and have the opportunity to maintain even more proximity to their children while teaching them. The strength of those (and so many other) women in the Acre Amazon has often replaced the omission of the public authorities in mapping demands, providing supply and guaranteeing part of the compulsory education in the territory where they live and work.

Regarding the exercise of teaching, many teachers, throughout their careers, have lived in different communities in the rural area of Feijó. Only two teachers did not teach in multigrade classes in the early years of Elementary School, evidencing the prevalence of this pedagogical organization in the territory. To enter teaching, many lived on the premises of the schools themselves, which is a common situation for teaching in rural areas. Currently, most of the interviewees live in their own colonies or in the colonies of family members.

Another mark of patriarchy, which had a lot of repercussions on the decision to enter teaching, is the need to “accompany the husband” in migratory processes within the territory of Feijó. This meant, for some of them, the interruption of their studies, the need to teach and so many other choices for their careers to enter the Magisterium. It is clear that the struggle for better schooling conditions in this territory usually comes up against a structure marked by the maintenance (and even naturalization) of numerous forms of oppression to which those women are subjected. According to Beauvoir (1970), in a patriarchal family model based on private property, the woman (property) is oppressed, while the man (owner) reigns sovereignly. This finding is very much in line with the decisions made by those women when they entered teaching in schools in the Acre Amazon.

This scenario attests to the need for more studies and research approaches that reveal the protagonism of those professionals. Or rather: of those women, who live, work and wish to continue in the Acre Amazon, making the territory used by Feijó their signifier of home.

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LMLR: Conceptualization, Research, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – first essay. ARS: Research, Writing – first essay. LS: Supervision, Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Writing – first essay. CLO: Research, Writing – proofreading and editing.

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