

BOOK REVIEW

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FROM AGRESTE TO THE WORLD

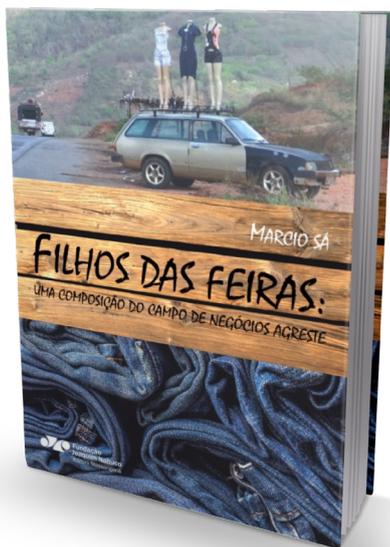
FILHOS DAS FEIRAS: UMA COMPOSIÇÃO DO CAMPO DE NEGÓCIOS AGRESTE

Márcio Sá. Recife, Brasil: Massangana, 1ª edição, 2018. 366 p.

For at least a decade, we have been periodically presented with rich and original reflections from the Agreste region of Pernambuco, a tradition to which “Sons of Fairs: A composition of the rural business field” remains faithful. Originally written as a PhD thesis in sociology at the University of Minho, Portugal, this book is a crowning achievement of the radicalism of Márcio Gomes de Sá as a researcher at Group of Studies and Interventions (Grupo de Estudos e Intervenções no Agreste [GEIA])—at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brazil). Agreste is a transition area in the north-eastern region of Brazil, extending parallel to the coast across six Brazilian states. It is an area comprising small and medium-sized rural properties as well as towns that benefit from proximity to the populous coastal area, despite being considerably different from it. Part of this difference is due to the *periphery condition*, characterized by fewer resources and a distinct form of economy, society, and administration.

This book deals with the culmination of a successful research agenda on Agreste in Pernambuco (Sá 2011; Sá, 2010; Sá *et al.*, 2013). Avoiding the trap of equating the *business man* with a clad executive in a metropolis, the author considers instead the local context by arguing that only localized lenses, coupled with rigorous theorizing, can help us understand and qualify business wealth in this region. This book expands the profile of the contemporary business man (Sá, 2010) by incorporating informality and ordinary management (Carrieri, 2014). It thus emphasizes the *local place*, a relevant tradition of research that can be traced to researchers like Tânia Fischer (1996), Coordinator of Power and Local Organizations Studies Centre of Federal University of Bahia.

Through six chapters, including a methodological appendix, this book is infused with the expressive theoretical influence of the French sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Bernard Lahire. It focuses on how a field of business forms, especially of *confections*. Márcio Sá emphasizes the relevance of understanding the *essence of business*—and consequently what it means to manage it and to be a manager—from the rich tradition of Agreste of Pernambuco. Besides discussing the precariousness of existing work on such informal businesses, he stitches theoretical–analytical dialogues combining history, economics, management, and sociology. Thus, these interdisciplinary, theoretical discussions are requalified within a unique context, which becomes the *protagonist* of this work. It not only discusses the productive configuration, but also the businesses existing in a specific region. These aspects must be understood not simply in reference to *capital*, which eventually considers the interior and its organizations “backward” and “disorganized,” and thus onward. This economic



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outlook has peculiar characteristics that are only achievable considering the knowledge produced therein more socially and empirically powerful from a theoretical point of view. In other words, the site cannot be observed through a global lens so as to avoid the risk of misunderstandings arising by adopting capital references.

Thus, the author's construction is very interesting, which "can be understood as capital in this country field?" (Sá, 2018, p. 210), is promising. Bourdieu's classic concept of capital is adjusted with respect to Agreste of Pernambuco by considering two elements: *the differentiating resources in the local market* and *distinctive features of its owners*. These two aspects configure a logic that allows one to grasp how positions are occupied in the confectionary field of a peripheral region. Far from investing only in the French reference of his theoretical guides, Professor Sá creatively, adherently, and pertinently immerses himself in the empirical testimonies. Despite the structuralist approach unequivocally associated with the adoption of a *Bourdieuian* perspective, the construction of a research deeply based on locality is thus capable of far broader dialogues.

A highlight of this book is the periphery issue, a fundamental variable to explain capitalism itself and its increasing accumulation. Periphery is not only a potent theoretical construct—since it allows the center and its limits to be drawn, often by opposition—but also acquires relevance by explaining why capitalism is a wealth concentrating system par excellence. That is, it pulsates in the periphery an energy that serves the centre, but which is ignored by it, as if it only fulfilled its destiny to be explored. The discussion on "think locally, act globally" is ubiquitous in this work not because it is the author's focus, but because it highlights the quality and strength of an argument that is part of a strand of research strongly committed to its ideals. It is an ethical commitment to using university tools and making them available to society, in order to delineate the ways in which it can understand itself. Without seeking to hierarchize knowledge from the academy, or to give exaggerated emphasis to the empirical at any time, this book is proof that it is possible to think of applied social sciences in the more rigorous use of the term—focusing on both social knowledge and its particularities, as well as the need to make knowledge serve society.