

The Elderly: A New Social Actor ahead of the finitude/death

O idoso: novo ator social diante da finitude/morte

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ABSTRACT: Longevity is one of humanity's greatest conquests, however the aging process and old age itself are still filled with stereotypes and negative stigmas. Despite all of the prejudice suffered by the elderly in the Brazilian culture, this age group has been gaining more visibility as far as public policies are concerned, and have also been understood in a distinctive manner by the research field. In spite of the demographic growth and aging, Brazil did not satisfactorily equate the issues regarding the demands of this age segment. Today, the elderly Brazilian population represents 22 million people, or 12% of the total population. According to projections of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, in 2025 Brazil will have an elderly population of 34 million: how will these elderly be? The goal of the article is after to identify the stereotypes that impregnated the old aged, reflect about the elderly in your new paper as a social actor while identifying the social movements focused for this segment. A bibliography research was performed. The conclusion was because of a hostile scenario imposed by a contemporary society to the elderly, the need for public policies recognize and guaranteeing basic rights for them is imperative. Despite the prejudices, the elderly mobilizations enable them to overcome situations of vulnerability, which they are exposed especially when in the proximity of your finitude. To the consolidation of a social actor, we need educational actions directed to that segment, bringing knowledge and information for all elderly. Education throughout life has a relevant role, in order to equip and empower the elderly. Hence, it will be possible to think, in actuality, of an elderly that is more active, participative and integrated to society, it is positioned to searching for their rights and

engaging in social movements, ultimately escaping the stereotype still widespread in society that nothing else in life would expect death.

Keywords: Social Actor; Elderly; Finitude/Death and Old Age; Education.

RESUMO: *A longevidade é uma das maiores conquistas da humanidade; no entanto, o processo de envelhecimento e a velhice ainda são revestidos de estereótipos e estigmas negativos. Apesar de todos os preconceitos sofridos pelos idosos na cultura brasileira, essa faixa etária vem ganhando maior visibilidade, tanto em função das políticas públicas voltadas a esse segmento quanto pela relevância enquanto campo de pesquisa. Apesar do crescimento demográfico e do envelhecimento, o Brasil não equacionou de forma satisfatória as questões relacionadas com as demandas desse segmento. Hoje, a população idosa brasileira representa cerca de 22 milhões de pessoas, ou seja, 12% da população total. De acordo com projeções do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, em 2025 o Brasil terá uma população idosa de 34 milhões de pessoas; e como estarão esses idosos? O objetivo do artigo é, após identificar os estereótipos que revestem a população idosa, refletir sobre o idoso no seu novo papel de ator social, identificando os movimentos sociais voltados para este segmento etário. Foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica. Conclui-se que, diante de um cenário hostil imposto pela sociedade contemporânea para os idosos, na verdade, há a necessidade de políticas públicas que reconheçam e garantam os direitos básicos por que luta este grupo etário. Apesar dos preconceitos, os idosos devem continuar a se mobilizar para que seja possível superar as situações de vulnerabilidade, a que, via de regra, estão expostos especialmente quando da proximidade de sua finitude. Para a consolidação de um ator social, são necessárias ações educativas dirigidas ao segmento, trazendo conhecimento e informação de acesso de todas as pessoas idosas. A educação ao longo da vida tem um papel muito relevante, a fim de instrumentalizar e capacitá-las. Assim, será possível pensar, na atualidade, em um idoso que seja mais ativo, participativo e integrado à sociedade, que se posicione em busca de seus direitos e se engaje em movimentos sociais, escapando em definitivo do estereótipo ainda disseminado na sociedade daquele que nada mais na vida faria senão esperar a morte.*

Palavras-chave: *Ator social; Idoso; Finitude/Morte; Educação.*

Introduction

Brazilian society still has not taken care of the elderly from a social perspective. Their reality is that basic guarantees are often neglected. This scenario shows that the majority of the elderly population suffers with old-age stereotypes and still faces serious social issues (Oliveira, 1999).

Adults 60 years of age and older fought for a very long time to earn respect, dignity, fair wages and a better life. However, we see more prejudice associated to social and economic marginalization, which places the elderly in a very restricted space, without real possibilities of change.

A person that spent 60 years in poverty, with no means to survive graciously, hopes at this point in their lives for a chance, perhaps, to achieve a space or at least be recognized for what they had produced in their lifetime. However, the elderly encounter new obstacles because on top of all the hurdles, they still need to overcome prejudices for being old and are often viewed as useless, incapable, and a burden to society.

The Sociology of Aging presupposes an analysis of the elderly, while a subject of social roles inserted within this context, they can constitute themselves as a social actor, able to fight for their rights and work towards recognition and a better life.

In this sense, the goal of this article is to focus on the elderly as a new social actor, acknowledging their identity, place in society space as well as their social relations.

Social Aspects of Old-Age

The human aging process cannot only be considered through a chronological viewpoint, a discernment of other aspects is needed. This chapter will highlight the social character regarding the old-age.

Society imposes imperatives of production, agility and modernity. The elderly, regarding biological issues, present several limitations and/or difficulties, although that does not mean incapacity to complete tasks. However, in the present social perspective, the elderly a lot of times are considered to be bothersome, for they do not perform in the same pace and manner that the youth view as adequate and correct. According to Beauvoir (1990, p.265), “it

is the predominant classes that impose this statue on the elderly and the remainder of the active population act as their accomplice.”

The aging of the population constitutes one of the greatest achievements of this century. To be able to reach the old-age is no longer a privilege to a few. By contrast, several communities are not in sync with this type of demographical change, for they attribute values related to competitiveness to their groups. Their worth is measured by the work capacity to reach independence and functional autonomy (Veloz, Schulze & Camargo, 1999).

According to Oliveira (2002, p.46), “the anxiety and impatience are important aspects and characteristics of the society. In face of this neurosis of velocity, it is incompatible, and a demise even, to accept the slower rhythm by the elderly.” Hence, it is more practical to finish the task rather than enable the elderly to do.

In a society that’s characterized by power and searches for profit, the elderly, a lot of times, represents a stop in the growth process, ignoring all of the social contribution that they have given, and still do, to the production of goods, services and knowledge.

Because of all the difficulties in confronting the social reality, a lot of the elderly deny their own existence by lying about their age, to be accepted within younger groups. Such behavior shows that the elderly do not face their old-age. To keep young and active is the desire of all of those that are aging, however it is necessary to be conscious about it, accepting and living life to its fullest.

Unfortunately, to keep active in a society that reaffirms elderly incapacity is a dilemma to overcome. Old-age was never synonymous with disease, but it is a phase in the process of human development.

The limitations, incapacities and difficulties are not problems related only to the elderly. There are a number of children, teenagers, and young adults that also have problems, due to different pathological causes. Hence, it is nonsense to consider old-age a limitation or a deficiency.

The impact of negative stereotypes to their self perception makes the elderly believe that their possibilities to act are over (Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002). These considerations cause a negative impact that result in non-acceptance, or a distortion, of this stage of life.

In society, the difficulties to confront the paradigms of the old-age are placed above the cultural considerations. To reject old-age unveils itself as a prejudice that for many years lived in the Brazilian Society.

To Silva (2003, p.110), “today the elderly condition does not reveal great changes from early times.” Even with the technological and social evolution, many problems still exist regarding the aging process, because there are no innovations, but remarkable disparities. To this author “the urbanization and industrialization increased the inequalities that associated prejudices and stigmas, demonstrates that the experiences brought with life have not been accepted by young people.” (Silva, 2003, p.110)

Hence, even with all the innovations in the most diverse areas, the elderly face serious social issues. “In Brazil, like in other developing countries, the problem of an aging population is added by an ample list of unanswered social questions, such as the poverty and social outcast.” (Camarano, 2004, p.254).

To many elderly, the reality of being outcast that was present throughout their entire life only got worse with old-age. Those conditions bring even worse repercussions, to realize that the phase they thought they would reach dignity is nothing but the confirmation that they are victims of a cruel system.

In order to overcome the negative factors of old-age, or at least to minimize them, it is imperative to recognize the representation of the elderly in society and their social role today, as well as their role in the past.

The role of the elderly was determined by customs and actions that appeared in the culture, as well as within the historical context that it is inserted. “The old-age Statute is imposed to the human being by the society in which they belong, and they are influence by cultural, social, economical and psychological values of that society that determines the role and the status that the elderly will have.” (Silva, 2003, p.96).

Thus, the social function that is attributed to the elderly was culturally formed. According to Ferrigno (2006), the social construction of the generations is completed by the affirmation of moral values and expectations for each of them, in different phases.

The social existence of the elderly represents that they are not just individuals, biological subjects that are restricted to an evolution process from birth to death. As it is affirmed by Bazo (1996), “the old-age is more than a biological concept, it is a social construction.”

Because it is a social construction, it must have value. However, in most cases the value given to it is negative, emphasizing the incapacity, fragility or inadequacy of the elderly to society.

These stereotypes represent a culture that values the new, and as a result proves that the elderly, despite all of the accumulated experience and the contributions to the formation of actual society, it is nothing but a problem that has not been equated.

The elderly, throughout their lifetime, had social roles in their youth and maturity that little by little were extinguished and diminished in existence. They had representation within the workforce and were very important as part of their families, as fathers and mothers. However, along the years these roles slowly disappeared.

The way people on retirement are viewed today does not take into consideration all of the previous activities that granted them the right to social security. Since they no longer work or produce anything new and useful they are not considered to be able to contribute to society. This pejorative viewpoint confirms the absence of a social role, because the worker becomes inactive, and no longer has the proper representation.

The retirement according to Beauvoir (1990, p.325), “introduces a radical lack of continuity, there is rupture with the past, the men must adapt to new conditions that bring certain advantages (resting), but also grave disadvantages: impoverishment, ineligibility disqualification.”

In the family, the elderly also suffer with the loss or with the diminishing of their social function. In many situations, the children and grandchildren do not consider the activities and the history of the elderly, for they were bosses, providers and responsible for education. Many descendants do not value that contribution, even though they are, in many cases, financially dependent on the elderly.

At the same time that the family maintains the allocation of resources, protection, care and education, the elderly are neglected, attributing to them a status of uselessness. For a long time, an older person was responsible to manage the family, having to make decisions and provide for the entire family. However, when one reaches old-age, that person is perceived as fragile and incapable of making valuable judgments about anything and ultimately incapable to make decisions.

Hence, to think on all the social aspects of old-age, is to reflect on the social roles they had during their lifetime and the loss of it when they reach this stage in their lives.

The sociology of Aging

It is important to relate to society the process of aging and old-age itself, for the men this is integrated to a social environment, despite its age. Thus, to think about sociology of aging, allows a new social dimension of these subjects that were always a part of society, though living by its margin.

The elderly all through their lives endured the process of socialization that inserted them to society and introduced to them to new ethical and moral customs, like culture itself. Socialization is a constant process where subjects adapt to new circumstances. In this manner, the socialization is not restricted only to initial stages of human development (Moragas, 1991).

The process of socialization goes through different stages. Acceptance consists in internalized values; accommodation infers a great level of internalization and adjustment to external values; adaptation requires a change of individual conduct more incisive than the accommodation; assimilation refers to permanent internalization of social values by the individual; integration is the last stage of the socialization process that presumes a global internalization of values and external manifestations of its conduct (Moragas, 1991).

The elderly will not detach themselves from all of their values. However, these values are included in the process, adding some aspects to their behavior by means of adaptation to contemporary society. This segment does not lose their social and cultural characteristics through time, but should try to include their own moral and ethical values to other groups, contributing to the socialization of younger people.

Hence, the sociology of aging appears from the need to maintain the integration of the elderly in the social context, confirming that age does not condition the capacity or the exercise of defined social roles.

This field of sociology searches to maintain the elderly socialization process by way of integrating him to his social context, defining roles and stressing the importance of this segment of the population within the society. To enable it, the prejudices and stigmas regarding old-age must be overcome, because “the society demonstrates a certain dosage of social intolerance to the elderly” (Morandini, 2004, p.290).

Old-age is a social problem that calls for real actions. The elderly population is rapidly growing. This fact implies the need of more resources for this segment and a social

organization that allows for the acceptance of the elderly, for aging is inevitable, unless a premature death occurs.

The great contingency of elderly citizens affects directly the State that must provide decent conditions for this population to survive. Therefore, aging is viewed as a danger to the economical structure because it means more expenses, especially in maintaining social welfare.

As the population ages, the relationship between the taxpayers and welfare beneficiaries becomes more delicate, for the active segment tends to reduce, however the retirees keeps growing, which interferes directly in the perception of aging. The retirement is a social milestone that characterizes the beginning of old-age, though at the same time it guarantees a right that associates the idea of incapacity. As stated by Jordão Netto (1997, p.76),

Retirement means a type of ‘official testament’ that the individual is aging, a symbol of that event’s ritual which will stigmatize him as ‘inactive’ and ultimately determine his old-age as a productive agent and by extension, his old-age also as a social actor.

It is clear that the individual has been prepared all through life to exercise certain social roles represented by a profession. As a result, after years of activity, the society allows his retirement, taking away his social role. Thus, there is a preparation for work, but not an education to prepare the individual for retirement (Steglich, 1992).

Hence, “the human being is born programmed to activity and, therefore work is a universal category that humanizes, being allowed to be a part of the construction and maintenance of the culture and the production of the group in any society (Whitaker, 2007, p.107).

The retirees however, are considered somewhat useless or incapable to complete an activity because “the social organized structures in regards to production, work and profit values the people for their productivity and capacity to work. In this sense, the elderly end up discriminated (Steglich, 1992, p.52).

This way, the old-age is socially and culturally considered a category which characterizes the elderly as an unproductive individual and that do not have any possibilities of future perspectives. The elderly population, consequently, represents a great social

problem, a large contingent of people that are considered to be dependent and replaceable (Jordão Netto, 1997).

If in the social perspective, the elderly are forced to isolation, being that the organization of the society orbits around the young population, to age takes people to a situation of degradation highly aversive and repugnant.

The elderly have difficulty following the pace of development of younger people and often cannot admit or accept the behavior and values of these groups. Thus, if the elderly are unable to adapt or at least accept the constant changes that take place in a society, their social coexistence diminishes little by little.

Considering the aging process, alerts to all of the social problematic that the older segment have been facing in the Brazilian reality and it cannot be restricted to isolated focus of difficulty. The culture of incapacity of the elderly compromises the social situation of old-age, demanding that that every person that reaches 60 years old becomes incapable, especially if they come from lower social class. The elderly lives two of the worst situations imposed by society: “to be old and poor, in a society that only glorifies the rich and values those who are sufficiently young to produce and consume according to the interests of those who detain the means of production” (Jordão Netto, 1997, p.68).

To overcome the prejudices, aside from the construction of a new culture of old-age to the population in general, it is imperative that the elderly accept their condition as old individuals, for the prejudice among themselves is great or even more delicate than that suffered by actions from the younger segment. To conquer these issues or at least to minimize them, an educational process is necessary.

Education to the Elderly

To allow a good view about the elderly and old-age, education appears as an opportunity to act, as much as for the society to know and learn about the elderly as for the elderly to have new conditions to open up to the world, knowing their rights and living new experiences.

Education is of fundamental importance, it must perform an eminently democratic role and be a meeting point where constant experiences are exchanged (Gadotti, 1984).

It is clear the role of transformation education has, overcoming the mere idea of transmitting information. In this sense, paraphrasing Piconez (2002), in view of the innovation of reality the education instruments critically and creatively. This way the educative process allows a stage of changes, despite the person's age.

The desired change process represents a long path to follow, nevertheless if the first step is not taken, the desired transformation will never take place. Thus, "the education in any case, would bring the seed of change and turn it into the instrument of realization of utopias" (Paiva, 1985, p.39).

Within this sphere, "the elderly must have room to speak out in order to have meaning, something that allows and launches the desire and to maintain the look upon them" (Castro, 2001, p.68).

It is noticeable that the elderly are now viewed as living beings able to think that have a lot to teach, however still have much to learn, which shows how much is necessary to be in touch with new experiences and new sources of knowledge.

Today, education for the elderly is focused on a differentiated sphere. It is no longer a charity system to those involved. There is a new approach for the elderly which acknowledges that it is not only someone that needs recreational activities to occupy their time, but somebody that needs room to keep growing.

Education is viewed as a form of liberation that comprehends changes when old-age arises, allowing a reevaluation of its characteristics as well as a way to facilitate the process of analysis and reflection to its members.

Moragas (1991, p.54) emphasize that "many people are taken by surprise when they see elderly people performing physical and intellectual activities fully and effectively." However, most cases within Brazilian society people have a pejorative concept of old-age and do not care at all about people of this age segment.

In order for the elderly to be in direct contact with new learning possibilities, it is fundamental that they be included in an education process and also have a knowledge mediation to structure the continuous formation of the individual as a social being.

Freire (2005) admits that it is necessary to make the education accessible to all popular classes. However, education will accomplish its political and social role when it is enabled to create a space for discussion and brainstorming of the reality, bearing in mind a conscientious education that allows the exercise of its citizen rights compromised with the transformation of reality.

Every individual is surrounded by an educative process, wherever it may be and in whatever circumstances he finds himself, showing that permanent education does not exist only in the formal education, but also within the most diverse spaces of non-formal education. Hence, it is imperative to stress the importance of all education possibilities, as well as of the reality.

Before comprehending the insertion of the elderly in the education context it is necessary to reflect on the aging process and old-age, knowing that “aging allows variety and richness of psycho and rational experiences” (Moragas, 1991, p.124).

From the moment the elderly sees himself as an actor of his own life, he conquers a respected space within the social and the family scenario. As it is affirmed by Paulo Freire, “only when the oppressed realize who is their oppressor they engage in an organized fight for their liberation and begin to believe in themselves, thus overcoming the “dealing” with the oppressor regime” (Freire, 2005, pp.58-59).

The learning process takes place meaningfully when the elderly have the capacity to learn despite their age as soon as they are stimulated. According to Moragas (1991) in order for the elderly to learn effectively, it is necessary to have adequate motivations, an environment that allows a time for assimilation to ensure a social and meaningful role for these people.

To Sá (2004), the elderly want to become a person through their pairs and from those who constitute their universe. They are able to incorporate, in their relationship, not only family but their friends, other elderly, the oppressed and the oppressors, the whole society.

Hence, the elderly can, by way of the educative process socialize and insert themselves within a bigger social context, extending their personal relations, knowing new realities, demystifying fears and realizing all the space that they can know and live. According to Freire (1971) it is understood that, for the men, the world is an objective reality, which can be known in spite of him. It is fundamental however, to begin from the idea that the men are a being of relations, not only contacts, it is not only in the world, but with the world.

Social Actor: Social Identity of the Elderly

From the moment the elderly was considered an individual able to develop activities and perform new social roles, the perception regarding old-age began to alter, for the

incapable and useless elderly, that expected for the arrival of death, became a new social agent. “Gradually the perception of the elderly, as a subgroup of the population that was vulnerable and dependent, was replaced by an active population segment and today must be incorporated in the search for the well being of the all society” (Camarano, 2004, pp.257-258).

In this perspective, when the elderly realize they can work as a channel that allows changes to take place and that they can do something positive for their rights, the entire old-age social context alters. The elderly are much more threatening when they act collectively rather than the own biological phenomenon of the old-age. Hence, the elderly when defining its identity, overcomes the prejudices and began to establish a social space, searching for recognition for what has been done throughout their lifetime and for what they can do because of their experience. As it is affirmed by Steglich (1992, p.61) “the best way to build its own personality, in any stage of life, it is always upon solid reality basis.”

By way of this assumption, the elderly searches for alternatives to overcome the difficulties that are imposed to them during life and worsen when reaches old-age. In this sense, “it is when the individual suffers and it is torn apart in its relations with others that the desire to be an individual turns into capacity to be a social actor” (Touriane, 1998, p.102).

Active development provides greater integration and social participation, and, due to an increase in self-esteem of the elderly. With an inevitable death, with advancing years, and the proximity of the end of existence, numerous negative feelings are evident, such as anxiety, fear, sadness, loneliness and the elderly can get to despair at having to face the unknown alone and great mystery of death.

This new conception of old age and aging, allowing an active life, optimize coping, acceptance and preparation for death, as an inevitable reality. Thus, is fundamental the elderly is recognized and acts as a social actor, decreasing the fragility of the finiteness process. Therefore, this new conception of elderly while social actor enable greater awareness of this process that is inevitable, need conduction this life with dynamism, optimistic projects, feed dreams to guide the personal and social life, gradually overcoming the stereotypical and negative appraisals than passively await death and the end of life.

The elder, when organized and looking to transform the reality in which it is inserted, have possibilities to act and become a new social actor that can fight for basic rights, which often are disregarded. This new social actor structures in a society that slowly began to notice

the influence of the elderly contingent as well as within the organization as in political aspects.

According to Touraine (1998), to have a formation of new social actors, it is necessary to have recognition of a new society. The world today unveils it as a group of uncontrollable flows, in constant transformation, that presumes that the new social movements will be formed. But the collective action comes from the individual will or group, acting on the actual structure, building and transforming its own identity and integration in order to defend an ideal of solidarity.

During the last few years, the demographic profile changed and the largest insertion of elderly within public spaces does not refer only to the growth of this population. Due to the desire to become more useful and to live intensely, in the last decades the behavior of the elderly has been altering and they have become more participative.

When thinking about a new social actor, the elderly reaches its representation when they are perceived as an active person. In this context, “the word ‘active’ refers to the continuous participation in social, economical, cultural, spiritual and civil issues and not just the capacity to be physically active or to be a part of the workforce” (WHO, 2005, p.13).

The active aging today, reveals one of the better structured social proposals to the elderly, aiming the social integration by way of the insertion within different spaces and the political recognition of this segment. The active elderly while social actors represent one of the most important social forces that start to be organized in this decade.

It is important to understand that the “active aging is the process of optimization of the health opportunities, participation and security, that aims to better the quality of life as the person gets older” (WHO, 2005, p.13).

For the implementation of the elderly as new social actors “any effort towards the promotion of the active aging, will result in an effective improvement in terms of quality of life for all of them” (Smethurst, 2004, p.151). In this sense, besides being a larger representation of the elderly in the social environment, another important factor relates to its own identity, through self affirmation as well as their higher self esteem because they are perceived as more useful, consequently, stands before a new perspective in relation their own finitude and death.

From a new point of view, based on the autonomy, activity and the full participation of the elderly, such a concept allows the configuration of a positive image of the elderly that

opposes the traditional view, which naturalizes the relation between aging, apathy, decadence, isolation or disease (Batista, Jaccoud, Aquino & El-Moor, 2008).

In the old-age culture that are now being put in there is evidence that the elderly is perceived within the social context as having its own space to claim its rights, as well as to help form a society that is more fair and democratic with equal rights to all.

As the elderly takes on this social role, they find themselves inserted in the process of social transformation as agents of the process. The elderly can contribute by way of the political, social and cultural insertion that have an important participation in the conservation of the identity and the social memory, aiding directly to the establishment of a new vision about the active elderly, replacing the old image about aging (Santana & Sena, 2003).

The cultural alterations occur when the elderly start to refuse the pejorative vision presented by population regarding old-age and begins to act as true social actors, capable of mobilizing the society in the search for a new social, cultural, political and economical acknowledgement.

The constitution of the individual occurs when he establishes with himself, enabling him to achieve personal enjoyment from what he represents or by the social prestige he was able to conquer through his activity. "It is true that the individual cannot be just defense and fight; it is also affirmation, happiness, success. But it is not the architect of an ideal order: is however, a force of liberation" (Touraine, 1998, p.103).

To think of an active aging in which more and more elderly have conditions to express their desires as well as their doubts and critiques make the society a big collective and democratic construction. According to Oliveira (2002, p.49), "the elderly need to be integrated to society". Hence, it is not the age that determines the condition or the possibility to be integrated in the social context.

Social engagement must be viewed as a right for every person that distinguishes them as citizens, despite social classes, race, gender or age segment. The right to social insertion must be preserved in all situations, to all members of Brazilian society. From the moment that groups that are socially vulnerable begin to mobilize, new cultural concepts will be formed, even though human dignity is not perceived as a right to everybody in the Brazilian culture.

The elderly want to be seen as integrated and not be remembered only when it is convenient during electoral campaigns or when the families need them to perform certain activities. As is affirmed by Ferrigno (2005, p.27), "just as the adolescents have their groups, the elderly also need that and have the right to have theirs".

When the elderly is integrated into their own segment, they begin to think collectively and establish common projects searching to achieve rights for all its members, which creates a group of social actors that are united, organize themselves in social movements in order to achieve improvements regarding human dignity and a better life for the elderly.

There is a need to create specific environments to make the integration and social participation possible for the elderly within their communities. This group would need to gain a lot of visibility as a social segment that fights for basic rights for an individual and collective citizenship against social exclusion and prejudices (Borges, 2003).

Within the groups of elderly that are engaged in movements to better this segment, there are associations that were created with the goal to defend their own interests as well as the retirees and the elderly in general, like the “Panteras Grisalhas”. This group was created in the USA, by Maggie Kuhn in 1970 and was quickly disseminated in every American state. It arrived in Europe in 1975 and an association was created in Germany. The Panteras Grisalhas, or Gray Panthers, were considered a legitimate elderly union and still maintains activities fighting for the elderly to achieve a quality life at the old-age.

Nationally, the civil organized society, along with small groups of elderly, have been claiming basic rights for this segment. The Sociedade Brasileira de Geriatria e Gerontologia (SBGG) was the first scientific entity that came forward to defend the elderly. They actively maintain the gathering of resources and develop courses, symposiums and events of national level in partnership with regional sections.

The Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC) stands out in the scenario, by way of SESC-SP that systematized the first program to aid the elderly. They developed, through SESC-RS in 2000, a project called Centro de Referência do Envelhecimento (CRE), working toward information and updating of the aging process. The SESC, regarding old-age, developed the integration of information, through a network of services for this segment and invested a lot of resources for education in general.

The Confederação Brasileira de Aposentados e Pensionistas (COPAB) represents about 20 million retirees in Brazil, and its goal is to represent and defend the rights of the elderly, acting alongside public segments, establishing articulations and with the dissemination of information.

The Associação Nacional de Gerontologia (ANG) was formed as a scientific and technological organization that investigates the old-aged. Its main goal is to collaborate for

the constitution of a gerontologic consciousness, looking to achieve quality of life for the elderly, guaranteeing their rights and creating new policies for the segment.

The Movimento dos Idosos Solidários (MIS) housed in the city of São Paulo, fights for the rights of this age segment. They also developed work toward the families that have permanently disabled elderly. In partnership with the Hospital Universitário da Universidade de São Paulo, they developed the Programa de Assistência Domiciliária (PAD) which is produced at no cost to entities, elderly groups, pastorals and other professionals that work with the elderly. The goal of this program is to aid families and optimize the skills of the caretaker. They work in the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo, Goiás, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso do Sul Pernambuco e Rondônia.

There is a significant number of elderly that participate in those entities or movements for their rights. However, despite these movements, the elderly that engage or engaged in social mobilizations still have a strong connection to work related causes. Thus, the segment needs to empower the movements that fight for rights of the elderly, and that does not mean they have to abstain from engaging in other causes. Instead, they should focus on an ideal to better economical, social, health, cultural and education conditions for the elderly.

Conclusion

Despite all of the achievements that have been reached by the elderly in the last years, through its representation, from the active aging conceptions and the constitution of a new social actor, a few points must advance. According to Whitaker (2007, p.107), “if the elderly loses the power, there are still rights, and through them the fight must go on. The less power the less prestige, thus greater must be the fight for their rights.”

The fight for rights of the elderly must be claimed by the elderly themselves, however it is necessary to point out that not all of the elderly population know what those basic rights are, even though they should be guaranteed them, but instead they end up accepting situations of discrimination and marginalization for the lack of knowledge.

In order for an effective organization of the elderly to take place to consolidate its rights, it is fundamental and urgent that the education and orchestration be made possible to all of the elderly. To know its own rights, is an elementary precept in order to claim better survival conditions and a better quality of life.

To the elderly that have had the opportunity to be educated, which allowed them to have discernment about what is imposed by society, and for those who fight to contest all that is wrong, they have the role of true social actors, mobilized for the cause to achieve a more just and equal society for the entire population, especially the elderly.

Within these conditioned circumstances, education presents itself as a propeller of a social transformation, for it is through that, combined with the acquisition of knowledge, where the socialization process intensifies and the formation of a critical reflexive subject is consolidated.

From the perspective of the elderly being inserted as a social actor and socially recognized as such, allow for a fuller, active, participatory life, significantly reducing distressing feelings of the number of years lived with reference to the finitude of its own existence as an inevitable human condition.

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