

**Handloom practices in Carmo do Rio Claro
(Minas Gerais), its history, its craftsmen, its actors
and Brazilian fashion**

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INTRODUCTION

Carmo do Rio Claro is a city located in the southwest of Minas Gerais and has its economic strength based mostly on rural practices and what they enable in commercial developments.

Among the various practices was the use of the handloom, or wooden loom, which served mainly for the production of cotton fabrics, on a scale of attendance to the particularities of the farm.

A very particular issue observed in this early period, with regard to the question of fabrics for clothing, is linked to the export and import agreements between Portugal and England, which meant that the colonies did not follow the processes of industrialization through which Europe went through and that had in textile production its main tributary.

Still, in a broader understanding, with the coming of the Portuguese Royal Family to Brazil, the breach of the prohibitive agreements in the Colony led Brazil to a new economic reality, even if still under the seal of the Portuguese Crown. Although we observe cotton as one of the main export products of the Colony, even with some oscillations between the years 1796 to 1807, this did not imply the emergence of textile factories in the region.

In this first period, the production of handloom fabrics in the region was predominantly female.

Although the practice of handloom is recognized as something widespread throughout a region, period data indicate that in Carmo do Rio Claro these practices had a presence perhaps a little more significant, even though the municipality, as well as the region, have undergone significant transformations over the years.

1 The collective productions of the factories

The first factories appeared in the late 1980s. This happened very naturally and through free initiative. Most of them were small factories, and not so many, that added an internal contingent ranging from twenty to thirty employees who participated in the direct production chain, which in this case was represented by the figures of the weavers and by a slightly smaller contingent of people who, informally, worked in their homes finishing the pieces produced on the handlooms.

In the context of productive reality, husbands were responsible for administrative and fiscal issues, and women for productive and creative issues, although these divisions were not rigorously established.

In this initial period, which runs from the end of 1980 to the first half of the 1990s, the largest contingent of the production chain was formed by women, who dominated most of the production on the looms and almost the entire productive question of everything that

is understood here by finishing.

Although it was known that there were men who wore, the appearance of male labor in the production of fabrics in the factories will take place, on a larger scale, with the production of blankets, which would not objectively eliminate the production of other articles.

1. Before fashion, the stages and television

The first movements of approximation of fashion or the aesthetics of clothing that, in fact, gave national visibility or a spontaneous visibility to the making of manual textile and its possibilities beyond the universe of decoration, came through its use by the hands of the theatrical director Gabriel Villela.

It is quite likely that the national success of Villela's shows has aroused the curiosity of personalities from the fashion world who may have seen them. More than that, this new possibility within the context of tissue creation in the mining locality may have indicated new paths and new approaches in the handling of techniques and raw materials. Somehow, what we perceive here is an exercise that resignified the making of manual textile.

Another event of paramount importance, perhaps the most impactful in the sense of the visibility of handmade textile practices, was the inclusion of a nucleus of weavers in the telenovela *Fera Ferida*, of Rede Globo de Televisão, in 1992.

2. Design and creation

In the early 1990s, with the emergence of the Association of Artisans of Carmo do Rio Claro, ideas of the teaching of practices were sketched not only due to economic factors, but also for its recognition as intangible heritage, in addition to a discourse of revitalization of knowledge. In this sense, one of the actions, and perhaps the most significant, was a public/municipal initiative project with Sebrae Minas (Passos), initiated in April 1997.

Within this context and with the local productive reality, what we observed is that the issue of teaching, in this period, was strictly linked to the productive need and its urgencies. Faced with this situation, in some cases the use of unskilled labor was common. Therefore, under these conditions, it was up to the business community to improve this workforce according to their needs, temporarily hiring experienced weavers or weavers to monitor the development of activities.

3. Brazilian fashion discovers manual fabrics

Fashion has always been present within the textile making of Carmo do Rio Claro, even in its limitations or delimitations, and we believe it is possible to affirm that the production of fabrics for clothing has always existed and was present in similar situations such as that of this rural community, if not by the term fashion, perhaps by

the term “cloth of dress”.

Wool was the main raw material of the fabrics aimed at this fashion that had a regional character.

In this sense, the local fashion and the handloom were linked through the craft of tailoring that, in Carmo do Rio Claro, was exercised by men and had in the making of male sets, mainly jackets and coats, its “rule” of use. The definitive approach of the world of national fashion begins more properly in the early 2000s. Brazilian fashion, then, turns its gaze to the artisanal possibilities.

The demands of the designers were not limited to the simple use of artisanal techniques. In the case of the handloom, in addition to the use of a multitude of tessitura patterns, the use of raw materials that reflected contemporaneity and modernity was very valuable.

CONCLUSION

Within the understanding of microhistory, certain particularities that make up the constructive process of knowledge involving the craft of weaving are evidenced. Because it is a practice intrinsically linked to the formative origin of a society and because it is directly linked to other ruralist practices of an era, the handloom ended up creating resistance through its agents, as occurs with those who still have basic tools necessary for the maintenance of a piece of land.

Although in the case of the handloom the teaching of knowledge has occurred more widely in the domestic sphere, it will be from this teaching practice that its permanence will result and may result in its perpetuation.

Even with the incursions and the recognized success and relevance of handmade fabrics in the world of national fashion, it is evident a difficulty of dialogue between the academic circles, in the figure of their trained agents, and the universe of practical artisans in the manualities. They are two distinct languages in the uses of the terms and in the purposes of the practical exercises, considering mainly the perspectives of an economic character.

Perhaps we have to take a new approach to the term technology and its relation to manualities, which is in fact the human capacity or ability to transform distinct materials, either by economic needs or by simple creative doing. The manualities contain in themselves this “technological” factor of knowing how to do through very particular skills, often distinct, but fundamental to the exercise of human creativity that, in fact, makes all the difference.

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