LABOR AND HUMAN CONDITIONS: BRAZILIAN PANORAMA AND RURAL SPACES*

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Abstract: The country's agrarian structure is directly related to the persistence of overexploitation of the labor of rural workers. The objective of the article is to analyze the working conditions in the Brazilian rural space and whether these conditions are similar or not to slave work. To develop this study and understand the contradictions existing in rural labor relations in Brazil in the 21st century, the article used the socio-historical method, comprehending the contradiction of national agrarian issues as one of the roots of this phenomenon. Through the database of the Dom Tomás Balduíno Documentation Center it was found that between 2015 and 2019 there was a decrease in the number of occurrences of work analogous to slavery. However, this decrease may be related to the precariousness of the labor inspection system, the criminalization of social movements, the propaganda on social media against the defense of human rights and the speech that became hegemonic, since 2016, regarding the freedom for defense of property. The conflicts generated in rural spaces with the expansion of agrarian capital are confronted with the immediate needs of peasants and rural workers who create conditions to build new knowledge and new potentials for social organization.

Keywords: rural working conditions in Brazil; agrarian structure; slave work; rural social movements.

TRABALHO E CONDIÇÕES HUMANAS: PANORAMA BRASILEIRO E ESPAÇOS RURAIS

Resumo: A estrutura agrária do país está diretamente relacionada à persistência da superexploração da mão de obra dos trabalhadores rurais. O objetivo do artigo é...
analisar as condições de trabalho no espaço rural brasileiro e se essas condições se assemelham ou não ao trabalho escravo. Para desenvolver este estudo e compreender as contradições existentes nas relações de trabalho rural no Brasil do século XXI, o artigo utilizou o método sócio-histórico, compreendendo a contradição das questões agrárias nacionais como uma das raízes desse fenômeno. Por meio do banco de dados do Centro de Documentação Dom Tomás Balduíno constatou-se que entre 2015 e 2019 houve uma diminuição do número de ocorrências de trabalho análogo ao de escravo. No entanto, essa diminuição pode estar relacionada à precariedade do sistema de fiscalização do trabalho, à criminalização dos movimentos sociais, à propaganda nas redes sociais contra a defesa dos direitos humanos e ao discurso que se tornou hegemônico, desde 2016, sobre a liberdade de defesa da própria propriedade.

Os conflitos gerados nos espaços rurais com a expansão do capital agrário são confrontados com as necessidades imediatas dos camponeses e trabalhadores rurais que criam condições para construir novos saberes e novas potencialidades de organização social.

Palavras-chave: condições de trabalho rural no Brasil; estrutura agrária; trabalho escravo; movimentos sociais rurais

TRABAJO Y CONDICIONES HUMANAS: PANORAMA BRASILEÑO Y ESPACIOS RURALES

Resumen: El objetivo del artículo es analizar las condiciones de trabajo en el campo brasileño y si estas condiciones son o no similares al trabajo esclavo. La estructura agraria del país está directamente relacionada con la persistencia de la sobreexplotación del trabajo de los trabajadores rurales. Para desarrollar este estudio y comprender las contradicciones existentes en las relaciones laborales rurales en el Brasil del siglo XXI, el artículo utilizó el método sociohistórico, entendiendo la contradicción de las cuestiones agrarias nacionales como una de las raíces de este fenómeno. A través de la base de datos del Centro de Documentación Dom Tomás Balduíno, se constató que entre 2015 y 2019 hubo una disminución en el número de ocurrencias de trabajos análogos a la esclavitud. Sin embargo, esta disminución puede estar relacionada con la precariedad del sistema de inspección del trabajo, la criminalización de los movimientos sociales, la propaganda en las redes sociales contra la defensa de los derechos humanos y el discurso que se ha vuelto hegemónico, desde 2016, sobre la libertad de defensa. la propiedad. Los conflictos generados en los espacios rurales con la expansión del capital agrario se confrontan con las necesidades inmediatas de los campesinos y trabajadores rurales que crean condiciones para construir nuevos saberes y nuevas potencialidades de organización social.

Palabras clave: condiciones de trabajo rural en Brasil; estructura agraria; trabajo esclavo; movimientos sociales rurales

This study has three dimensions in dialogue. The first one refers to the identification of labor as a creation that makes up the biological subsistence of the human being (production of something material that has a use-value and supports human existence). The second dimension analyzes the issue of land use and possession in Brazil as a space for the expansion and consolidation of agrarian capital and the conflicts generated by this process, in the sphere of hegemonic disputes over land control. The third dimension refers to the locus of labor conflicts as a denial of social rights, configuring over-exploitation, and work analogous to contemporary slavery.

The institutional process of abolishing slavery in Brazil took at least 38 years. It began with the legislation that put an end to the African slave trade (1850), then the Free Womb Law (1871) was instituted, until the abolition of slavery in 1888 (MATHEUS; MOREIRA, 2020). Thus, in order to conceptualize, as accurately as possible, what is meant by labor analogous to slavery from the late nineteenth century, after abolition,
until the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to define first what slavery is in an institutional context, in which this relationship of labor control is formally prohibited, however, the problems involved slavery continue, due to its long historical roots (QUIRK, 2006).

Since 1815, more than 300 international treaties dealing with slavery have been signed, few used the same definition. We highlight three Conventions, which in our view are fundamental to this discussion: The 1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations, the United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery that took place in 1956 and the Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on Legal Parameters of Slavery of the 2012, wrote by the Research Network on Legal Parameters of Slavery (MENDE, 2019). These documents are used to define the concept of work analogous to slavery assumed in this study.

Slavery is understood as the condition of a person over whom any or all powers inherent to the right of property are exercised. This power is practiced through violence, or threat to use violence, or other forms of coercion, depriving individual freedom with the intention of exploitation through the use, management, profit, transfer, or alienation of that person.

In this concept, three elements are present, the control of one person over another, an involuntary aspect of the relationship and exploitation. These notions allow capture different forms of slavery (MENDE, 2019), such as: trafficking in persons for prostitution and/or other purposes; forced labor; servitude; removal of organs; debt bondage; forced marriage; trafficking of children.

Therefore, forced labor constitute a form of slavery. According to the Research Network on Legal Parameters of Slavery, the 1926 Slavery Convention recognizes that forced labor can evolve "into conditions analogous to slavery" if there is the control over the exploited person and the exercise of power connecting to the right of ownership.

Two warnings are necessary: First, the data presented until 2019 served us as a meeting point between the past, marked by its contradictions and memories, which remains alive, as if willing to continue in an eternal present (JAMESON, 1992), with its structures of plunder and conflicts. According to Millôr Fernandes, "Brazil has a long history ahead". The second warning refers to the “new” clothing of Brazil from 2016, and especially from 2019, identifying a turmoil of organized actions against the working class in general and some social categories, for example, Indigenous, Maroons, women. In addition to these actions, the current government (Bolsonaro administration) uses media advertisements, via social networks, to hide class hatred by encouraging generalized actions by individuals creating an atmosphere of social violence unprecedented in the history of Brazil.

Reflections in the socio-historical field were used to understand the concreteness of labor relationships, their concept, and the creation of relationships between human beings, nature, and the construction of their social organizations. Subsequently, a set of information is presented concerning the degrading means of the use of human physical force (work) in the relations of agricultural production in Brazil.
The objective of the article is to analyze the working conditions in the Brazilian rural space and whether these conditions are similar or not to slave work. The research is based on qualitative design that analyzed the database of the Dom Tomás Balduíno Documentation Center (CEDOC CPT) that collected information concerning work analogous to contemporary slavery occurred in all regions of Brazil from 2010 until 2019.

The article is divided in five sections. The one that follows the introduction presents the theoretical discussion concerning the concepts of labor analogous a slavery, use and conflicts of rural land in Brazil, and collective actions regarding the fight against slavery. The third section addresses the methodology. In the fourth sections the results and discussions. And fifth the final considerations.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION: THE LABOR, THE LAND, AND HUMAN ACTIONS

Human survival is the result of a set of relationships between each individual and their collectivity with nature and with another being, creating and recreating social relationships in different historical periods. This process, which is not uniform over time, guarantees the social reproduction of human beings as ways of life in their economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. We identified this set of actions that enhance the survival of our species as work. This human action, mediated by the use of its forces, both physical (driving force) and as being part of the socio-cultural and political construction (production of knowledge that produces work tools), has dynamized and transformed social relations (MARX, 2021). The occurrence or not of changes in these relationships is organized by historical subjects (MARX e ENGELS, 1978; GRAMSCI, 1979), which has been causing contradictions also identified with each historical time since the beginning of modernity.

Among the multiple forms of contradictions generated in modern Western societies (from the industrial revolution that started in the 18th century), the relations of “free” and wage labor stand out, defined by the group of people who controlled the means of production, and the group of people who “freely” sold their physical strength (having the work as their only means of survival). The result of this process accelerated the production of goods (merchandise) and services, consolidating capitalism as a mode of production. In this context, the labor factor has become the center of social relations. "The magnitude of the value of a commodity varies in direct proportion to the quantity, and in the inverse of the productivity of the work that is applied to it." (MARX, 2021, p. 118).

The mysterious character of the goods does not come from their use-value, nor the determining factors of value. And for that, there are some reasons. First, however useful works or productive activities differ, the physiological truth is that they are functions of the human organism, and each of these functions, regardless of form or content, is essentially the expenditure of the brain, nerves, muscles, directions, etc. of men (MARX, 2021, p. 146).

If, on the one hand, work was consolidated according to Marx (2021), on the other hand, it became an element of alienation, since it separated the productive activities, distancing the relationships between human beings, nature, and the manufactured product.
The worker loses the notion (in the sense of an idea or feeling) of a value created by his physical effort, by his labor force. The labor becomes strange, as something external to the worker, the private property of the employer. It no longer belongs to the one who produced it (MARX, 2021). “The worker becomes rottener the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extension. The worker becomes a commodity as much cheaper as more merchandise creates. [...] Yes, the worker himself becomes an object ...”.

At the junction of the international transformations that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries, we can identify the Brazilian scenario in terms of land ownership and use. In this context, Brazil has not presented its entry credential in the 21st century, as it remains with great social, economic, and political debts, to be paid for the 19th century. One of the biggest debts, if not the biggest, is the issue of the use and control of land tenure. The Brazilian rural space has been the scene of permanent conflicts. Since the middle of the 19th century (1850), the agrarian elite introduced the “Lei da Terra” (Land Law) to the country, preventing access to the population without income, money, or wealth. It was only in 1871 that the Free Womb Law (1871) was signed, which considered “free” the children of slaves who were born from that year onwards, creating an intermediate situation, “slave parents, free children”. Thirty-eight years later (1888), a significant portion of the population “won” an induct, leaving behind slavery, formally (in the writings of the law). This population has conquered the status of free workers, in addition to possessing physical strength (labor) available to be sold on the commodities market. But they were not informed that, without access to the means of production, there was and is no freedom.

The Brazilian economic and political development is structured by a strong rural and slavery trait that gave rise to the current landowning structure and was the driving force for the expansion of agribusiness from monocultures. This process that was structured based on the master-slave relationship gave rise to the crossing to capital-labor relations during the 20th century (ALVES, 2010), as it was possible to identify from the legislation (Land Law 1850, Free Womb Law 1871, and Abolition of Slavery 1888). It is noteworthy, however, that the legislation did not guarantee the definitive cessation of labor analogous to slavery, as we shall see later. The expansion process of large agricultural estates and agribusiness also expanded labor analogous to slavery, causing two types of restriction of freedom: withholding payment of wages and death threats.

The centrality of land ownership in the Brazilian socioeconomic and political scenario has been consolidated (PRADO JUNIOR, 1979). In turn, these traces of dominance in the use and possession of land were the stage for confrontations of the expanding capital in front of the peasants seized in these spaces, or even between that capital and the extorted populations of the lands in the expansion process, being released to sell their labor force as wage earners (MARTINS, 1986). These disputes can be considered political actions that highlight the differences, distortions, and concentration of wealth in civil society, in addition to establishing ideological conflicts, consolidating hegemonies, or their possible ruptures. It is noteworthy that the agrarian ruling class built its hegemony in a relationship of command and consent based on land use and possession, creating
coercive conditions of control over peasants and wage earners in particular, and civil society in general, both from the cultural (ideological) or political-economic (State and its instances) point of view. The control of civil and political society directly interfered in the group that exercises the hegemony (GRAMSCI, 1979; 2002). In this scenario, at least three social actors entered into conflicts over land use and possession in Brazil, disputing hegemony in the rural space. Peasants and rural wage earners (their own and allied organizations), the state (their bureaucratic/legal structures and class alliances), and agrarian capital (their own and allied organizations).

The “March to the West” (LENHARO, 1986) is the reference for spatial occupation in the states of the Brazilian Midwest region (Goiás, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul) since it is related to the quantitative expansion of the population and also to the modernization of agricultural systems in these states, including paving the way for the occupation of the Amazon region, or to the new “agricultural frontier”. It was planned during the dictatorship of the Estado Novo, in the Getúlio Vargas administration, from 1938. He found the solution to some social problems in the “empty spaces” of the Midwest.

The state policy of forcing a great national march, favoured the agrarian capital to consolidate itself also in the North region of Brazil. It was significantly important for the expansion of the Amazon frontier, initially with the occupation of the southern region of the state of Pará, which from the 1980s onwards experienced the multiplication of conflicts over land ownership and use, but also registered numerous complaints of slave labor. Soon after, the states of Rondônia, Roraima, Acre, and Amazonas were incorporated into this agricultural frontier.

Industrial agriculture is dynamic, and, in this sense, it sought and still seeks to consolidate and incorporate new regions into the process of production of goods. Between the first and second decade of the 2000s, the country started to count on another expansion pole, the MATOPIBA (an intersection between the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí, and Bahia). This “new” and at the same time old frontier was identified as

The MATOPIBA region includes adjacent areas from three states in the Brazilian Northeast (Maranhão, Bahia, and Piauí) and one state from the North region (Tocantins) and covers 337 municipalities in a total area of 73,173,485 hectares. MATOPIBA is a territorial delimitation, created through a technical cooperation agreement, signed in 2014 by different federal ministries and agencies, to delimit a potential area for agricultural expansion in a region often described by the government as “the last agricultural frontier in the world”. In May 2015, the federal government created, through a decree, the special MATOPIBA region and launched the MATOPIBA Agricultural Development Plan (PDA), aimed at the development of agricultural and mining activities in the region (CPT, 2021).

This new regional development project can be considered an expansion of the Japanese-Brazilian Cooperation Program for the Development of the Cerrados (PRODECER, in Portuguese) that develops agricultural activities from the 1970s on in the Midwest of Brazil. This program promoted the deforestation of the Cerrado biome, opening the agricultural frontier for soybean, corn, sorghum, cotton crops, and launched the pasture frontier for the North region (mainly the states of Pará and Rondônia). PRODECER, in addition to accelerating the process of conservative modernization of national agriculture,
also accelerated conflicts over land ownership and use, increasing the number of cases of land grabbing, assassinations of squatters, the emergence of slave labor in the clearing of native forests (from 1970 to 2000 the charcoal works, and pasture plantations were the locus of denunciation of slave labor).

This “new” project (package) for the growth of rural production, as we shall see, increased conflicts over the use and possession of agricultural land, at the same time as it increased the number of labor analogous to slavery.

The disputes for hegemony and, therefore, possibilities for generating social conflicts, have produced a locus classified as “[... ] emptied, concentrated, homogenized, destroyed, contaminated by the artificialization imposed by the agro and other business complexes. A ruralization of the commodification of work and nature” [...] (SILVA, 2012) creating, in the cities, population surpluses in conditions of extreme social marginalization with a lack of public policies (health, education, and housing), in addition to precarious working relationships, with strong tendencies to unemployment and subjection to degrading activities. This situation relates to the idea of ‘favelização’/impoverishment that was so common in the city throughout the 20th century, at the same time that it widens the invisibility of rural workers.

The two social processes - land tenure and use, and the social division of labor in the act of generating conflicts - also generate opposition or contradiction. Social organizations are consolidated to mitigate or even overcome these conflicts. The human being would not be able to meet his essential survival needs (to develop their productive forces and the resulting social relations) individually, even if the idea of a free “individual” (or ideology, as reflected by Mézáros) (MÉSZÁROS, 2004) is one of the central milestones of modern society. The need to move, while collective action movements (VAKALOU-LIS, 2000) make it possible to qualify individual demands in social proposals and projects. In the collectivity, the subjects “[... ] perceive themselves as a political force, reconfigure knowledge, and constitute their identities, placing themselves as a social being” (PIETRAFESA, 2016). These collective actors show the contradictions of the accumulation model implemented in a flexible way (HARVEY, 1992). They reject the rationality of capital and its organizer - the State -, seeking to build new patterns of production and work, thus opposing the hegemonic culture.

The movement, in the sense of displacement of political and social forces, has been a reaction to the conflict that capital places in each productive sector. Social movements and their actions are not always the same and are not aimed at solving the same problems. They have their variations, temporalities, and specific objectives, but they coexist in time and space. They are collective actions of a political nature. In this sense, they reinforce the construction of social actors seeking some type of emancipation, be it specific and localized or at a broader level, searching for new social movements, mediated by their contradictions and the conflicts generated from them, act in at least two substantive ways. The first promotes and aggregates the direct actions of the subjects in the organizational process, enhancing the emergence of new protagonists. The second, on the other hand, acts as a formative and educating element. Acting and thinking require the act of planning, creating alternative proposals, developing knowledge. In this sense, ”[... ] we can affirm that the experience in the
social movement is humanizing and that [...] can be understood as an educational matrix" (CALDART; PALUDO; DOLL, 2016). It is only humanizing when lights are put on, igniting the restlessness of being, and when it seeks to overcome human degradation.

These actions are organized by “historical subjects” (MARX; HENGELS, 1978; GRAMSCI, 1979), transforming individual demands into collective proposals, in which social subjects perceive themselves as a political force, consolidating knowledge in a permanent educational process.

METHODOLOGY

The article is based on qualitative design research. This type of research allows analyzing social phenomena with complex interactions, as it draws connections between possible causes with observable results, focusing its attention on the sequential processes of a specific historical case (BORGES, 2007). In qualitative studies, researchers examine historical phenomena, documentary archives, interview transcripts, and other sources, with the goal of establishing which explanations is consistent with the unbroken chain of evidence for observing certain results. The strength of this methodological procedure appears in the fact that it requires historical continuity and integrality in the explanation of the cases studied (GEORGE and BENNETT, 2005).

The database produced by Dom Tomás Balduíno Documentation Center of the Pastoral Land Commission was used to identify where the work analogous to slavery occurs in Brazil from 2010 until 2019. The events were classified in three categories, number of workers on the denouncement, number of workers released and young people, under eighteen years old.

For in-depth analysis of the occurrences, the documents “Cadernos de Conflito Brasil” and National Campaign to Combat and Prevent Contemporary Work Analogous to Slavery, elaborated, respectively, by Pastoral Land Commission and Federal Public Ministry (MPF, in Portuguese) were the sources describing the context of each case and the scenarios of possible intervention of the competent state authorities to combat contemporary slavery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When the Past Persists in the Present

If the central role of labor and its relevance in social relations have diminished in contemporary capitalism, ceasing to have its dual function – usefulness of labor and production of goods and abstract labor, collectiveness, and surplus value over the wage –, how to understand the persistence of situations of labor analogous to slavery, in which capital extracts the total value produced by human physical force? Some hypotheses:

(1) As seen in the previous section, we identified that the search for survival through work, in rural areas in the agricultural world, and a relationship between buyer and seller of the workforce, can be either contractual subordination or ultra-exploitation
– working conditions similar to slavery – and the situation of overexploitation (exhaustion by physical effort for working over the legal contractual hours, forcing the use of drugs to accelerate productivity, among other situations).

(2) The social invisibility of the wage rural worker puts him on the limit of survival, that is, society does not “care”, does not “see” this disposable worker, and so is the merchandise he produces, as in contemporary social relations most people do not know how coal is produced for the large iron and steel miners. Ethanol seems to arrive at gas station pumps automatically and by itself, in a magic trick; and so we could list many other similar goods production (fruits, beef, cellulose, cereals);

(3) Because we lose track of how the production process takes place, we lose track of building social relationships through living with the other, the different. And in this field, society has lost its freedom and rights, and it has accepted these losses as normal and natural (“this is how modern, technological, fast, plastic and liquid life is”).

(4) Capital (financial, commercial, media, industrial, among others) launched its "revenge" against the State of Social Welfare in its general aspects and workers in particular. A vast sector that controls the economy has conquered ideologically and has allied itself with layers of the urban middle classes and with conservative sectors in the religious field (mainly in its western Christian aspect) and has taken coups of states in several countries, including Brazil. It is close to the fascist orientations, with a large part of its population anesthetized, believing that only with the destruction of the State and the total loss of social rights will Brazil grow again;

(5) The social mobilizations organized by many popular fronts continued to carry out a series of protests, demands, and complaints, reaching the national territory. So many other organizations continue to propose alternatives for organizing the national production system. Therefore, it should not be accepted that the Brazilian social group is dormant. However, unlike other historical periods, it is not possible to raise awareness among workers about their losses. And, at the same time, capital, in its media aspect, shielded the media from the situation of conflicts in the country. In the case of rural workers, this situation is even more alarming, since they are the invisible portion of the society, and in this case, little importance is given if they are subjected to degrading jobs, slaves or not. Life goes on!!!.

We could raise many other hypotheses in the national and international context, but as there is a huge group of people and organizations doing so, we will be restricted to analyze some data on “labor conflicts and workers movements”.

Since 2010 the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, in Portuguese), together with the Federal Public Ministry (MPF, in Portuguese), the Labor Office, the International Labor Organization (ILO), in addition to Social Movements organizations (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers, for instance), have created a space of intervention and actions to prevent contemporary slavery, identified as the National Campaign of Combat Against Slave Labor.

According to the MPF, between the year 2010, with the creation of the National Campaign until the year 2014, the extrajudicial procedures initiated increased by more than 800%. The criminal proceedings filed almost doubled. This reflects the commitment to fight against
crimes related to contemporary slavery and thus guarantees the effectiveness of one of the guiding principles of the Federative Republic, which is the dignity of the human person (MINISTÉRIO PÚBLICO DO TRABALHO – Procuradoria Federal no Tocantins, 2014). This highly effective procedure lasted until 2015, when the Brazilian State changed its ideological political course, betting on the deregulation of state rights and services, drastically reducing its inspection and resources actions for this purpose. The federal government did not authorize new public tenders to fill vacancies in the position of Labor Tax Auditor and because of this “downsizing” of the administrative machine, the sector has become vulnerable.

The Dom Tomas Balduino Documentation Center of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) identified in its database that in ten years (2010-2019) work analogous to contemporary slavery occurred in all regions of Brazil and almost all states. Table 1 describes the cases in three categories, number of workers on the denouncement, number of workers released and young people, under eighteen years old, who was involved.

Table 1: Labor analogous to slavery (agricultural activities between 2010 - 2019) Brazil

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<td>Central - West Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occurrences</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>203</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total of workers on the denouncement</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>1,943</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3,657</td>
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<td>Total released</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2,336</td>
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<td>Minor workers</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Northeast Region</td>
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<td>Occurrences</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>246</td>
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<td>Total of workers on the denouncement</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>3,812</td>
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<td>Total released</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>367</td>
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<td>183</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>2,350</td>
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<td>Minor workers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>Northern Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occurrences</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>507</td>
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<td>Total of workers on the denouncement</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>1,784</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>127</td>
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<td>237</td>
<td>428</td>
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<td>171</td>
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<td>389</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>248</td>
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<td>744</td>
<td>122</td>
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<td>248</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>2,493</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>279</td>
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Source: Database Dom Tomas Balduino Documentation Center of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, 2019)
This degrading work relationship predominates in numbers of occurrences in the border areas, more specifically in the states of Pará (291 cases), Tocantins (122), and Maranhão (125). These frontiers should not be considered recent since their occupation has been occurring since the 1970s. The novelty in this area has been the change in land use and ownership since the creation of large monoculture projects and new agricultural policies regional organizations, among which MATOPIBA can be identified, as previously mentioned.

To get an idea of the direct relationship between large projects and slave labor, in the Northeast region of Brazil the three main states with this situation belong to the MATOPIBA project (Bahia with 49 cases and Piauí with 35 close the high statistics, in addition to Maranhão). In the case of the North region, the highlights are in the states of Pará and Tocantins. In these five Brazilian states, there are 622 cases of areas inspected and identified with the occurrence of work analogous to slavery, corresponding to 49.6% of the total occurrences in Brazil (1,253 cases).

These data only confirm the old and permanent debt that Brazil has had with the rural working class (peasants and wage workers) since the 19th century. For reflection, let us take two historical examples: First, a report by Daniela Penha (PENHA, 2019) indicates that:

A family of black men and women. None of the four children managed to finish high school. They grew up in the country and started working as children. João (fictitious name), 26, left school in the sixth grade, around the age of 12. Since then, he works cutting sugar cane or harvesting coffee. In August 2018, he was one of 18 workers rescued in a situation analogous to slavery on a coffee farm in Minas Gerais. João is part of the numbers that, for specialists, prove the marginalization of black populations. For every five workers rescued in a situation similar to slavery between 2016 and 2018, four are black. Black and brown people represent 82% of the 2,400 workers who received unemployment insurance after redemption. Among the black people rescued, the majority are men (91%), young people aged 15 to 29 (40%), and born in Northeastern states (46%). The survey was carried out by Repórter Brasil, based on data obtained from the Secretariat for Labor Inspection, through the Access to Information Law (PENHA, 2019).

The data above refer to the years 2016-2018, 21st century, Brazil. The second example refers to the European continent that was experiencing constant social conflicts in labor relations during the middle of the 19th century and finding more definitive solutions to fight against this relationship since the beginning of the 20th century. Marx (1996, p. 29-30) analyzing the situation of child labor, noticed similarities between the situation of the child and the black slaves of his time. The situation that Europeans “overcame” at the end of the 19th century.

The worker sold his workforce, which he had as a formally free person. Now he sells his wife and son. He becomes a slave trader. The search for child labor is similar, often in form, to the search for black slaves, as used to be read in American newspaper advertisements. “My attention,” says an English factory inspector, for example, “was sparked by an advertisement in the local newspaper for one of the most important manufacturing cities in my district, of which the following is a copy: 20 boys grown up so they can spend 13 years.” (MARX, 1996, p. 29-30)

In the Brazilian case, the situation of the black population that has persisted since the 19th century is repeated in the 21st century and, in a way, as in that century, with the...
naturalization of the situation by some portions of the population, and by sectors of agrarian capital.

Other data catch our attention, including the number of workers involved in the cases. In the northern region of Brazil, 6,923 workers were identified as slaves in 507 inspected cases. This is the largest number of occurrences in Brazil. Followed by the Southeast region, which counted 4,928 individuals in 190 occurrences. The North region, being characterized as a “new frontier” from the 1970s onwards, in a situation of agricultural activities of deforestation - clearing of forests, clearing of pastures, setting up fences, charcoal works, mining and sawmills as the predominant place of records slave labor, since they are the ones who open borders. These activities can be identified as those absorbing little technology, where inspection is limited by logistical issues and by pressure and “command” from the managers of agrarian capital, that is, the old and permanent policy of control and violence in the border regions. The highlight in this region is the state of Pará, which recorded 291 occurrences (out of a total of 507 regionally) and workers freed from slavery totalled 4,423.

In the Southeast, slave labor is present in the activities of sugar cane, coffee, coal and mining, fruits, pine, and livestock. Some activities are similar to the North, but others, such as coffee, sugar cane, and fruits, for example, are organized with high technological standards and in a region where the frontier had its expansion in the late 19th century until the middle of the 20th. What makes it possible to affirm that the labor relations that create situations analogous to slavery are so rooted in Brazil, as the agricultural activity itself, not identifying “delay or advances” in the work equipment, but the historical constancy of the plunder of workers. In the Southeast of Brazil, the state of Minas Gerais stood out with 132 occurrences (out of a regional total of 190) and 3,871 workers freed from slavery. In addition to these numbers, Minas Gerais is the state that has the greatest variation in reported and supervised activities (in addition to the aforementioned, there are coal, livestock mining, deforestation, beans).

The Southeast region also stood out in this 10-year period (2010-2019) for concentrating the largest number of children and young people in the condition of slaves. CEDOC CPT catalogued the inspection actions of the National Campaign of the Fight Against and Prevent Contemporary Slave Labor, which identified 76 workers “under 18” in this working condition. Once again, Minas Gerais state was ahead of the others with 57 identifications, being the location with the highest number of occurrences in Brazil (the national total was 279 cases). Followed by the South region with 70 occurrences. Rio Grande do Sul registered 31 cases (supervised activities, mate, apple fruits, and tobacco), followed by Santa Catarina with 22 (activities: apple fruits, pine, acacia, and mining crops) and Paraná with 17 (activities: mate and pine).

The South and Southeast regions concentrate 52.3% of underaged workers identified in situations similar to slavery. In this case, one more question arises. It is the region with the highest rate of technology use, its agricultural frontier is the oldest in Brazil and even so, the use of workforce by children under 18 and in demeaning conditions stands out as the greatest intensity. One possible variable is that in this region of the country the inspection is carried out more efficiently, and therefore a greater volume of "free people".
Another variable, some agrarian capital sectors, and their ramifications have no limits for extracting the value produced by human labor, and in the case of the underaged, these sectors prefer to run the risk of complaints and processes rather than lose their income.

Youth labor in Brazil is one of the most degrading situations in the relationship between the capital (investor) and wage earner (seller) of social relationships. In the specific case of this text (slavery and social relations), we highlight some hypotheses for reflections on this theme:

(1) Like rural wage earners, children and women are more invisible by the structural forms of social relations organized by capital. It was naturalized in Brazilian society to affirm that it is better for a child to work with their parents, even if it is in inappropriate situations, than “to be on the streets at the disposal of drug dealers and organized crime”;

(2) If so, we do not need many schools in agricultural regions (in the sense of education) aiming at the full formation of children (in the cognitive, artistic, physical, and spiritual aspects, this in the sense of humanization of the subjects). It is enough for children, teenagers, and young people to receive some information necessary to work without damaging machinery and equipment (nothing much more than receiving elementary and high school education).

(3) So, if this is also true, children, teenagers, and youth are deprived of two fundamental things: 1st- the childhood and leisure are so necessary for them to discover their own life, which should be the reason for existence and their insertion in the “world of adults”. 2nd - the future, as these human beings are condemned to eternity as if they were trapped in a continuous present time and deprived of knowledge. Therefore, they become unqualified, unprepared for labor, subject to “any type of work”.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, in Western Europe, a set of complaints about youth labor was identified. After inspections and pressure from social movements at the time these working conditions were abolished.

In 1861, 48,043 people were engaged in braiding straw and making straw hats, of which 3,815 were male in all age groups, the others were female, 14,913 of whom were under 20 years old, 7,000 of whom were children. Instead of the embroidery schools, straw plait schools appear. Then the children begin to learn to plait straw at the age of 4, sometimes between 3 and 4 years old. None, of course, receives education (MARX, 1996, p. 99).

Child labor in Brazil is not limited to the conditions presented in the data collected by the CEDOC-CPT. It is more common than one can imagine. In addition to rural areas, the children are present in labor relations from several productive and urban fields. Data on labor analogous to slavery has been the most perverse side of the context. Even considering that the numbers reported are very low (279 cases of minors in 10 years) compared to the total number of workers in the condition of slaves (20,639), they only confirm the analyzes indicating that there are no limits to the extraction of the values created by the
workers. The wealth produced is appropriated, or in Harvey's words (1989), the permanent flexible exploitation.

The Brazilian political, social, and economic context still allows us to perceive other contradictory movements in the human being's relationship between the sale and purchase of labor. We list five contexts below: The first refers to the decrease in the occurrence of slave labor in Brazil between the years 2015 to 2019. These can be identified mainly by some variables: a) The representatives of the Labor Auditors (AFT) have denouncing since 2018 that they are lacking servers to carry out inspection activities. According to the “Folha Dirigida” (2020) website, which obtained information from the Ministry of Economy in its Personnel Statistical Panel (PEP), “[...] the position of labor tax auditor has 6,276 vacancies. Of this total, 3,057 are retired, 1,065 are inactive and only 2,154 are active (that is, the Brazilian government's policy since 2016 is to decrease State services). b) The largest concentration of civil servants is located in the Southeast with 34% of the workforce. The North and Northeast regions have only 23.9% of the employees”. According to the same website, the sector has a deficit of 1,250 vacancies and does not obtain authorization for public tenders. c) Drastic reduction in the capillary scope of inspection since rural areas are large, as well as the number of public tenures (FOLHA DIRIGIDA, 2020).

The second context that may have interfered with the decrease in cases refers to the condemnation of the Brazilian State by the Organization of American States (OAS) for violating human rights in not restraining agricultural activities with work analogous to slavery. According to the newspaper O Globo from 19 December 2016 (O GLOBO, 2016),

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, an autonomous judicial institution of the Organization of American States (OAS), has held Brazil internationally responsible for not preventing the practice of modern slave labor and human trafficking. The sentence of the case “Trabalhadores da Fazenda Brasil Verde Vs. Brasil” was given this week in a process that lasted about three years. Brazil is the first country condemned by the OAS in this matter. The ruling also requires that investigations on violations against these workers be reopened, setting precedents for reopening cases already filed here and in other Latin American countries. According to the social scientist Beatriz Affonso, director of Cejil for the Brazil Program, the decision is fundamental to combat this type of crime in the country, where there is a systematic pattern of not performing justice in cases of slave labor, although there is evidence (O GLOBO, 2016).

The third context reports on information about workers' actions. As previously seen, only collective human actions are capable of changing social scenarios of conflicts and remove marginal populations from the spheres of power and disputes over hegemony in the field of social, political, and economic relations. The CEDOC-CPT catalogued in the period from 2010 to 2019 the occurrence of 70 workers' actions involving labor conflicts in rural spaces. It is worth mentioning the fact that the sector of workers with greater efficiency in actions is in the sugar-energy production system. There were strikes, plant occupations, roadblocks, strikes for unpaid wages, and workplace safety in eight states (Goiás, Mato Grosso, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Paraná). Of these states Alagoas (AL) stood out with 25 actions by unions in defense of sugar cane workers, followed by the state of Pernambuco (PE) with 12 actions.
The state of Rio Grande do Norte (RN) took action. The Northeast of Brazil, despite not having the highest number of occurrences of labor conflicts, nor being a “new frontiers” region, is the one that reacted the most in the face of the violation of labor rights in the sugar-energy sector, totalling 38 actions, representing 54.2 % of mobilizations in defense of rural wage earners in conflicts in Brazil.

The Southeast region held the second-largest volume of workers' actions. The state of São Paulo (SP) had 12, all in the sugar-energy sector, and Minas Gerais (MG) registered 7 (six organized by sugarcane workers and one in the mining area). In the South region, despite the majority of conflicts occurring in the mate, pinus, and fruit crops, workers of these crops did not take action in defense of the category. In 2010 alone, three actions took place in the state of Paraná (PR) in the sugar-energy sector and one in Santa Catarina (SC) in the construction of a hydroelectric plant. These Brazilian regions have strong pressure on the union structure and the formation of social movements. But concerning confronting and fighting work similar to slavery, there are few records on the actions of these social agents.

A fourth issue that arose when confronting the data refers to the border regions (North and MATOPIBA, in particular), that registered only 3 occurrences of workers' actions. One in Rondônia (RO), in 2010, in the construction of a hydroelectric, one in Maranhão (MA) in the livestock sector in 2014, and one in the state of Bahia (BA) in 2012. The state of Pará, the biggest promoter of occurrences of labor conflicts and greater in the identification of slave labor, did not register information and record of organized actions.

The livestock sector with its activities of deforestation, charcoal production, sawmills, mowing, and pasture fencing, is traditionally the most involved in work practices similar to slavery. Although there is no information about actions organized to deal with degrading working conditions in this sector, this does not mean that society as a whole does not promote actions. Environmentalist and human rights movements have reported conflicts on indigenous lands, in a situation of environmental degradation. In partnership with the Federal Public Ministry and the Pastoral Land Commission, the Rural Workers' Federations and National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG, in Portuguese) participate in the coordination of the National Campaign to Combat and Prevent Contemporary Slave Labor, seeking to pressure the State, companies (agribusiness, charcoal producers, lumber companies) and the landowners against unfair labor practices.

The fifth context refers to the strongest violence in social relations in general, and in particular to labor relations, invisibility, and the risk alienation and subjectification of human beings. Between 2010 and 2019, CEDOC-CPT reported the situation of waged workers contaminated by pesticides (20 cases), subject to physical assaults (19), death threats (56), intimidation (13), assassination attempts (15), deaths as a result of overexploitation (16) and murders (12). In ten years of records, these numbers are low when compared to the general picture of labor conflicts. Once again, it is not the numbers that matter, but the facts themselves. The social relations in the labor market overcome the free competition of purchase and sale between work and capital, overcoming barbarity.

bêru, Goiânia, 2022, e12757.
FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of this study, there is a mixture of feelings and questions. The first feeling is of some satisfaction, as if a relief, with a sharp decrease in the number of labor analogous to contemporary slavery between the years 2015-2019. But suddenly, indignation comes, because it is also true that the decrease in cases may be related to the lack of governmental “political will” since the government has been preventing public tenders for labor inspectors (as already indicated) here while making a speech of freedom for the "defense of property", for the carrying of guns and promoting "justice with their own hands". The set of speeches in the ideological field, the criminalization of social movements, and advertisements on social networks against any attempt to defend human rights, also help to mask reality.

Far beyond the “rude” speeches of spreading class hatred and confrontation with the 1988 Federal Constitution, the international agreements signed by Brazil in the areas of human and environmental rights are harmed. The obscurantist and fundamentalist discourse seek to build a curtain to block the real movement of social contradictions since this movement of an economic, political, social, and cultural nature enhances its opposite, which is the collective actions.

The conflicts generated in rural areas as a result of the expansion of the agrarian economy are confronted with the immediate needs of the peasants (for land and labor). This is the central issue here. In this movement of actions and reactions, peasants and rural wage earners, by positioning themselves as subjects of rights, create conditions to build new knowledge and new potential for social organization. This is, precisely, the humanizing process of social movements, since the possible conquests remove the experience of these actors from misery, unemployment, violence, and rural exodus (among a set of other degrading situations) that agrarian capital launched them.

REFERENCES


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