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**Resisting proletarianisation in the subsistence sector: social reproduction of  
gendered and racialised classes of labour**

**Resistência à proletarização no setor de subsistência: relações raciais e de gênero,  
classes de trabalho e reprodução social**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

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In a world where proletarianisation historically produces a surplus population at the margins of the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1867), questions regarding the social reproduction of the working class arise (Vogel, 1983; Gimenez, 2019). For instance, agrarian questions of labour (Bernstein, 2006, 2010) put forward the problem of commodification of subsistence along with social differentiation between more and less dispossessed classes of labour. This fragmentation is also informed by the flipside of commodification, the ongoing importance of non-commodified relations of production, such as kinship and gender relations, as well as solidarity ties in traditional communities. In other words, the onus of social reproduction, in terms of non-monetised, non-costly for capital, reproductive labour hinges on gendered and racialised bodies. Given this context, in the first paper of this dissertation, I propose a critique of the political economy of development and its understanding of proletarianisation in the global South (and more generally, in the global North), epitomised in Lewis' (1954) classic formulation, a dual economy, with its division between a subsistence sector and a capitalist sector. By doing so, I seek to understand further Marx's special commodity, labour power, the only one not reproduced capitalistically (Bhattacharya, 2017). In the second paper, I investigate the Brazilian historical experience of proletarianisation and present empirical evidence from the Agricultural and Livestock Censuses and the Quarterly National Household Sample Survey to argue that pluriactivity (Schneider, 2003), as an income diversification resistance strategy of family farmers and peasants, is articulated to gendered and racialised classes of labour.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Social reproduction. Proletarianisation. Classes of labour. Gender. Race. Family farming. Pluriactivity.





## **RESUMO:**

Resende, A. M. (2023). *Resistência à proletarização no setor de subsistência: relações raciais e de gênero, classes de trabalho e reprodução social* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Departamento de Economia, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo.

Em um mundo onde o processo de proletarização historicamente reproduz uma população excedente, ou nos termos de Marx (1867), uma superpopulação relativa, às margens do modo capitalista de produção, perguntas surgem a respeito das condições de reprodução social da classe trabalhadora (Vogel, 1983; Gimenez, 2019). Em particular, a “questão agrária do trabalho” ou suas multifacetadas questões (Bernstein, 2006; 2010) enunciam a mercantilização da vida acompanhada da diferenciação social entre mais ou menos expropriadas “classes de trabalho”. Essa fragmentação é também informada pelo outro lado da mercantilização: a contínua importância de relações não monetizadas de produção, como relações de parentesco e de gênero, assim como laços de solidariedade em comunidades tradicionais. Em outras palavras, o ônus da reprodução social, em termos de trabalho reprodutivo não-monetizado, portanto gratuito, para o capital, recai sobre corpos sexualizados e racializados. Nesse contexto, no primeiro ensaio desta dissertação, eu proponho uma crítica à economia política do desenvolvimento e seu entendimento do processo de proletarização no Sul global (e de modo mais geral, no Norte global), epitomizada na clássica formulação de Lewis (1954), uma economia dual, com sua divisão entre um setor de subsistência e um setor capitalista. Ao fazê-lo, busco aprofundar a compreensão a respeito da mercadoria especial de Marx, a única que jamais é plenamente reproduzida em um processo capitalista de produção: a força de trabalho (Bhattacharya, 2017). No segundo ensaio, eu investigo a experiência histórica de proletarização da população rural brasileira. Utilizando o Censo Agropecuário e a PNAD Contínua, apresento evidências empíricas para argumentar que a pluriatividade (Schneider, 2003), ou a diversificação das fontes de renda domiciliar enquanto uma estratégia de resistência da agricultura familiar e camponesa, está articulada a classes de trabalho que, por sua vez, são inseparáveis de relações raciais e de gênero.

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

Reprodução social. Proletarização. Classes de trabalho. Gênero. Raça. Agricultura familiar. Pluriatividade.



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## FOREWORD

Proletarianisation is nothing less (and nothing more) than the increasing precariousness (Palmer, 2014) of social reproduction along the continuous process of capitalist expansion worldwide. Such contradiction was identified by different perspectives within feminism, all of which were influenced by Marx to some degree. In different but highly connected ways, Lise Vogel (1983), Verónica Gago (2019), Nancy Fraser (2017) and Martha Gimenez (2019) put forward the inherent conflict between capital accumulation and the reproduction of labour power, expressed in class struggle, daily and historically. In this scenario, the long-lasting slaughtering of the labouring classes' livelihoods should rely on some mechanism, like social structures, to sustain such material contradictions.

Gender norms and social practices related to gender differentiation, including divisions of labour, are not exclusive to the capitalist mode of production. Similarly, imperialism, racism and exploitation of foreign labour are not modern inventions. Even so, never have a historical civilisation reached a similar level of global hegemony and produced a complex and multifaceted hierarchy between "classes of labour" (Bernstein, 2006; 2010). The international division of labour is inseparable from racism (Quijano, 2005; Grosfoguel, 2016), which informs a scale of precariousness (from legally protected wage labour to sheer violence and expropriation) in labour processes, according to the degree of humanity with which each ethnic group is conferred. Nationally, the hierarchisation between centres and peripheries is reproduced as the hierarchisation between developed and underdeveloped regions, and racism is the guideline of such industrial(ising) societies.

The fragmentation of the working class and the corresponding weakening of their bargaining position in class struggle is an old phenomenon within capitalist dynamics. Along with gender and racial hierarchies, and inextricably related to them, the separation between the active proletariat and the vast surplus population of the sheer expropriated is also a well-known debate (Denning, 2010; Foster et al., 2011; Palmer, 2014; Breman et al., 2014). Wagelessness is the reality of a major parcel of the working class (Denning, 2010) and questions regarding the conditions of reproduction of this large segment of

deprived people are imperative. Therefore, the present thesis is concerned with two sets of related questions.

First, how are gender and racial relations articulated to class struggle? What are the specificities of each of these social structures, and in which particular ways do they attenuate or aggravate the contradiction between social reproduction and capital accumulation? Second, as we know, the fate of billions of peasants and small farmers across the world is at stake, given ongoing primitive accumulation, that is, proletarianisation, without any perspective of absorption in the already crowded urban labour markets. In this context, what is to happen to the “unlimited supply of labour” of these workers, whose livelihoods lie in (subsistence) agricultural production until today, many decades after Lewis’ (1954) classic article? In other words, given that “under neoliberalism peasant producers and indigenous peoples are considered redundant by capital” (Bretón et al., 2022, p. 570), how are we to approach the “agrarian questions of labour” (Bernstein, 2006, p. 456)?



## FROM DUAL ECONOMY TO SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

What processes can we enlighten if we see the classic problem of a dual economy (Lewis, 1954) as the problem of the dialectic or contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction (Vogel, 1983)? What answers shall we give for old questions such as: what is proletarianisation? Which biological, social, political, economic, and cultural processes constitute the accumulation process and are engendered by it? What sustains capital accumulation? How are racial and gender relations and subjectivities articulated with and produced by these very same processes in the context of a wide and variegated struggle for emancipation? What is the class struggle, and how can we actualise its meaning (Gago, 2019) to capture the thoroughness of the conflicting and heterogeneous relations embedded in it?

Note that the concept of interest, a “dual economy”, is a suggestive term, for it leads us to conclude that the object in question is twofold. Indeed, the idea of two different economic dimensions (a capitalist sector and a subsistence sector, the productive and reproductive spheres, monetised and non-monetised relations of production) is appealing and, in effect, fruitful, as proven by development economists (Lewis, 1954; Furtado, 1952) and Marxist feminists (Hartmann, 1979) alike. However, it often fails to take a step further in the ongoing and ever-actualising endeavour of constructing a “*unitary theory*” (Vogel, 1983; 2017) or, in Marx’s own words, of understanding the social as “*the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse*” (*apud* Ferguson; McNally, 2013, XXXVIII).

In the classic “*Crítica à razão dualista*” (1972), Chico de Oliveira argues that the very notion of a dual economy is a fallacy: everywhere in the world, and in particular, in Latin America, it was possible to find the formal opposition between a “modern” and a “backward” sector. In practice, those segments were intertwined, and there would be “*a symbiosis and an organicity, a unity of contraries, in which the “modern” grows and feeds on the existence of the “backward”*”<sup>1</sup> (Oliveira, 1972, pp. 7-8).

More recently, Bryan D. Palmer (2014) reinstated this debate by contesting that “*analytic thought in our times trends in the direction of accenting the fragmentations and divisions that incapacitate the working class, in all its gradations, rather than forging it*

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<sup>1</sup> My translation.

*into a fighting tribune for all of the world's exploited and oppressed"* (p. 56). He was most worried about the fracturing of the experience of waged and non-waged workers as working-class members, the idea of separating the proletariat from a supposed new class, the *precariat*, in particular. But, perhaps symptomatically, he also criticised and warned against identity-driven social movements.

In this context, I take a historic materialist approach and build upon social reproduction perspectives (Vogel, 1983; Fraser, 2016; 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017; Gago, 2019; Stevano, 2023) to better understand capitalist development on a global scale and its correlated proletarianisation processes, with all its historical diversity in a world marked by colonialism (Quijano, 2005) and imperialism (Foster et al., 2011). More specifically, by exploring the meaning of proletarianization using a perspective that centres life and its conditions of reproduction, I seek to re-unite the multiple dimensions of class struggle in one common goal: resist to survive.

A historic materialist approach (Vogel, 1983; Ferguson; McNally, 2013; Bhattacharya, 2017) recognises bodies and processes in concrete historical realities, privileging agency, conflict, and change over the notion of structures and functions. Furthermore, is "*one that identifies the conditions under which race, gender, sexuality, and class are (co)-reproduced, transformed and potentially revolutionized*" (Ferguson; McNally, 2013, XXXVII). Intriguingly for some, race, gender and sexuality are social constructions with a strong material basis<sup>2</sup>: they are grounded on material relations of production and reproduction.

Hence, from a materialist standpoint, history is the indeterminate result of class struggle, which, in turn, hinges on human agency and social conflict, that is, social practices of oppression and resistance. Some questions then arise. Bhattacharya (2017, p. 3) asks "*what it means to bind class struggle*", which implies asking what does it mean to set class struggle free? What does it mean to go beyond the concept of wage labour (Denning, 2010) and to recognise labour-power, as well as the working class's resistance to exploitation, in their thorough sense (Gago, 2019)? By answering these questions, we

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<sup>2</sup> The material conditions of living, which reflect the technical level of the labour process and the unequal distribution of wealth, are also an expression of representations, symbols, beliefs, values, interests, and desires. Many anthropologists (Sahlins, 1976; Douglas; Isherwood, 1979; Miller, 2007) and historians (Roberts, 1998) have shown that, beyond the idea of fetishism, our relations to material goods or, more precisely, our acts of consumption, reproduce, as rituals, social relations, but also may question and subvert those same relations, transforming subjectivities in the process. As we will see, when talking about social reproduction as a whole, Marx himself attributes a fundamental role to consumption (Sahlins, 1976).

might grasp the importance of collective action (Foster et al., 2011; Palmer, 2014) without taking diversity for granted.

## **2. Decentring wage: the proletarianisation process and Marx's surplus population**

Almost seventy years after the publication of Lewis' classic article, "*Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour*" (1954), which, in a sense, has systematised and influenced debates upsurging in the new field of development economics, the relevant questions raised by the author are far from being problems of the past. Rather, we should recognise the topicality of his inquiries regarding a "*dual economy*" (Lewis, 1972). In particular, I am interested in investigating how we could reformulate the questions concerning the abundance of labour and potentially permanent reproduction (Oliveira, 1972; Furtado, 1966; 1974; Singer, 1981; Souza, 1999; Bhattacharya et al., 2023) – or, at least, long-lasting reproduction (Lewis, 1979) – of a "traditional sector" in "developing" – and even in "advanced" (Marglin, 2019) – economies.

In his original formulation, Lewis' model intended to capture the dynamics between two distinct segments of society to better comprehend capital accumulation as a process. In sum, the presence of surplus labour, that is, unemployed or underemployed workers (farmers, casual workers, petty traders, domestic and commercial retainers, wives and daughters), would guarantee the stability of wages paid in the modern or "capitalist sector", setting a floor given by the average earnings of the traditional or "subsistence sector", expressed, in its turn, by the average product of the farmer. This constant downward pressure on wages – given by the size and the elasticity of labour supply in the subsistence sector – would enable the constant appropriation, by capitalists, of the fruits of the rise in the average productivity of labour along with the expansion of the capitalist sector through investment and technological progress. This continuous redistribution of income in favour of profits would boost reinvestment and speed up the process of expanded reproduction of capital until the unlimited supply of labour and the very subsistence sector would be extinguished or, at least, significantly diminished.

Lewis' later articles (1972, 1979) have not altered the pillars of his original model nor offered answers to pertinent criticism (Boianovsky, 2019), as well as to previous related questions (Furtado, 1950; 1952; Nurkse, 1953). Still, the change in his perspective is notorious, and the author acknowledged the potential hindrances to the absorption of

an unlimited supply of labour, given the course taken by global capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century. In his seminal article (Lewis, 1954), he accuses Marx of having an emotional approach to the investigation of the accumulation process, even though both agree that the driving force of such a process is unequal income distribution. For Lewis, it was not as yet an issue Marx's argument that capital accumulation dynamics, with its intrinsic tendency to innovate and increase labour efficiency, endogenously reproduced the industrial reserve army. According to the former, the latter's hypothesis has not resisted empirical tests (Lewis, 1954, pp. 144-145).

However, further expansion of the global capitalist system has attested to the complexity and heterogeneity of this historical process (Arrighi, 1970; 1990; Foster et al., 2011). Evidence abounds on the continuous destruction, creation, and recreation of non-capitalist forms of organising production both in the global South (Singer, 1981; Souza, 1999; Bhattacharya et al., 2023; O'Laughlin, 2002; Quijano, 2005) and increasingly in the global North (Foster et al., 2011; Denning, 2010; Palmer, 2014; Breman et al., 2014). After the disavowal of Marx's hypothesis in 1954, Lewis implicitly assumes his own mistake in 1972 by referring to him from another standpoint:

There is much less resistance today than there was in 1954 to the idea of an unlimited supply of labor being available to the capitalist sector, since swelling urban unemployment has emerged as the biggest problem of the seventies, *as a result of the modernization process itself* (Lewis, 1972, p. 85).

In 1979, his conscience of technical progress' role in the expansion of the labour supply is even more apparent. He states that "*the employment problem may be more difficult to solve now than it was a hundred years ago*", for, besides the increasing demographic pressures, "*the capacity of modern sectors to absorb people is more restricted*", given labour-saving technologies (Lewis, 1979, pp. 222-223). As Marx has long explained, "*accumulation of capital is*", indeed, "*increase of the proletariat*" (Marx, 1867 *apud* Palmer, 2014, p. 47). The accumulation process and its embedded technical progress constantly elevate labour productivity, reducing labour costs (or the relative amount of labour the working class performs) and thus expanding the idle workforce.

Paul Singer's (1981) impressive empirical account on the role of subsistence agriculture in the Brazilian industrialisation process could be understood in these terms. Singer produced the most thorough investigation of this country's proletarianisation process (Rugitsky, 2021). Most generally, he showed that the process of agricultural modernisation during the 1960s resulted in a parallel process of expansion of smallholdings, since the mechanised agriculture's low capacity of absorption of the labour

force, alongside the displacement of small farmers from fertile and close-to-urban-centres lands, transformed subsistence agriculture in the only viable option for many families' daily sustenance. As it turned out, the ongoing reproduction of subsistence agriculture followed the expansion of capitalist social relations in the countryside, and an increasing surplus population became potentially available to the industrialisation process.

Thus, capital accumulation is not only unable to solve the problem of the unlimited supply of labour (Lewis, 1979), but it also constantly reproduces such supply. According to Marx (1867), this process generates a relative surplus population, that is, members of the industrial reserve army – the floating reserve (temporarily unemployed workers), the latent reserve<sup>3</sup>, and the stagnant reserve<sup>4</sup> – as well as paupers<sup>5</sup>, all of which are left to subsist within a mode of production that expands its productive capacity by exploring the very same thing that is made superfluous during the process of capital valorisation: labour-power (Vogel, 1983). This is the *law of population* (Marx, 1867, p. 630-631 *apud* Gimenez, 2019, p. 328) or, in other words:

[T]he greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army... This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation (Marx, 1971a, p. 603 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 70-71).

Souza's (1999) understanding of Marx's concepts of relative surplus population and industrial reserve army is elucidating, even though, for my purposes, Vogel's (1983) interpretation seems more adequate. Souza explains that the workforce, or the working class in a strict sense, comprises employed and waged workers (the active workers' army) and unemployed workers (the industrial reserve army). He seems to consider the latent and the stagnant reserves, respectively, those occupied in activities related to non-capitalist sectors and those facing chronic under-employment, precarious working conditions and poverty as components of the relative surplus population which are excluded from the industrial reserve army. In this case, the latter would be the equivalent to the floating reserve, composed of temporarily unemployed workers floating in accordance to the cyclical movements of capitalist economies.

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<sup>3</sup> The part of the surplus population that does not yet integrate the capitalist workforce – since it is involved with non-typically capitalist activities – and, therefore, represents a latent workforce. According to Marx, the latent surplus population or the latent reserve army is epitomised in the vast contingent of subsistence agricultural producers (Foster et al., 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The stagnant surplus population is expressed by casual, precarious workers, which would, today, be considered informal workers. In Marx's understanding, they represented an increasing fraction of the working class (Foster et al., 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Vogel (1983, p. 71) excludes the paupers from the industrial reserve army, asserting that, despite Marx's imprecision about such terms, he “*seems to regard the industrial reserve army as included in, rather than co-extensive with, the relative surplus-population*”.

In this way, those occupied in non-capitalist forms of organising production would not integrate the workforce and could be classified as a mass of sub-proletarians who frequently bear worse living conditions than waged workers and, just like the latter, have been dispossessed of their means of production or were left with depleted means. Alongside the industrial reserve army, these non-waged workers would compose the relative surplus population, that is, a population not only available to serve the expansion of the capitalist sector but also *determined* exactly by this expansionist dynamic. As Souza (1999) puts it, non-capitalist forms of organising production are constantly destroyed, created, and recreated by the expansionist movement of the capitalist system. His assessment is not at odds with Bhattacharya, Kesar and Mehra (2023), who offer an account of the distinctiveness of postcolonial capitalist development using the case of India as an example. The idea of constant destruction, creation and recreation of non-capitalist forms of production can, indeed, be related to the notion of a “*process of ‘spatio-temporal flux’ of population groups moving across capitalist and non-capitalist economic segments*” (Bhattacharya et al., 2023, p. 151)<sup>6</sup>.

On this horizon, notwithstanding the room for agency and resistance from the latent and stagnant surplus population, this “excluded” parcel of the working class is subordinated to capital, for (i) its size is determined by the rhythm of the destruction of non-capitalist activities and the creation of capitalist employment relationships; (ii) to guarantee its long term reproduction, it reorganises itself to occupy “economic spaces” conceded or created by capital’s expansion; (iii) the capitalist sector directly exploits it through sub-employment relationships (Souza, 1999).

Lewis (1954) and, ultimately, Marx (1867) have identified an essential mechanism through which capital accumulation was undeniably dependent on the existence of a surplus population: a continuous and always renovated downward pressure on wages, in other words, the permanent reproduction of cheap labour (Souza, 1999; Foster et al., 2011). According to Palmer (2014),

Marx noted this in *Capital*, writing that capitalist enrichment was premised on ‘the condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part’,

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<sup>6</sup> For these authors, however, regardless of the inextricable articulation between capitalist and non-capitalist production, the vast surplus population of the global South should be understood as something other than completely functional to capital. In this sense, even though the capitalist mode of production might be responsible for making this vast contingent of workers redundant, such surplus labour does not necessarily need to play any meaningful role in the capitalist system. In other words, at least a parcel of the surplus population is a-functional from the point of view of capital. By departing from a “capitalocentric” view (Bhattacharya et al., 2023), the authors respond to the question regarding the persistence of non-capitalist forms of production in a simple and useful manner: they exist because they provide the material conditions for this vast, marginalised population to meet basic survival needs.

accelerating ‘the production of the reserve army on a scale corresponding with the advance of social accumulation’ (Palmer, 2014, p. 50).

Despite my accordance with this interpretation, which contains valuable contributions, I contest that it fits better with Vogel’s (1983) proposal to distinguish the industrial reserve army and the relative surplus population only by the additional presence of the paupers. Indeed, Souza (1999) himself argues that the capitalist sector might directly exploit workers employed in non-capitalist forms of organising production. Thus, the latent and the stagnant reserves are constitutive of the industrial reserve army, potentially or actually guaranteeing a source of surplus value for capital accumulation to proceed. Self-employment is as much an expression of ongoing proletarianisation as waged employment, and does not prevent surplus value appropriation from occurring.

Avoiding the somewhat circular definition of Lewis’ (1979) traditional sector, which refers only to those activities that contract with economic development (thus excluding typical “modern sector” informal activities), it is reasonable to argue that the unlimited supply of labour to which the author refers is expressed in both the concepts of surplus population and industrial reserve army, while the subsistence sector is best comprehended as the sum of the latent and the stagnant reserves, including “wives and daughters” (Lewis, 1954, p. 143). What all these working-class members have in common, from the paupers to the active workforce, is their permanent strive for social reproduction, always at tension with capital accumulation.

The idea of a subsistence sector opposed to but also articulated with and determined by a capitalist sector is useful, but can also be misleading. As we know, waged work – or capitalist relations of production – has always been a privilege of relatively few working-class members in the peripheries. More recently, the biased notion that the “normal” or expected development path should eradicate “non-capitalist” forms of production was recently proven utterly mistaken even in the experience of the global North, and the normalisation of the wage earner has given way to the recognition of wagelessness as a ubiquitous reality (Denning, 2010). As Bryan D. Palmer (2014, p. 42) has argued, “*precariousness is axiomatic*” and what defines proletarianisation is not wage labour but expropriation, since non-capitalist forms of production – for example, self-employment and agricultural production for self-consumption – are a rule within the capitalist mode of production:

Expropriation, then, is a highly heterogeneous experience, since no individual can be dispossessed in precisely the same way as another, or live that process of material alienation

exactly as another would. Yet *dispossession, in general*, nonetheless *defines proletarianization* (Palmer, 2014, p. 49).

From all of the above, I intend to reformulate Lewis' question. Instead of asking if, given the population growth rate, the modern sector will expand fast enough to absorb those who wish to leave the traditional sector, I want to investigate Lewis' implicit suggestion about the specificity of the proletarianisation process in the global South, and how it relates to and shares similarities with the global North's recent path of development. Since proletarianisation, that is, the expropriation of the means necessary for labour-power reproduction, is not accompanied by full integration into labour markets and access to wages and labour rights, but instead, a major parcel of the working class faces a chronic shortage of employment and is always in the margins of the capitalist mode of production, how does the working class actually guarantee the reproduction of their labour-power? In other words, what are the dynamics underlying the constant reproduction of the subsistence sector alongside capital accumulation?

In what follows, I argue that the permanent renewal of the labour force sustains capitalist accumulation, which, in turn, constantly menaces this very same labour force, as the resources necessary for social reproduction (including time) are squeezed through dispossession. In this sense, capital exploits female labour as a form of managing the perduring tension between its rapacious instinct of expropriation and its irreconcilable dependence on the reproduction of a disciplined labour force, sometimes profiting from their physical and emotional health – if not by an increase in productivity, at least as a means for political stability (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). The voracity of capital and the violence of primitive accumulation, especially for those considered below the line of the human (Grosfoguel, 2016), threatens and directly violates the working classes' regenerating capacities, including their bodies, resources, products, cultures, and subjectivities. In this scenario of death, the exploitation and expropriation of the reproductive labour of overloaded women, who seek to guarantee life, is the great expression of the intertwining of class, race and gender in the capitalist system.

### **3. Class struggle within (non)-commodity relations and the reproduction of labour-power**

Like the idea of a dual economy, early socialist feminists struggled with a different kind of dualism, despite the wide overlapping zone between the former and the latter. The dual-systems analyses of the 1970s and early 1980s represented the effort of socialist



feminists to combine Marxist and feminist theories, or rather, class and women's oppression. Yet, as Vogel (1983) emphasised, “[t]he duality generally recapitulates the opposition between feminism and Marxism that socialist-feminist theory had attempted to transcend” (p 28), and even more so, inhibits the construction of a more comprehensive theory, “largely to the exclusion of issues of racial or national oppression” (p. 29).

Still, socialist feminists' understanding of the articulation between women's oppression and the capitalist system should not be taken for granted. Vogel (1983) was right to depart from the domestic labour debate to further extend Marx's theoretical framework “towards a unitary theory”. In this view, Vogel analyses the work of two important participants<sup>7</sup> of the aforementioned debate, which I briefly resume for my intended purposes.

In 1969, Margaret Benston was the first to envision women's *work* in the domestic sphere as the material basis of women's oppression in capitalist society (Ferguson; McNally, 2013). She reframes feminists' common perception of the family as a consumption unit to the notion of a production unit, engaged with the “technologically primitive” production of use-values, which family members directly consume. Women's responsibility for unpaid domestic labour outside the money economy rendered them marginal participation in wage labour. Consequently, not only are they placed in a “pre-industrial” and “pre-capitalist” production sight, the family household, but they also compose a massive reserve army of labour for capitalist production of exchange values (Vogel, 1983).

Questioning Benston's “*facile dismissal*” of women's participation in wage labour and her interpretation of domestic labour as a “*remnant from pre-capitalist modes of production which had somehow survived into the capitalist present*” (Vogel, 1983, p. 19), Peggy Morton's article, published a year later, emphasised the role played by the family unit in the maintenance and reproduction of labour-power, a crucial element of the capitalist mode of production: “*the task of the family is to maintain the present work force and provide the next generation of workers, fitted with the skills and values necessary for them to be productive members of the work force*” (Morton, 1971 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 18). She also highlights the contradictions embedded in working-class women's experience as both wage and domestic labourers, pointing to their central position as members of the reserve army and, therefore, as an important source of cheap labour.

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<sup>7</sup> She also discusses Mariarosa Dalla Costa's contributions, which I will not address here due to scope limits.

Morton's sophisticated analysis focused exclusively on working-class women and lacked a more comprehensive understanding of the "*special oppression of all women as a group*" (Vogel, 1983, p. 19). Still, despite their limitations, Benston and Morton's contributions successfully "*located the problem of women's oppression in the theoretical terrain of materialism*" (Vogel, 1983, p. 19). In a sense, they opened up the way for the fruitful development of the domestic labour debate, which engaged socialist feminists in the following decade. By the mid-1970s, however, many questions had remained unanswered, new questions had been put forward, and the limits to this theoretical approach had become increasingly tangible.

It seemed more and more for socialist-feminist theorists that Marxism and the socialist struggle could not offer a thorough account of women's oppression nor embrace all of the political actions and demands at issue. Epitomised in Heidi Hartmann's "*Unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*" (1979), the dual-systems theory expressed an effort to overcome the pitfalls of both Marxist and radical feminists' analyses, since "*the categories of marxism are sex-blind*" and feminist theory "*has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist*" (Hartmann, 1979, p. 1). In this sense, a renewed Marxist feminist analysis should draw upon the former's method and the latter's fine perception of women's oppression to theorise about the historical articulation between patriarchy and capitalism, while avoiding the temptation to "*subsume the feminist struggle into the 'larger' struggle against the capital*" (Hartmann, 1979, p. 1).

As Vogel (1983) has argued, the dual-systems theory has its roots in the socialist tradition, more precisely, in a frequently cited passage from Engels' influential book, "*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*":

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other (Engels, 1972 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 33).

In this way, the twofold character of production and reproduction of immediate life makes room for the notion of two separate modes of production with distinct logic and relatively independent functioning. Vogel and other socialist feminists contended that this dualistic approach dissociated women's oppression from the social relations on which it was grounded, suggesting that "*two powerful motors drive the development of history: the class-struggle and the sex-struggle*" (Vogel, 1983, p. 135). Besides failing to

“*compellingly explain the nature of the inter-connection between patriarchy and capitalism*” (Ferguson; McNally, 2013, XX), this perspective reinforced long-standing obstacles to socialist feminists’ “*strategic commitment to uniting women across such differences as class, race, age, and sexual orientation*” (Vogel, 1983, p. 34).

Nevertheless, the dual-systems perspective was not the only legacy left by the socialist tradition on the “women-question”. In fact, Marx himself had a lot more to say than was usually recognised, and those who listened were able to take various steps further in this theoretical and political task. According to Vogel (1983, p. 135), in contrast to the empirical stance from which the dual-systems theory departs, “*the social-reproduction perspective starts out from a theoretical position – namely, that class-struggle over the conditions of production represents the central dynamic of social development in societies characterised by exploitation*”. In this sense, the social reproduction perspective perceives – all kinds of – oppression as “*structurally relational to, and hence shaped by, capitalist production*” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 3).

But what is social reproduction? For Marx, it meant the constant renovation of the conditions of existence of a society as a whole: “[*a*] *society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction*” (Marx 1971a, p. 531 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 143-144). A particular but fundamental component of this overall process is the – material and social – reproduction of individuals through consumption:

Consumption reproduces the individual himself in a specific mode of being, not only in his immediate quality of being alive, and in specific social relations. So that the ultimate appropriation by individuals taking place in the consumption process reproduces them in the original relations in which they move within the production process and towards each other; reproduces them in their social being, and hence reproduces their social being – society – which appears as much the subject as the result of this great total process (Marx 1973b, p. 717n *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 60).

Social reproduction is underpinned by the continual renewal of the material and social conditions of production of a given society, which include the means of production around which the labour processes are organised, the means of subsistence of the labourers and the social relations of production that reproduce individuals as social beings, for instance, as workers and capitalists. Here lies a key aspect of social reproduction, human labour, “*the first premise of all human history*” (Marx *apud* Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 2). Labour-power or the *capacity for labour* (Marx *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 143) is exercised when human beings produce use-values, such as means of

production and means of subsistence, in a labour process<sup>8</sup>. It is human labour that sustains social reproduction, so without the replenishment of labour-power, there would not be social reproduction.

Suppose we consider that not only present workers but also past and future workers are essential to social reproduction. In that case, we are forced to conclude that the reproduction of labour-power might involve not only the individual consumption<sup>9</sup> of direct producers but also the maintenance of non-labouring individuals and the generational replacement of workers. In such cases, women's childbearing capacity becomes a major issue. We should note, however, that such biological processes do not determine women's social positions and gender roles. Furthermore, divisions of labour based on socially constructed gender differences exist in many societies, but they do not necessarily imply women's oppression. Rather, women's oppression is rooted in their historical role in class societies (Vogel, 1983).

An important premise of class societies is the capacity of human labour to produce more use-values than are needed for its reproduction – given a certain development stage of production forces. In class societies, where class relations are based on exploitation, surplus labour is not (necessarily) employed in the interest of overall social reproduction but appropriated by the ruling class. In this context, *“the concept of labour-power acquires a specific class-meaning”*, for only members of the exploited class – the class of direct producers – perform such surplus labour. Therefore, *“the concept of the reproduction of labour-power pertains, strictly speaking, to the maintenance and renewal of the class of bearers of labour-power subject to exploitation”* (Vogel, 1983, p. 148), notwithstanding the need for the ruling class to somehow maintain and replace their members.

Beyond surplus labour and the labour necessary to guarantee the exploited class's daily means of subsistence (necessary labour), there are several activities – we can call it, for now, supplementary labour<sup>10</sup> (Vogel, 1983, p. 149) – that transform these necessities

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<sup>8</sup> In this scenario, Vogel (1983, p. 144) argues that the reproduction of labour-power is a condition of production (therefore, indispensable to overall social reproduction) but is not *“itself a form of production”* since the bearers of labour-power can be renewed in various ways (generational replacement, enslavement, immigration) which do not necessarily involve a labour process. Maybe Vogel (1983) would reconsider her position, for even immigration and enslavement are underpinned in reproductive labour. The fact that such labour processes are frequently costless for capital does not change their character.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding individual consumption in a capitalist society, Marx explains that it is *“the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in exchange for labor-power, into fresh labor-power at the disposal of capital for exploitation. It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the laborer himself”* (Marx 1971a, pp. 536–7 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 68).

<sup>10</sup> I will get into the details of this controversial point later on.

into consumable goods, conserve them for prolonged consumption as well as guarantee the subordinated class's reproduction in a broader sense – activities related to the bearing and raising of children, physical, emotional and psychological care, intellectual development, among others<sup>11</sup>. Although essential to the reproduction of labour-power, these activities have to dispute the time of a labourer's working day, which, in a class society, should also be devoted to the exercise of the surplus labour appropriated by the ruling class. *“From the point of view of the dominant class, there is, therefore, a potential contradiction between its immediate need to appropriate surplus-labour and its long-term requirement for a class to perform it”* (Vogel, 1983, p. 151).

This contradiction could be resolved in various ways, depending on the particular powers and resources available to the dominant class and, conversely, on the capacity for resistance of the subordinated class. In other words, whether the ruling class will be able to minimise necessary and supplementary labour – and maximise surplus labour – over the long term while also guaranteeing the reproduction of labour-power is *“a matter of class struggle”* (Vogel, 1983, p. 151). In this way, we cannot deduce theoretically any outcome from these processes, but only observe *“specific historical cases”* (p. 150) and analyse *“with the guidance of a theoretical framework”*, *“a historical phenomenon”* such as *“[t]he existence of women's oppression in class-societies”* (p. 154).

Historically, childbearing – as much as agricultural production – is a biologically-rooted process involved in labour processes of generational replacement and, more broadly, social reproduction. Considering female bodies' childbearing capacity, class societies have usually encouraged male supremacy *“in order to stabilize the reproduction of labour-power as well as to keep the amount of necessary [and supplementary] labour at acceptable levels”* (Vogel, 1983, p. 153). In this way, women of the exploited class have been disproportionately burdened with the responsibility for the reproduction of labour-power, and women, in general, have been oppressed – though in fundamentally distinct ways – by social institutions and social representations that materially and ideologically sustain male supremacy, in articulation to, and at the service of, class exploitation.

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<sup>11</sup> I could argue that many of these activities go beyond individuals' immediate reproduction demands and, therefore, could be considered a form of surplus labour, especially in non-class societies where such labour might be employed for the benefit of social reproduction. However, this debate transcends the purpose of this chapter.

What happens, then, to labour-power in the capitalist mode of production? Marx explains that it becomes a commodity, since the direct producers – the working class – are expropriated from their means of production and hereafter need to sell their labour-power in the market for a price. The use-value of this commodity is exactly its capacity to produce value, or more specifically, surplus value. Moreover, this commodity is “unique” in the sense that, despite its importance to capital accumulation, it is the only commodity whose production is not guaranteed capitalistically (Vogel, 1983; Bhattacharya, 2017), as Marx several times implicitly recognises:

The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfillment to the laborers’ instincts of self-preservation and of propagation (Marx, 1867, p. 572 *apud* Gimenez, 2019, p. 326).

[women] (...) had sufficient leisure to give their infants the breast instead of poisoning them with Godfrey’s Cordial (an opiate). They also had the time to learn to cook. Unfortunately, the acquisition of this art occurred at a time when they had nothing to cook. *From this we see how capital for the purpose of its self-valorization, has usurped the family labour necessary for consumption* (Marx, 1990, p. 517-518 *apud* Federici, 2017, p. 87-88; Marx, 1996, p. 28, my emphasis).

In the second passage, Marx makes explicit reference to the conflict between capital accumulation and the reproduction of the working class, exposing the violent expansion of surplus labour at the expense of necessary and supplementary labour. In the following passage, Marx describes the process of monetisation of life reproduction, which simultaneously affects and is affected by the insertion of female labour-power in circuits of capital (namely, the labour market), again, at the expense of supplementary labour, identifying a limit and a possible source of tension for capital valorisation: rising costs.

Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers who have been confiscated by capital must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside. The cost of production of the working class therefore increases and balances its greater income. In addition to this, economy and judgment in the consumption and preparation of the means of subsistence becomes impossible (Marx, 1990, p. 518 *apud* Federici, 2017, p. 87; Marx, 1996, p. 29).

Herein lies a crucial matter, one that Marx himself has not paid much attention to, even though he has certainly offered some important insights on the issue<sup>12</sup>: the limits to the commodification of life, in particular, the limits to the commodification of the

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<sup>12</sup> “Marx’s famous comments that the labourer ‘belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the process of production’, a performance ‘the capitalist may safely leave . . . to the laborer’s instincts of self-preservation and of propagation’, implicitly recognise reproduction of labour-power as a process that must remain external to capitalist commodity-production. His unfortunate phrasing, quite rightly the object of feminist criticism, appears to exempt the process from theoretical examination, however, and conceals the kernel of genuine theoretical insight. Marx 1971a, pp. 536–7” (Vogel, 1983, p. 158).

reproduction of labour-power. In this sense, Humphries (1977) takes the example of class struggle in 19<sup>TH</sup> century England to underline the ongoing importance of domestic production of use-values, as well as the efficient redistribution, by non-market relations of production (family, kinship ties, class solidarity), of the products of domestic and waged labour between labouring and non-labouring individuals. As she argues, such non-commodified relations of production reduce social insecurity and uplift the working class's subsistence conditions.

While Humphries (1977) assumed an agnostic position to the benefits or drawbacks attached to the preservation of the institution of the family from the point of view of capital, choosing to highlight the working class's agency, expressed in their capacity to resist further deprivation and disorganisation of their social structures, Federici (2017) and other feminists in the 1970s were adamant about capital's dependence on and exploitation of the reproductive labour of women.

The postponed debate about surplus, necessary and supplementary labour should help to develop a firmer grasp on this issue. According to Vogel, Marx separates the labourer's working day between surplus and necessary labour, that is, labour appropriated by the capitalist class and labour necessary to cover the value of the means of subsistence of the waged worker, expressed by the wage. However, by doing so, he does not explicitly consider another type of necessary labour, that is, the labour necessary to transform and complement these means of subsistence in order to effectively replenish the working-class's labour-power<sup>13</sup>. This includes all the domestic labour aimed at renewing direct producers' labour-power as well as maintaining non-labouring individuals<sup>14</sup>. Vogel (1983) called this the “*domestic component of necessary labour*”, in contrast to the “*social component of necessary labour*” to which Marx referred.

Years later, Vogel (2000) expressed doubts about her initial analysis and left this question open for further theoretical investigation. Ferguson and McNally (2013, XXXIV) explain why she was wise to raise such doubts if we are to preserve the “*critical-scientific spirit that informs Marxism and the Oppression of Women*”:

Vogel was, of course, right that the labour of producing and reproducing current and future generations of wage-labourers is socially necessary to capital. But the term ‘necessary labour’ has

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<sup>13</sup> Although such notion is certainly present in Marx's thought, as can be inferred from his reference to the “*family labour necessary for consumption*” in the second passage of the previous page.

<sup>14</sup> The labour necessary to guarantee non-labouring individuals' means of subsistence is in a grey zone because if the worker receives a “family wage”, his necessary labour already covers the means of subsistence demanded by non-labouring family members. On the other hand, sometimes necessary labour covers only individual consumption, and women and children must enter the labour market. With a historical more than an analytical perspective, Marx was not clear on this point, as Vogel (1983) lamented.

a much more restricted meaning for Marx in his theory of surplus-value: it refers to the labour that comprises a necessary cost for capital, the labour that must be paid (in wages) out of capital's funds. This is why Marx refers to wages as variable capital (Ferguson; McNally, 2013, XXXIII-XXXIV).

Hence, necessary labour is, interestingly, understood by Marx as a necessary cost for capital or *the remunerated component of the worker's daily labour necessary to guarantee his social reproduction*. By calling the *non-remunerated* component of reproductive labour the domestic component of necessary labour, Vogel (1983) was honouring a long tradition of intellectual discussion. Nevertheless, note that the concept of domestic, here, should be understood as encompassing "*labour-camps, barracks, orphanages, hospitals, prisons, and other such institutions*" (p. 159)<sup>15</sup>. Thus, building upon Vogel's insights while preserving Marx's original theory, there is room for understanding the presence, on the "production site", of paid and unpaid labour, or necessary and surplus-labour, a distinction ingeniously obscured by the wage form; and on the "reproductive site", of paid (or, again, necessary labour) and unpaid reproductive labour (domestic and care activities), which cannot be directly appropriated by the capitalist class, but suffer from a severe detachment from one another, as a result of the material and ideological separation between monetised and non-monetised relations of production<sup>16</sup>.

Given this scenario, which conflicts may arise? As with the wider context of class societies, capital accumulation fundamentally depends on the very thing that it wants to minimise: the reproduction of labour-power or, more precisely, the labour time spent guaranteeing this reproduction (Vogel, 1983). In Marx's original analysis, the conflict between capital's demand for surplus labour and the workers' strive for higher standards of living through higher real wages – which means a smaller rate of exploitation and (relatively) more time spent performing necessary labour – was one of the expressions of class struggle.

What remained under "*Marx's hidden abode*" (Fraser, 2014) was the conflict between surplus labour and unpaid reproductive labour, and here I refer not "only" to care and domestic activities but also to the vast universe of wagelessness within the

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<sup>15</sup> I believe it is not unreasonable to conceive public provision of reproductive labour (public health, public education, social transfers) as a form of paid reproductive (hence, necessary) labour, since it is financed through taxes, which is a necessary cost of capitalist production. Depending on the purpose, however, it is useful to embrace wider notions of non-monetised reproductive labour.

<sup>16</sup> The distinction between monetised and non-monetised labour may also incorporate surplus labour, and refer to the dissociation between waged (surplus and necessary) and non-waged reproductive labour (Vogel, 1983, p. 159).



subsistence sector. As it turns out, an increase in the unpaid component of reproductive labour relative to the waged component also means an increase in surplus labour relative to necessary labour. Alternatively, the capitalist class may employ several strategies to reduce overall labour time spent on (paid and/or unpaid) reproductive labour, with distinct consequences in terms of an absolute or relative increase in surplus value. This might enhance the direct extraction of surplus labour, especially from women's labour power. After all, from the perspective of the contradiction between capital accumulation and the reproduction of the working class, unpaid reproductive labour also "*competes with capital's drive for accumulation*" Vogel (1983, p. 161).

This second element of these inherent contradictions has an aggravator: technological progress could not – or would not – that easily innovate the labour processes involved in generational replacement. Hence, despite the notorious tendency of the capitalist system to socialise care and domestic labour through market relations and public institutions, or to reduce its costs through technology, the fact is that the costs of fully socialising such labour remain too high (Vogel, 1983), especially if you consider that the alternative is externalising it to oppressed, marginalised women, whose social devaluation through racialised and gendered representations makes their labour-power cheaper, in terms of necessary costs for capital (Gonzalez, 1984; Davis, 2016; Bueno, 2015).

In this context, the symbiosis between the subsistence sector and female reproductive labour serves as a mechanism driving the externalisation of the reproduction of labour-power. First, popular economies (Gago, 2017; 2019) and non-capitalist or non-commoditised relations of production within the vast informal sector (Denning, 2010; Breman et al., 2014) guarantee the material means of daily subsistence for many individuals and households. Therefore, without the subsistence sector, the surplus population would not survive. Second, the surplus population is composed of many women that are profitably allocated to the performance of care and domestic labour (many times conciliated with self-employment or informal labour), with the advantage that, as members of a superfluous workforce, their labour-power is devalued and, therefore, represents a low or null cost to capital. Again, if women did not perform reproductive labour, there would be no surplus population and, consequently, no subsistence sector.

Not surprisingly, Verónica Gago (2019) argues that, under capitalism, there is a marked intersection between female labour and popular economies: they are connected in their political struggle to sustain social reproduction, given their marginalisation and profitable "exclusion" from – or rather subaltern inclusion in – the capitalist mode of

production. In other words, the contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction<sup>17</sup> leans on gendered and racialised bodies and territories (the household, the streets, urban peripheries, rural areas) and, at the same time, is threatened by their resistance to dispossession and exploitation.

Still on the externalisation of the reproduction of labour-power, as we can infer from the concept of *necropolitics* (Mbembe, 2016), neither exploitation nor expropriation need necessarily be accompanied by generational replacement when racism is at play (Flauzina, 2008). The possibility to use and abuse a large contingent of people, irrespective of what are the concrete conditions of their social reproduction, is a crucial element of capital accumulation. From a global perspective, Quijano (2005) demonstrates that, with the expansion of capitalist colonial relations of production, racism, “*a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human*” (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 10), became the principle of organisation of the world population, with the corresponding attribution of racialised roles and places in the new global pattern of control of labour, as well as of the resources and products thereof. In this sense, all kinds of previous forms of labour control and exploitation – slavery, servitude, petty commodity production, reciprocity, and wage labour – were transformed and articulated to serve accumulation’s purposes, preserving, in the process, most of their original characteristics, but still being subordinated to capital.

Quijano (2005) suggests that the new global pattern of power depends on and reproduces all of these “pre-capitalist” forms, which are transmuted to new “historic-structural” configurations within the capitalist world system. The phenomenon of global labour arbitrage, in which imperialist multinational firms extract surplus value from cheap precarious labour, is certainly illustrative (Foster et al., 2011). In other words, these – indeed capitalist – forms of organising labour and production are constitutive of global capitalism, in the same sense that Marx’s primitive accumulation is an established, ongoing, and profitable mechanism of expropriation, often related to those very same forms of labour control. Racial hierarchy assures that capital’s voracity for life destruction, or necropolitics (Mbembe, 2016) is concealed from or even justified by the public eye. Thus, not only the racial division of labour – at both national and international levels – but also the very possibility of disposing of “disposable” labour-power, make racism a material basis for the existence and expansion of the capitalist mode of

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<sup>17</sup> This contradiction may also take the form of the current environmental crisis (Fraser, 2014; López; Rodríguez, 2010).

production, to the detriment of the reproduction of the working class. As Marx has pointed out, the relative surplus-population is:

a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army . . . Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation (Marx, 1971a, p. 592 *apud* Vogel, 1983, p. 71).

Female labour is particularly demanded in the process of reproduction when human life is either seen as disposable work power – and the extraction of surplus involves gradual or quick dissipation of life – or is not even seen as labour-power, but as an inconvenience, something that is in the way of capital accumulation. This “(dis)utility” of life eases the weight of contradictions, clearing the way for the legitimate employment of necropolitics. Hence, racism and the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2015) deepen and reconfigure the oppression of women below the line of the human, as we can infer from the historical experience of primitive accumulation during the period of formation of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005), as well as from Brazilian’s current reality: for centuries, female African women sustained the process of accumulation engendered in the slavery trade, guaranteeing a continuous supply of profitably allocated labour-power – whether in the coffee plantations or the depths of the sea (Fragoso; Florentino, 1993). Today, many black women sustain families with no fathers, brothers, and sons because the state apparatuses – especially the penal system – are committed to the profitable genocide of black people (Flauzina, 2008).

#### **4. Final considerations**

In his classic formulation of a dual economy, with its division between a subsistence sector and a capitalist sector, Lewis (1954) implicitly assumed that female labour becomes important only after “daughters and wives” are fully integrated into the labour market. This view has many shortcomings for an understanding of the role of social reproduction to capital accumulation or, as far as Lewis was concerned, to development. Assuming a historical materialist approach (Vogel, 1983), I contended that the ongoing relevance of “non-capitalist”, sometimes non-commoditised, relations of (re)production is an expression of the inherent conflict between capital accumulation and the reproduction of the working class, in which capital depends on but constantly threatens the working class’s capacity to reproduce itself. Living in the permanent tension of having to guarantee daily subsistence, precarious labourers, especially non-waged labourers, create strategies to fight capital exploitation and expropriation.

Thus, “non-capitalist” forms of production (such as self-employment and subsistence production) are an expression of class struggle and represent as much the resistance as the subjection of workers to ongoing proletarianisation. As Gago (2017) puts it, these popular economies are constantly reinventing themselves, adapting to, while also disrupting, capitalist social relations, producing new strategies for hindering the expansion of capital accumulation and its inextricable processes of expropriation. Through acts of obedience to, negotiation with, and subversion of capitalist principles and values, these baroque economies’ ambivalent practices express their vitalist pragmatic and the power – “*potencia*”, in Spinozist terms – of labour-power, the popular classes’ will to live.

In a “crisis-ridden capitalism” (Palmer, 2014, p. 56), such “non-capitalist” forms of production are central to the daily survival of the working class and a condition for capital accumulation. In order to manage the intrinsic contradictions that constantly menace the system as a whole, capital externalises the costs of the reproduction of labour power, counting on “non-capitalist” and non-commoditised relations and labour processes to guarantee, whenever necessary, its ready access to a vast, cheap, somewhat disciplined and always hard-working surplus population.

In this sense, “non-capitalist” relations of production such as gender and kinship divisions of labour are indispensable for the working class’s social reproduction, which is frequently resistant to commodification. To put in another perspective, for those who struggle every day to guarantee subsistence, “*the artificial separation between the sites of production and reproduction tends to be highly blurred*” (Stevano, 2023, p. 4), and the theoretical separation between paid and unpaid reproductive labour becomes a meaningless abstraction. Moreover, if the distinction between production and reproduction sites is arbitrary and problematic, so is the notion of a dual economy, composed of two supposedly different sectors. In effect, the subsistence economy is becoming increasingly capitalised, both in terms of its access to and exploitation by financial capital (Gago, 2017; 2019).

Finally, I showed that class struggle is embedded in historical gender and racial hierarchies<sup>18</sup> socially constructed to fracture the working class and maintain control over labour. In this horizon, capital’s conflicting interests toward women’s labour-power, disputed by alternative uses within the spheres of production and reproduction (Vogel,

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<sup>18</sup> Such as the separation between waged and unwaged (self-employed) workers, as well as the separation between paid (waged or self-employed) and unpaid reproductive workers.

1983; Federici, 2017), and capital's endeavour to attenuate (by radicalising) such contradictions through racialisation will remain a massive source of class struggle, with hitherto unknown and under-theorised consequences.

Since the capitalist system depends on and constantly reproduces racial, national, gender, and sexual representations, hierarchies and social relations, as well as correlated institutions, for instance, the family and the National State, even for feminists (Butler, 2016), there is truth in the argument that every politics of difference should be considered cautiously (Palmer, 2014). But, then again, it is undeniable that collective bodies are underpinned by individual, concrete bodies. Hence, I joined in the effort to restore to "*the economic process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component: living human beings, capable of following orders as well as of flouting them*" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 19). Only in this way may "workers of the world" be truly and thoroughly united in the class struggle.



## DEAGRARIANISATION AND PLURIACTIVITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF BRAZIL: GENDERED AND RACIALISED CLASSES OF LABOUR

### 1. Introduction

Proletarianisation has long been proven not to be a homogeneous or inevitable process across largely different historical and geopolitical contexts (Arrighi, 1970; O’Laughlin, 2002). At the same time, we can observe, as “a central dynamic of the development of capitalism” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 4), the worldwide deagrarianisation of rural livelihoods (Graziano da Silva, 2001; Alatrística, 2019; Basole; Basu, 2011; Qi, 2019; Gutiérrez et al., 2006; Bryceson, 2018, 2019) and “commodification of subsistence”, that is, the commodification of social and material conditions of daily and generational reproduction, including social relations of production (Friedmann, 1978a; 1978b; 1980; Bernstein, 1988; 2006; O’Laughlin, 2002). In particular, we can verify the commodification of labour power and the correspondent dependency on wages to complement or guarantee rural household’s diversified sources of income in many countries<sup>19</sup>. Even so, as I intend to show in the case of Brazil, agriculture remains an indispensable source of subsistence for rural classes of labour and self-employment is frequently an alternative or a complement of wage labour, as a social reproduction strategy of the working classes.

In the Latin American countryside, historically characterised by multiple forms of production (Bernstein, 2010), the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and the commodity boom during the 2000s have contributed to the intensification of long-standing tendencies toward land concentration (García-Arias et al., 2021), and especially, market and capital concentration (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017a). As a result, the last decades were marked by the growing loss of autonomy and increasing market dependency of small agricultural producers (Bretón et al., 2022), not only through integration to concentrated commodity chains of upstream and downstream activities but also with regard to wage labour, a growingly important source of income in rural areas. Related to these processes, there has been a further deepening of “peasant class differentiation” (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017a, p. 245), with a corresponding reconfiguration of “classes of labour” (Bernstein, 2010) –

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the cases of Brazil (Schneider, 2003; Schneider et al., 2010; Silva, 2009; Sakamoto et al., 2016), India (Basole; Basu, 2011; Pattenden, 2018), Mozambique (O’Laughlin, 2002; Stevano; 2017; 2023) and Peru (Alatrística, 2019).

or class differentiation within the working class –, in constant (trans)formation given their respective historical paths of class struggle (Singer, 1981).

In this same period, the simultaneous rise of social movements and the election of progressive governments in Latin America – the pink tide (Vergara-Camus, Kay, 2017b; Loureiro, 2018) – were, in a way, a response to earlier processes of dispossession and exploitation under “neoliberalism from above”<sup>20</sup> (Gago, 2017). Despite paying attention to the political struggle that brought together small-scale farmers, landless and landed peasants and rural workers, these governments assumed a contradictory position (Escher, 2020; Sauer et al., 2017; Guanziroli et al., 2013; Pahnke et al., 2015), managing conflicts between agribusiness and popular demands and trying to reconcile their interests under the dome of “neo-developmentalism”<sup>21</sup> (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b; Gago, 2017; Garcia-Arias et al., 2021).

In Brazil, one of the results of intense social mobilisation and academic research was the official recognition of family farmers as relevant social actors and legitimate beneficiaries of public policy (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Escher, 2020). Several social and agrarian development policies, such as the National Programme to Strengthen Family Farming (PRONAF), created in 1995, were implemented to improve family farmers’ conditions of reproduction, especially with regard to market competitiveness and increase in labour and land productivity. This trend culminated in the approval, in 2006, of the “Law of Family Farming” (Law 11.326), which institutionalised the legal definition of the term. PRONAF and other family farms’ targeted policies were, in this initial period of their implementation, truly effective: between the agricultural censuses of 1996 and 2006, family farming managed to sustain – and in the North and Northeast regions, to

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<sup>20</sup> “[F]rom above, neoliberalism recognizes a modification of the global regime of accumulation — new strategies on the part of corporations, agencies, and governments — that induces a mutation in nation-state institutions. In this regard, neoliberalism is a phase (and not a mere aspect) of capitalism. From below, neoliberalism is the proliferation of forms of life that reorganize notions of freedom, calculation, and obedience, projecting a new collective affectivity and rationality” (Gago, 2017, p. 6).

<sup>21</sup> “In contrast to the arguments put forward by some authors, such as Grugel and Riggiozzi (2012), these left-wing governments were not post-neoliberal, if we understand that to be beyond neoliberalism (see Petras & Veltmeyer, 2017). In our view, these regimes are best characterized as neo-developmental. They all pursued a development strategy in which they sought to strengthen the state, which had been significantly trimmed down during the neoliberal period, so as to intervene more in the market and steer the development process in a desired direction; that is, towards a more diversified and technologically advanced economic structure, as well as towards a more socially inclusive and egalitarian society. (...). One of the important objectives of neodevelopmentalism is to choose the right sectors and then champion and establish the conditions for their market success, the idea being that it is necessary to have growth before redistribution. In agriculture, we have seen that this view has translated in supporting agribusiness and exports while diverting some of the state funds to support the small-scale producers that have the ability to integrate successfully into the market” (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b, p. 430).



increase – their share in gross value of production (GVP), even during a period of steep growth in the agricultural sector (Guanziroli et al., 2013). However, the successful integration of a class of family farms into agribusiness circuits was achieved in a context of increasing polarisation within family farming, given the further marginalisation of small and less integrated farmers (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b; Aquino et al., 2018; Escher, 2020).

As Friedmann (1978a) has argued, family farming is a somewhat arbitrary and controversial concept, which could be replaced by the concept of simple commodity production, where “ownership and labour are combined in the household, and production takes place under conditions of competition” (p. 71). Nevertheless, since one of the purposes of this paper is to contest the legal meaning of family farming, I will not forsake the term. As Del Grossi et al. (2022) have shown, the current legal framing excludes a significant number of agricultural families from access to targeted public policies because one of their reproduction strategies is pluriactivity, that is, diversification of household income sources: the exercise of agricultural activities inside and outside the production unit and/or the allocation of family labour simultaneously in agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Schneider, 2003; Escher et al., 2014).

The combination of wage labour with simple commodity production has been long recognised as a typical reproduction strategy of rural families (Friedmann, 1978a). In this chapter, I argue that, despite differences in Brazilian rural classes of labour, in terms of commodification of life and subjection to proletarianisation, they share one common feature: they depend on agriculture for social reproduction. I contend that the legal definition of family farming should broaden its scope to include more beneficiaries, in particular, pluriactive families; otherwise, it might intensify the polarisation effects of family farming policies.

Moreover, even if rural families engaged with wage labour and subsistence agricultural production, as well as landless wage-earning families, do not fit the definition of family farming, they deserve agrarian development programmes of their own, such as food sovereignty policies and agrarian reform. After all, these classes of labour frequently face more challenges than those engaged with simple commodity production, and hence need protection from undesired processes of commodification of subsistence and proletarianisation. Even though this broader political agenda received some recognition and implementation during the Worker’s Party (PT) administrations, especially if compared to other left-wing governments in Latin America in the same period (Vergara-

Camus; Kay, 2017b; Deere, 2017), they were far from the Brazilian governments' priority in recent decades, especially after 2010 (Sauer et al., 2017; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b).

Since then, this scenario has only worsened. During the period of devalorisation of primary commodities (Bretón et al., 2022), pressures from agribusiness actors have managed to weaken institutionalised processes of agrarian reform, marginalise and criminalise social movements (Sauer et al., 2017), extinguish or destabilise a variety of social and development programmes (Escher, 2020; Grisa, 2018a) and intensify the exclusionary tendencies of the already biased PRONAF policies (Aquino et al., 2018). The rightist and neoliberal turn after 2016 represented, therefore, the culmination of an ongoing process of social disempowerment, expressed by the extinction of critical institutions (Escher, 2020; Grisa, 2018a) such as the Ministry of Agrarian Development and the National Council of Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA), as well as the significant weakening of environmental regulations and institutions (Garcia-Arias et al., 2021).

Applying a social reproduction framework (Vogel, 1983) to illuminate long-standing (agrarian) political economy debates, I engage with two of them<sup>22</sup>: the “persistence” of “non-capitalist”<sup>23</sup> relations of production in otherwise capitalist enterprises (forms of production) and/or social formations (Friedmann, 1978b; 1980; Singer, 1981; Bernstein, 1988; Harris-White, 2014); and the mutual constitution of classes of labour and gender, race, age, ethnicity, caste and other social relations of power and exploitation, through historically specific but worldwide experienced processes of commodification of social reproduction, including proletarianisation and social practices of resistance to it (Sharma, 1985; O’Laughlin, 2002; Bernstein, 1988; 2006; 2010; Stevano, 2017; 2023; Deere, 2003; 2006; 2017).

More specifically, I first build upon the contributions of the above scholars to address the topicality of non-capitalist relations of production within the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, I argue that, on both theoretical and empirical grounds, self-employment in the form of simple commodity production (Friedmann, 1978a, 1978b,

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<sup>22</sup> Regarding the empirical evidence presented for the Brazilian case, this study would benefit from an extension of the present analysis, still preliminary in certain aspects. For instance, instead of a picture of a given year, future studies should adopt a methodology that further allows the investigation of dynamics over time. Besides this limited picture, I rely on a brief literature review of key empirical works on Brazilian rural transformations in the last decades.

<sup>23</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, I state that non-capitalist forms of production are constitutive of the capitalist mode of production and are constituted by it (Oliveira, 1972). The idea of their persistence is also misleading because it does not consider the constant destruction, creation and recreation of these forms within the overall process of capitalist expansion (Souza, 1999).

1980) or<sup>24</sup> petty commodity production (Bernstein, 1988) is a widespread form of production in capitalist social formations, frequently guaranteeing or complementing the subsistence of a major parcel of the working class.

Then, I work with the concept of pluriactivity (Schneider, 2003) to further understand the distinctiveness of classes of labour (Bernstein, 2006; 2010) in rural spaces<sup>25</sup>. I argue that the combination of wage labour, subsistence production and simple commodity production is not simply an expression of proletarianisation but an active resistance strategy to such a process (O’Laughlin, 2002). Finally, and I believe this is my main contribution to the literature, I present evidence that classes of labour in the countryside of Brazil are intertwined with gender and race relations. By doing so, I assert that the exclusion of low-income, pluriactive families from the legal concept of family farming privileges white men to the detriment of white and black women, as well as black men.

Apart from this introduction, the paper is organised into five more sections. In the second section, I theoretically discuss the ongoing and indeed increasing importance of simple commodity production and income diversification strategies in rural areas. In the third section, I contextualise agrarian change in Brazil in the last decades and enumerate a list of public policies toward agrarian development that were implemented during the Brazilian pink tide, especially with regard to family farms.

After a brief description of the methodology in the fourth section, in the fifth section, I assemble empirical evidence from the Agricultural and Livestock Censuses of 2006 and 2017 and the National Household Sample Survey (2016, 2019 and 2022), both undertaken by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Results point to the heterogeneity of classes of labour in the countryside of Brazil: gendered, racialised, more or less integrated into market circuits, more or less dispossessed of material conditions of (re)production, thus more or less proletarianised, with more or less access to wage employment, thus more or less sub-proletarianised<sup>26</sup>. The final section concludes.

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<sup>24</sup> I use the terms indistinctively.

<sup>25</sup> A distinctiveness, however, that increasingly shares similarities with urban sights.

<sup>26</sup> Sub-proletarianisation is a condition which implies expropriation of the means of production necessary for social reproduction (for instance, land), with little or no perspective of wage employment, increasingly scarce, informal and precarious. On the other hand, semi-proletarianised workers are still in the possession of some means and resources: land, capital, information and/or not least (family) labour. In other words, they are usually less vulnerable to capital expropriation and exploitation. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to be simultaneously sub-proletarianised and semi-proletarianised. In fact, this is the case of many rural families in Brazil, dependent simultaneously on wage labour and subsistence agricultural production for survival.

## 2. Social reproduction through commodity cycles: classes of agrarian capital and labour

Social reproduction, or the reproduction of society as a whole, depends on the constant renewal of social and material conditions of production. This includes not only the replenishment, at the beginning of every production cycle, of the means necessary for production, but also the renewal of the producers, that is, the daily and generational reproduction of human life and social relations of production, which means, in particular, daily reproduction of labourers and their labour power, including discipline, skills, beliefs and social hierarchies (Friedmann, 1978a; 1978b; Vogel, 1983; Bhattacharya, 2017).

In the capitalist mode of production, the expansion of market circuits is constantly transforming, in multiple historical contexts, (non-capitalist) social relations of production, forms of production and overall conditions of reproduction. The commodification of subsistence is one of these clear tendencies, and we should specify its meaning to avoid generalisations. Although inevitable, it is certainly not ubiquitous, since unpaid reproductive labour, performed overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, by women, is still (and appears it will continue to be) a necessary condition for reproduction even in the so-called developed countries<sup>27</sup> (Humphries, 1977; Vogel, 1983; Federici, 2017b). Moreover, the commodification of life does not mean the generalisation of wage employment. In developing countries and, increasingly, in developed ones, social reproduction is fundamentally dependent on informal and informalised relations of production, classes of labour are characterised by “wagelessness” (Denning, 2010), and for many, the “distinction between work and reproductive time becomes blurred” (Mezzadri, 2019, p. 38).

Whether functional to capitalism or not<sup>28</sup>, the fact is that non-commodified relations of production, such as kinship and gender relations, as well as community and solidarity ties, are historically an important condition of reproduction of human beings,

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<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Humphries (1977) asserts that the protection of the family and non-capitalist relations of production has represented a reproduction strategy of the working class since the first process of proletarianisation in 19th century England. According to her, through class struggle and class “solidarity” (or class differentiation within the working class), including the defence of the family and the reinforcement of gender hierarchies, the English working class limited the labour supply for capitalist expansion, simultaneously sustaining the workers’ bargaining position with employers and protecting kinship ties, which not only guaranteed the regular production of “use-values” by domestic labour but also “provided a major source of non-bureaucratic support in conditions of chronic uncertainty” (p. 247).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the a-functional character of non-capitalist forms of production within the capitalist system, see Bhattacharya et al. (2023).

and in capitalist societies, of the working class (Humphrey, 1977; Vogel, 1983). At the same time, such non-commodified relations are “deeply shaped and conditioned by the wider dynamics of capital-labour relations, changing regimes of accumulation, and their politics” (Cousins et al., 2018, p. 1062). This recognition opens several questions regarding the co-constitution of class and gender relations, class and geopolitical (geographical, racial, ethnical) relations, and the artificiality of the separation between the spheres of production and reproduction (Mezzadri, 2019; 2020; Stevano, 2017; 2023).

Kinship ties and gendered divisions of labour are also essential to the conditions of reproduction of agricultural “household production” (Friedmann, 1978a; 1978b; 1980; Schneider, 2003). In this section, I will further explore this argument.

*a. Commodification or resistance to it: simple commodity production and the “persistence” of non-typically capitalist relations of production*

Notwithstanding the inexorable and worldwide trend toward deagrarianisation of employment and economic activity<sup>29</sup> – for instance, in Brazil (Graziano da Silva, 2001), Peru (Alatrística, 2019), India (Basole; Basu, 2011; Qi, 2019), Netherlands (Ploeg, 2018), Spain (Gutiérrez et al., 2006) and Africa (Bryceson, 2018, 2019) –, it is noteworthy the current widespread predominance, at least in terms of employment<sup>30</sup>, of small producers and family farms in agricultural activities.

According to Harriet Friedmann (1978a, 1978b, 1989), simple or petty commodity production (SCP or PCP), which combines capital (and land) ownership with family labour<sup>31</sup>, is not only a form of production fully integrated and dependent on market circuits – an assertion perhaps too strong after the domestic labour debate (Bernstein, 1988) – but also has been historically more competitive than, and has even superseded, typically capitalist production in some branches of agricultural activity, such as wheat production (Friedmann, 1978b). In this sense, simple commodity production is a non-capitalist “form of production”<sup>32</sup> that is grounded on and stems from the capitalist mode of production as well as other concrete aspects of modern social formations (such as the State apparatuses):

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<sup>29</sup> Albeit the recent reprimarisation of economic activity – or the renewed importance of the agricultural and livestock sector – in Latin American economies certainly defies such a supposed general trend.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding total farming area and total agricultural and livestock production, agribusiness usually surpasses small, family producers. This is the case of Brazil, as shown in Table 5.

<sup>31</sup> “[T]he distinctiveness of PCP” (Bernstein, 1988, p. 262).

<sup>32</sup> “[T]he minimal unit of productive organization” (Friedmann, 1978b, p. 552).

The reproduction of commercial households involves the continual reconstitution of the apparently anomalous conjunction of full market relations among enterprises and kinship relations within enterprises. It occurs historically under conditions of fully developed markets, not only in the commodities produced by household labour, but also in land, means of production, articles of personal consumption, money, and most importantly, labour power itself (Friedman, 1978a, p. 73).

Friedmann (1978a) builds upon Marx's theory of reproduction to assess the "circuits of reproduction" of agricultural commercial households. For her, "reproduction occurs when the act of production not only results in a product, such as wheat, but also recreates the original structure of social relations so that the act of production can be repeated in the same form" (Friedmann, 1978b, p. 555). In every "new round of production", the attainment of conditions of reproduction, which are specific to each particular form of production, depends "entirely on relations of production" (p. 556).

Apart from sharing one significant condition of reproduction, full integration into markets – a condition that Gibbon and Neocosmos called "generalised commodity production" (Bernstein, 1988, p. 262) –, capitalist enterprises and commercial households have "structurally different kinds of costs" (Friedmann, 1978b, p. 556), determined by fundamentally different relations of production. In the capitalist form of production, labour and capital pertain to different social classes, and their union, materialised in wage labour, is only made possible by market relations. On the other hand, in simple commodity production (SCP), unpaid family labour and ownership of capital compose the pool of resources of the unit of production and consumption, the household, even if individual members of the family assume different class (and gender) positions within it (Bernstein, 1988; 2010; Friedmann, 1986 *apud* Schneider, 2003), and even though commercial households frequently resort to the labour market as a means to stabilise the household's supply and demand of labour according to each family's demographic cycle (Friedmann, 1978a).

As families, these households' labour processes depend on kinship ties and gender relations. As enterprises, simple commodity production, or "petty-bourgeois production" (Bernstein, 1988), is a typically capitalist form of production, and in Friedmann's somewhat "ideal-typical view of capitalism" (Bernstein, 1988, p. 260), their reproduction is no longer (or was never) based on reciprocal ties, and is fully invested in commodity relations. In other words, Friedmann (1980) abstracts from the family character of commercial households to affirm that they are fully commodified, contrary to "peasant" or less integrated forms of production: "the end point of commoditisation is simple commodity production" (Friedmann, 1980, p. 163). By contrast, "peasant" households,

provisionally defined “for expositional simplicity” as those “households whose reproduction occurs through communal and particularistic class relations” (p. 163), resist commodification, and their heterogeneous forms of production are characterised by constrained mobility of land, capital and/or labour, thus, partial integration into markets.

For Friedmann (1980), the historical diversity of the peasantry makes it impossible to generalise or analytically deduct conditions of peasant reproduction, as opposed to simple commodity production, “a logical concept” (p. 163). Such theoretical status should not, however, preclude our ability to recognise the historical diversity of simple commodity production according to different “types of family structure, patriarchy, gender and generational divisions of labour, modes of economic calculation and so on” (Bernstein, 1988, p. 262). Thus, even if market relations pose somewhat objective conditions of *possibility* to household reproduction, those conditions must be interpreted in real contexts, where the *actual* reproduction of simple commodity producers occurs (Friedmann, 1978a). In this sense, peasants and simple commodity producers should not be that much different (Bernstein, 1988), and despite the survival of pre-capitalist social relations of reproduction in all such forms of production, the increasing commodification of life subsistence urged for the flexibilisation of Friedmann’s rigid distinction (Bernstein, Byres, 2001, p. 26).

In this horizon, petty commodity production should be viewed as a useful analytical tool – a logical concept, as Friedmann (1980) put it – for assessing the conditions of reproduction of small agricultural producers, even if they are embedded in solidarity ties, and/or engaged with resistance strategies against commodification. The possible variations in the level of conformity or resistance to commodity relations and how these differences affect actual conditions of reproduction is a matter for concrete historical investigation.

*b. Proletarianisation or resistance to it: the “pluriactive family”, and the dialectical relation between subsistence production, simple commodity production and wage labour*

One of Friedmann’s (1978a) essential contributions to agrarian political economy was her theoretical and empirical demonstration of the relevance of wage labour for the reproduction of commercial households. Using the case of Cass County (United States) to illustrate her argument, she shows that simple commodity production is highly

dependent on the labour market, both to guarantee an appropriate supply of labour for the operation of the enterprise when family labour is not available in sufficient quantities, and to enable an additional source of income (wages) for the household when family labour exceeds enterprise requirements. She argues that household members engaged with wage labour have a qualitatively different relationship to such occupation when compared to permanent wage workers: for the formers, wage labour frequently represents a temporary source of income during a specific period of the life cycle, when they are not yet themselves heads of simple commodity production households.

For simple commodity producers, then, wage labour is not always a condition of daily and generational reproduction of labour power, as is the case for wage-earning households, since the additional income might not be necessary for household *personal* consumption. Moreover, and again in contrast to wage-earning families, it might be a relevant source of income for household *productive* consumption, that is, maintenance, and replacement of the means of production, as well as a source of savings for expanded reproduction (Friedmann, 1978a; 1978b).

Other scholars have emphasised such a character of commercial households. For instance, in her impressive account of Mozambique's historical process of proletarianisation, which resulted in multiple and variable forms of rural livelihoods in the country, Bridget O'Laughlin (2002) asserts that "using wage-income to hire casual wage-workers (*ganho-ganho*) remains a common way of organising smallholder commercial farming today throughout Mozambique" (p. 520).

But what if wage labour is not only a complement to simple commodity production, the major source of household income, but instead represents an indispensable condition of reproduction for some rural families, contributing, permanently or temporarily, to the bulk of household expenses? For Friedmann, these families should not be regarded as simple commodity producers, even if this form of production constitutes one of the reproduction strategies of the household:

Since all sorts of plots of land are cultivated as supplemental sources of food or income by people whose main source of subsistence lies elsewhere, only those which provide the main source of subsistence to their possessors should be considered forms of agricultural production in their own right (Friedmann, 1978b, p. 552).

This rigid distinction, just like the mutual exclusion between peasant and simple commodity production, fails to grasp the growing complexity of rural livelihoods, as well as their increasing dependency on diversified sources of income across the world. In India (Basole; Basu, 2011; Pattenden, 2018), China (Qi, 2019), Mozambique (O'Laughlin,



2002; Stevano; 2017; 2023), and many countries of Latin America (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017a; Deere, 2006; Alatrasta, 2019; Schneider, 2003; Schneider et al., 2010), subsistence production, petty commercial farming, and wage labour are, frequently, complementary sources of income and, thus, mutually reinforcing conditions of household reproduction. As Barbara Harris-White (2014, p. 987) points out, “the evidence suggests that there is a diversity of labour arrangements along a spectrum between wage work and PCP”.

In Brazil, some scholars have called attention to the growing role of pluriactivity (Schneider, 2003; Schneider et al., 2010; Silva, 2009; Sakamoto et al., 2016), that is, household – or even individual – occupation in more than one economic activity (wage labour, subsistence production, agricultural petty commodity production, non-agricultural petty commodity production), as long as (at least) one of them takes place in the agricultural sector. Pluriactivity is, on the one hand, an expression of the articulated processes of deagrarianisation and proletarianisation: in a context of commodification of subsistence, pressures from upstream and downstream markets make it increasingly difficult for simple commodity producers to guarantee their conditions of reproduction. On the other hand, pluriactivity is a resistance strategy to those same processes, for it represents the possibility of improving the family income with alternative livelihoods while simultaneously preserving, or even strengthening, SCP. In this sense, it is a strategy against the expropriation of the means of production, particularly land. Although it is definitely a form of integration into market circuits (Escher et al., 2014), it strengthens the autonomy of the household (Schneider et al., 2010) and does not imply an increase in its market vulnerability, like specialisation in monocultures. From another perspective, it is a direct response to the constant production of an idle workforce through ongoing processes of agricultural modernisation (Schneider et al., 2010; Silveira, 2017), an important source of surplus population<sup>33</sup>.

However, Friedmann (1978a, 197b, 1980) was not wrong to distinguish between petty bourgeoisie production, expressed, in the historical example she uses, the white American family farmer, and forms of production much more attached to a “labour” position in class relations (although still preserving some aspects of “capital”). Indeed, in petty commodity production, a variety of combinations of capital and labour may result in diverse class configurations and social relations of production (and exploitation) so that “a form of production that appears very simple is in fact intensely diverse and subject to

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<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Brazilian commercial households are increasingly the responsibility of only one or a few family members (usually the father and one of the sons) (Sakamoto et al., 2016).

complex, intermingled and often competing logics” (Harris-White, 2014, p. 989). In this sense, classes of capital, classes of labour and in-between classes of capital and labour are an always-changing and contradictory result of class struggle, expressed concretely in historical processes of proletarianisation and resistance to it (Bernstein, 2010; O’Laughlin, 2022).

Proletarianisation rarely implies full commodification of labour power and generalisation of wage labour (O’Laughlin, 2002), even though generalised commodity production is a prerequisite (Bernstein, 1988). Rather, the distinctive character of proletarianisation is the separation of the labourer from his/her means of production and, therefore, expropriation (Palmer, 2014), the separation of “capital” and labour, a distinction that, prior to the capitalist mode of production, would not have any practical or logical meaning. Partial or semi-proletarianisation, that is, the possibility for the labourer to maintain control of at least a fraction, not yet expropriated, of his/her means of production, though not uncommon, is difficult to comprehend, given, as Marx has warned us, “the mode of thought of bourgeois society” and its complete reliance on capitalist categories such as “the working class” and “the capitalist class” (Friedmann, 1978b, p. 561).

Reflecting upon such categories, I suggest that semi-proletarianisation of simple commodity producers, that is, partial loss of control of the means of production – through direct processes of dispossession or increasing subordination to upstream and downstream markets – fundamentally changes conditions of reproduction. This brings about what Friedmann (1978b) calls the *transformation* or even destruction of some forms of production and their respective reproductive processes. From another perspective, resistance to proletarianisation, through different combinations between subsistence production, commercial farming and/or wage labour (in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors) may guarantee the survival of some characteristics of the previous form of production, while permanently, or sometimes, temporarily, changing its original form (O’Laughlin, 2002). At the same time, and depending on the strategies of collective or individual resistance put forward, non-proletarianised forms of production may arise anew, as the case of the Brazilian MST Landless Movement demonstrates (Vergara-Camus, 2014). In this way, multiple configurations of (agrarian) forms of production and (agrarian) classes of capital and labour historically constitute class differentiation in rural areas (Bernstein, 2006; 2010). As O’Laughlin (2002) put it:

Proletarianisation does not necessarily imply that everyone becomes and remains a wage-worker. Capitalist economies are characterised by the continual movement of people between wage-labour, non-marketed labour (particularly in the case of women and children), self-employment and unemployment. Nor does proletarianisation have as a pre-condition the loss of land. What forced labour, and resistance to it, achieved in Mozambique was to make production of commodities a necessary part of rural livelihoods, to tie rural livelihoods to global market movements, to make labour-power a commodity that was routinely bought and sold in diverse ways, and to give those who had capital the capability to exploit (O’Laughlin, 2002, p. 516).

Like Arrighi (1970), O’Laughlin (2002) simultaneously grasped the diversity but also the specificity of proletarianisation processes in a global capitalist economy. Moreover, she questioned the theoretical trend expressed in livelihoods frameworks, using the concept of proletarianisation to “detach the concepts of livelihoods and agency from the micro-economic language of possessive individualism and strategic gaming and to reclaim them for a Marxist terrain of class struggle”. I would like to contribute to this endeavour by proposing that the concepts of livelihoods and agency should be understood in the context of the inherent conflict between capital accumulation and social reproduction, or more specifically, the reproduction of labourers and labour power (Vogel, 1983; Gimenez, 2019; Gago, 2019), which is, in another sense, an inherent conflict between social reproduction and ongoing processes of proletarianisation.

*c. Social reproduction, class differentiation, and gendered and racialised classes of labour*

Everywhere, but especially in the global South, the commodification of social reproduction is widespread but does not annihilate forms and relations of production previous to the capitalist mode of production, such as gender and kin divisions of labour. Rather, they are transformed and shaped by circuits of commodity production. In this sense, the idea that these subsistence strategies are “remnants” of “traditional” and “backward” relations of production disregards the main conditions of reproduction in non-Western countries (the “Rest”), dominated by informal economy and informalised labour (Mezzadri, 2019; 2020)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> In a different context, and put in other terms, see also Arrighi (1970), Oliveira (1972), Furtado (1974), Singer (1981) and Souza (1999). For a generalisation of the idea that the capitalist mode of production, even in “developed” countries, constantly reproduces non-capitalist forms of organising production, see Marglin (2019), Denning (2010), Palmer (2014). The notion of a surplus population, that is, Marx’s (1867) relative surplus population and industrial reserve army or Lewis’s (1954) “unlimited” supply of labour (or a supply sufficiently abundant to accommodate any demand for labour), is, at least indirectly, present in the insights of these authors.

Also, proletarianisation in the global South (O’Laughlin, 2002) does not imply complete expropriation of the means of production (for example, with regard to land in rural areas). Nevertheless, these countries are marked by deep processes of sub-proletarianisation, in the sense that increasingly scarce, informal and precarious wage labour (Pattenden, 2018), as well as limited access to productive resources (capital, land or even labour), make rural and urban livelihoods dependent on multiple, precarious and poorly-remunerated sources of income. In other words, income diversification becomes imperative for household reproduction but does not always (and in some cases rarely) adequately guarantee it (Stevano, 2017; 2023). As a result, classes of labour in the global South are composed of multiple and heterogeneous forms of production and conditions of reproduction, which represent the livelihoods of heterogeneous workers, differently positioned according to gender relations, as well as race and colonial relations, constitutive of the capitalist mode of production (Quijano, 2005; Federici, 2017a; Stevano, 2023).

For instance, women, and working-class women in particular, are expected to perform unpaid reproductive labour, which involves guaranteeing conditions of reproduction of the household, especially when relations of production are not fully commodified (O’Laughlin, 2002), although sub-proletarianisation and feminisation of precarious wage labour increasingly defy this last statement (Deere, 2006; Bryceson, 2019; Alatrística, 2019; Silva, 2009). At the same time, the artificial separation, in bourgeois society, between reproductive and productive labour, and the corresponding devaluation of the former in a market economy (Federici, 2017a; 2017b; Vogel, 1983), tend to undermine the already undermined social position of women in vastly different historical contexts. In this sense, women are usually deprived of sufficient access to land, capital and (family or waged) labour to conduct productive processes (O’Laughlin, 2002; Deere, 2003; 2017; Magalhães, 2009; Agarwal, 2018). Thus, they usually fit in the class position of “labour” in social relations of production, whether in typically capitalist forms of production – where opportunities are concentrated in precarious, informal and poorly-remunerated occupations (O’Laughlin, 2002; Deere, 2006; Stevano, 2017; 2023; Alatrística, 2019) –, in simple commodity production (Bernstein, 1988) or while performing reproductive labour:

Gibbon and Neocosmos [178,202-3] suggest that the class places of capital and labour might be distributed differentially among social categories within PCP household enterprises, and notably gender categories. That is, patriarchal heads of households may represent more the class place of capital, and women and children more the class place of labour, indicating one channel of exploitation (and possible accumulation) (Bernstein, 1988, p. 266).

From another perspective, the legacy of colonialism – regimes of exploitation underpinned by ongoing processes of dispossession and the constant reproduction of social hierarchies through colonial relations and practices – includes the racial division of labour within and between countries (Quijano, 2005), and thus social differentiation of classes of labour according to race and colonial hierarchies (Stevano, 2023). In this horizon, global and local reproduction of racism naturalises precarious, sometimes unsustainable, conditions of daily and generational reproduction in both contexts of wage dependency or wagelessness: those below the line of the human (Grosfoguel, 2016) could be exploited as a source of surplus value to capital accumulation in informal and informalised, underpaid or unpaid labour processes in blurred productive and reproductive cycles (Mezzadri, 2019; 2020; Stevano, 2023).

In sum, along the ongoing process of proletarianisation and resistance to it, classes of labour are co-constitutive of and co-constituted by gender and race relations. Notwithstanding differences in trajectories and varying consequences according to each historical context, the inherent conflict between social reproduction and capital accumulation (Vogel, 1983; Gimenez, 2019) leans on gendered and racialised bodies. In the next sections, I will investigate social relations of production and classes of labour in the Brazilian countryside, focusing on the gender and race configurations of such classes. My hypothesis is that the disregard for the practice of pluriactivity (or the reliance on income diversification) as a subsistence strategy in rural areas has resulted in a biased legal definition of family farming, to the benefit of white men.

### **3. Contextualising agrarian change in Brazil**

#### *a. Family farms, (non-)agricultural income and pluriactivity in a context of deagrarianisation of employment*

In his contribution to the debates around rising income inequality in Brazil, Paul Singer (1981) explained and presented evidence about the movements of Brazilian rural and urban classes of capital and labour, during a period of structural transformations in the economy. Regarding changes in the rural class structure, Singer (1981) argues that, between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, capitalist development reached a point when capitalist relations of production started to systematically penetrate Brazilian agriculture. For the first time, *latifúndios* (large properties dependent on labour exploited

predominantly through non-capitalist relations of production) and subsistence agriculture or “simple commodity production” (p. 159) were disputing land and markets with capitalist agriculture.

In this scenario, people at the time expected that waged workers would increase their share of participation in rural employment (Singer, 1981). Indeed, their number substantially rose between 1950 (2,308,397) and 1960 (2,983,324) (p. 158). However, between 1960 and 1970, wage labour shrank in absolute terms, and in relative terms, such a trend was a reality since 1940, when waged workers represented 39.2% of the workforce, falling to 28.2% in 1960 and 19.8% in 1970 (p. 158). Singer (1981) explains that the widespread mechanisation of agriculture<sup>35</sup> counteracted the employment potentialities of an expansion of capitalist production, resulting in the constant recreation of an idle, surplus population, with no employment opportunities within capitalist forms of production. As a result, simple commodity production and what the author calls the “family workforce” (p. 158) were constantly expanding through “the simple incorporation of natural conditions of production, that is, labour power and land”, with little or no capital accumulation involved (Singer, 1981, p. 152)<sup>36</sup>.

Capitalist agriculture, thus, reinforced the existence of “pre-capitalist forms” of production (p. 150) in the countryside of Brazil, and those of the “agrarian reserve army” which were not compelled by rural exodus were subject to a process of *minifundiarização* (Singer, 1981, p. 163): Between 1960 and 1970, people employed in (increasingly far away from urban centres) small land holdings with less than 10 hectares raised from 4,820,738 to 7,129,803. As the author points out, the vast extension of the Brazilian territory enables the reproduction of the conditions of existence of simple commodity producers. Therefore, the “increasing polarisation between a capitalist and a subsistence agriculture, both expanding” (Singer, 1981, p. 159), was characterised by the marginalisation and regular displacement of small farmers and peasants to lands in the frontier of colonisation.

From another perspective, already in the 1950s, the family workforce in simple commodity production regularly sold their labour power – as temporary or permanent waged workers – to complement the family income (Singer, 1981, p. 163). Such agrarian pluriactivity, or the diversification of sources of income within the agricultural sector,

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<sup>35</sup> Expressed, for instance, in the increasing number of tractors per farm, regardless of the size of the holding (Singer, 1981, pp. 160-162)

<sup>36</sup> My translation.

presented its limitations in the 1960s and the 1970s, when agricultural wage labour became increasingly scarce. In the following decades, given the pace of deagrarianisation in rural sights, this type of pluriactivity was progressively replaced by intersectoral pluriactivity, that is, employment in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

In the 1990s, the emergence of new occupations in the countryside<sup>37</sup> of Brazil and the increasing integration between urban and rural areas reinforced the practice of pluriactivity among rural households (Silva, 2009; Schneider et al., 2010; Ploeg et al., 2012; Escher et al., 2014; Sakamoto et al., 2016; Del Grossi et al., 2022). The increasing weight of non-agricultural activities contributed to the stability – or even the growth, between 1996 and 1999 – of the rural population, notwithstanding the progressive reduction in the total number of people occupied in agriculture. According to the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD, or *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*) for 1999, almost a third of the economically active rural population – 4.6 million of 15 million – was occupied in non-agricultural employments (Graziano da Silva, 2001).

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was characterised by a steep increase in agricultural and livestock production and total cultivated area in the Brazilian territory, given the boom in external demand for agricultural commodities. In this context, deagrarianisation of employment was, arguably, promoted by the reprimarisation of the economy: the modernising bias of public policies toward agrarian development, as well as strategies implemented by agents involved with agribusiness (Escher, 2020; Guanziroli et al., 2013; Aquino et al., 2018), led to the adoption of labour-saving techniques, technologies and inputs which promoted land concentration (Garcia-Arias et al., 2021), and especially, market and capital concentration (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017a). As a consequence, between 2004 and 2015, PNAD registered a reduction of 4,3 million in the total of people occupied in agriculture<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, between the first quarter of 2012 and the first quarter of 2017, PNADc (Quarterly National Household Sample Survey) registered a fall of 1,6 million in agricultural occupation (Silveira, 2017). Young people and women were disproportionately affected<sup>39</sup>, which reinforces the long-identified trend (Abramovay;

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<sup>37</sup> Activities related to tourism, leisure, nature preservation, as well as occupations associated with agroindustry, industrial decentralisation and the proliferation of commercialisation networks, all of which have been dynamising the rural economy and the labour market (Graziano da Silva, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Along the same line, between 2004 and 2015, the number of people living in exclusively agricultural households has fallen from 25.4 million to 17.4 million, in contrast to the stability and the growth of pluriactive and non-agricultural households, respectively (Silveira, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Besides young people and women, the ones mainly affected by this competitive process of capital intensification in farms were, on the one side, informal wage workers and non-remunerated auxiliary family

Camarano, 1999) toward the masculinisation and aging of rural dwellers and people occupied in agricultural activities (Balsadi; Del Grossi, 2016; Silveira, 2017).

Still, we should not overestimate the pace of deagrarianisation for the Brazilian rural population. In this regard, contrary to the prospect that, in 2014, non-agricultural occupations would employ the majority of rural residents (Graziano da Silva, 2001), in 2015, “only” 36% of the rural occupied population was employed in non-agricultural activities (Silveira, 2017). More recently, such activities indeed became predominant, employing 53% of the rural workforce (PNADc, 2022). Still, a relevant fraction of rural residents faces scarce employment opportunities in non-agricultural activities, both because of their low education level or professional qualification and their great distance to urban centres (Graziano da Silva, 2001; Sakamoto et al., 2016). In such contexts, there is a marked dependency on agricultural (farm and off-farm) activities for the sustenance of rural households, especially the most vulnerable ones.

In this sense, the significant increase, between 2004 and 2015<sup>40</sup>, in the number of people occupied in agricultural production for self-consumption draws attention (Balsadi; Del Grossi, 2016). This is not an isolated phenomenon: in 1999, there was a reversal of the downward trend in agricultural occupation, and Graziano da Silva (2001) relates such a fact to the “resumption of subsistence production” (p. 44).

Hence, if both agricultural and non-agricultural – as well as farm and off-farm – occupations are indispensable for rural households’ social reproduction, then pluriactivity, an old strategy of the countryside population constantly renewed in the capitalist mode of production, becomes a usual practice that sustains and transforms rural classes of labour. It helps to reduce rural poverty and demographic pressures on urban centres, guaranteeing an increase in the total income of rural families and their permanence in rural sites. Besides, pluriactivity is a source of financial stability and food security, since non-agricultural income protects families from the uncertainties inherent to agricultural activities<sup>41</sup>, which, in turn, are an important resource in moments of low dynamism of the

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workers, and on the other side, employers and, to a lesser extent, own account workers (Balsadi; Del Grossi, 2016; Silveira, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Between 2004 and 2014, this category of occupation received an influx of almost 1 million workers, especially in the Northeast. Between 2014 and 2015, however, there was a significant fall in the number of people occupied in this activity, which resulted in an increase, between 2004 and 2015, of 255 thousand people in the number of agricultural producers for self-consumption (Balsadi; Del Grossi, 2016). Unfortunately, the Quarterly National Household Sample Survey, which replaced the (Annual) National Household Sample Survey, does not disclose information about this production for self-consumption, which creates an obstacle to monitoring the current trends of this economic activity (Silveira, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> As we know, agricultural production is constantly subject to crop failures and price volatility.



labour market. In particular, agricultural production for self-consumption is a strategy to fight hunger when (temporary or long-lasting) unemployment menaces family subsistence.

With respect to the latter, however, it is essential to recognise the role of social protection policies – pensions and income transfers to poor households such as *Bolsa Família* – in complementing many families' income sources. Frequently, these policies are even the main source of monetary resources for some households, guaranteeing their permanence in the countryside (Graziano da Silva, 2001; Silveira, 2017). In the same sense, before its extinction<sup>42</sup>, in 2016, the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) promoted a series of relevant policies aimed at small and family farmers (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Pahnke et al., 2015; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b; Escher, 2020). In the next subsection, I will explore this topic.

*b. Public policies and agrarian development during the Brazilian pink tide*

The PT governments of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff can be understood as an expression of a historical period when, given more than a decade of neoliberal policies and the redefinition of the global dynamics between capital accumulation and national States, re-democratisation and social welfare politics gained prominence in Latin American countries. As a result, this brief period when Brazil was able to build and sustain some of the fundamental pillars of the “Welfare State” was embedded in a much longer period when neoliberalism particularly constrained and conditioned State policies. For the countryside of Brazil, this meant a contradictory set of policies aimed at agrarian and social development, on the one hand, and agricultural modernisation with capital, market and land concentration, on the other (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b; Escher, 2020).

Still, popular rural movements were, for the first time, demanding and partially succeeding in their struggle for rights (Schneider, 2003; Deere, 2003; 2017; Guanziroli et al., 2013; Pahnke et al., 2015; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017a; 2017b; Escher, 2020). In fact, Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017b) argue that Brazilian’s left-wing governments were, in Latin America, the ones that supported family farmers the most: “no other country, not even Argentina, comes close to Brazil in the disbursement of funding to family farmers”. (p. 423). In this horizon, important policy measures of at least four types were

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<sup>42</sup> The MDA was recently recreated after Lula’s reelection in 2022.

implemented: “credit schemes for agricultural production, linking family producers to a commodity chain, the creation of privileged or protected markets, and the institutionalisation of family farming within the state” (p. 423).

The first type, credit for financing production, investing in the improvement of infrastructure and productivity, and generating new sources of income, was undertaken mainly through PRONAF, the National Programme for the Strengthening of Family Farming (*Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar*). Inaugurated during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) government, PRONAF was broadened, in terms of total budget<sup>43</sup> and types of agricultural activity funded, during the PT governments (Sauer et al., 2017; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b). Despite the indisputable merits of the programme, which granted access to credit for small and medium farmers for the first time in history, it still benefitted only a privileged fraction of family farmers, in particular, those more capable of integrating into agribusiness commodity chains (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b; Aquino et al., 2018). Policymakers tried to overcome structural barriers related to the diversity of the material and social conditions of family farmers, but the adoption of conventional tools afforded them little success:

Created by Cardoso’s government in 1996, PRONAF loans were initially implemented only as a crop credit line for family farms, with more than 80% of loans made in southern Brazil. After 2003, however, the MDA tried to redress the regional imbalance by creating more credit lines, such as PRONAF Forest, PRONAF semi-arid, and PRONAF Agroecology, as well as credit for rural women and youth. These were intended to meet the diversity of family farming, supporting production and generating income (Aquino & Schneider, 2015). Notwithstanding these efforts at greater diversification and inclusion, the fact remained that significant portions of family farmers, around two thirds, were left without access to credit (Mattei, 2012). In large part, this was because PRONAF was implemented through regular bank contracts. Thus, those who failed to meet its loan conditions (for instance, giving the bank sufficient risk guarantees or having a proper project designed by a technician or agronomist) were disqualified (Aquino & Schneider, 2015) (Sauer et al., 2017, p. 405).

The second type of policy is an expression of the modernisation bias of agrarian policies in left-wing governments, as well as the influence of institutions such as the World Bank, which “has been calling for this type of state intervention since its World Development Report 2008, entitled *Agriculture for development*, if not earlier” (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b, p. 424). PNPB, or the National Programme of Production and Use of Biodiesel (*Programa Nacional de Produção e Uso de Biodiesel*) is perhaps the plainest

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<sup>43</sup> “The amount allocated to the Family Farming Cropping Plan rose from R\$2.3 billion (US\$640 million) in 2003 to R\$10 billion (US\$ 4.8 billion) in 2007, R\$15 billion (US\$ 8.9 billion) in 2011, and R\$28.9 billion (US\$ 7.2 billion) for 2015/16 (MDA, 2015), mostly allocated to PRONAF (mainly credit for production)” (Sauer et al., 2017, p. 405).

example of the attempt to link family farmers to commodity chains during the PT administrations. However, instead of increasing family producers' capabilities and resources, the programme has deepened their subordination to large agribusiness corporations (Fernandes; Welch; Gonçalves, 2010 *apud* Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b).

The creation of protected, nested or structured markets, or the third type of support policy usually<sup>44</sup> employed by left-wing Latin American governments, is exemplified, in Brazil, by two important public procurement programmes: PNAE, the National School Meals Programme (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*), which, since 2009, requires municipalities to purchase at least 30% of the food for school meals from family farmers<sup>45</sup>; and PAA, the Food Procurement Programme (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos*), also aimed at encouraging the purchase of food from family producers by state institutions (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b). The programmes must be recognised for their potential to guarantee a secure source of demand for family farmers' produce, making them less vulnerable to market fluctuations. Their reach, however, is still limited<sup>46</sup>, especially after the overall weakening of public policies during the rightist turn.

Finally, a fourth type of policy, which, in effect, conditions all the other types, is the institutionalisation of the category of family farming and the creation of, or increase in funding for, state institutions trusted with the goal of promoting the former's development. In this regard, Brazil is an exception, for it was the only Latin American country that had created such institutions before left-wing governments took office (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b): the Ministry of Agrarian Development, with a Department of Family Farming, was created in 1999 (Guanziroli et al., 2013). Even so, only in 2006 was the legal concept of family farming institutionalised by Law 11.326, which reinforced the recognition of family farmers as relevant political actors and legitimate beneficiaries of public policy (Guanziroli et al., 2013; Escher, 2020). I will return to this topic in the next section, but first, it is important to mention some other relevant public policies targeted more broadly at rural development during this period.

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<sup>44</sup> In this case, only three countries resorted to this type of policy: Brazil, Venezuela and Ecuador (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b).

<sup>45</sup> Most municipalities, however, have not yet achieved the 30% mark (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b). Law 11.947/2009 liberates them from this minimum percentage if the "regular and constant supply of foodstuffs" by family farms is "unfeasible" (article 14, my translation).

<sup>46</sup> For instance, PNAE was given "a budget of 3.8 billion reais (US\$1.15 billion) in 2014, of which 1.14 billion reais (US\$340 million) was reserved for the direct purchase of family farming products" (Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b, p. 424).

As a result of pressures from landless movements – in particular, MST or *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* – agrarian reform went back to the public policy agenda in the 1990s. The Itamar Franco’s government created the Emergency Settlement Programme in 1993 (Guanzirolu et al., 2013), and by 1999, during the FHC administration, 475,801 settled families, holding almost 23 million hectares of land, benefitted from agrarian reform (Deere, 2003). During Lula’s government, at least 422,808 families were beneficiaries. Although the pace of agrarian reform significantly dropped during the first term of Dilma Rousseff’s government, her administration focused on improving the conditions and agricultural performance of already established settlements (Deere, 2017). In any case, land reform in these governments was far from meeting landless movements’ needs and demands. Overall, they failed to tackle structural inequalities and left the acute levels of land concentration virtually unchanged (Sauer et al., 2017; Vergara-Camus; Kay, 2017b).

Still, for a period, agrarian reform changed and improved the livelihoods of many rural families. This and other policies aimed at rural development (Guanzirolu et al., 2013; Grisa, 2018b), such as policy measures to expand the countryside population’s access to water (Cistern Program-P1MC or *Programa de um milhão de cisternas, Programa Uma Terra Duas Águas (P1+2)*), electricity (Electricity for All), land (PNCF, or the National Land Credit Programme) and shelter (PNHR, *Programa Nacional de Habitação Rural*)<sup>47</sup>, to reduce rural poverty (PCPR, or *Programa de Combate a Pobreza Rural*), and to improve rural infrastructure (*Programa de Apoio à Infraestrutura nos Territórios rurais, Proinf*), transformed rural livelihoods and, in particular, albeit heterogeneously, family farmers’ conditions of reproduction, strengthening their resistance capacity. The expansion of access to electricity is illustrative:

The strongest growth was in the use of electricity, which has been boosted since the 1990s by a series of government programs, especially in the Northeast and mostly in the context of social welfare policies unlinked to production strategies. The use of mechanical traction increased and the proportion relying entirely on manual traction decreased, although it remained high (31 percent). Mechanization was encouraged both by loans from BNDES (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social), the national development bank, under the MODERFROTA Program (Programa de Modernização da Frota de Tratores Agrícolas), which finances purchases of tractors, combines and farm machinery, and by PRONAF (Guanzirolu et al., 2013, p. 831).

Another related feature of public policies in rural areas at the beginning of this century was the promotion, demanded by social movements such as the “Daisy March” (*Marcha das Margaridas*) in 2000, of gender equality policies (Deere, 2003; 2017). One

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<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that this housing programme was aimed at family farmers.

of the most important measures was the establishment, in 2003, of mandatory joint adjudication to couples in the distribution of agrarian reform land<sup>48</sup>. Also, in 2007, the Ministry of Agrarian Development determined the priority of female-headed households as beneficiaries of agrarian reform<sup>49</sup>. Another relevant policy, with broad implications, was a program (*Programa Nacional de Documentação da Trabalhadora Rural*, PNDTR) that promoted access to identity cards and other official documents, benefiting 1.35 million rural women between 2004 and 2014.

The above policies enhanced women's access to land, which is evidenced by the significant increase, in absolute and relative terms, in the female management of farms between the Agricultural and Livestock Censuses of 2006 and 2017: from 13.8% to 19.8% of family farms, and from 6.9% to 15.1% of non-family farms. The enormous rise in the number of producers whose legal condition is classified as “condominium, consortium or society of people (including couples, when both are responsible for management)” demonstrates the importance of joint adjudication to couples.

*c. Pluriactivity and the legal concept of family farming in Brazil*

Pluriactivity is a complex and multifaceted concept, flexible to alternative definitions, depending on the purpose of the research and, in the case of empirical investigations, on data availability (Schneider, 2009 *apud* Sakamoto et al., 2016). There are at least three types of pluriactivity, according to the economic activities guaranteeing the reproduction of the family or productive unit (Escher et al., 2014, p. 649): (i) *intersectoral pluriactivity*, associated with the rising integration between economic sectors, as well as urban and rural spaces. In this sense, it is often related to industrial decentralisation or the expansion of peripheries in metropolitan areas, articulated with the intensification of the commuting flow. Tourism and other services and products consumed by urban residents are also flourishing sources of employment for rural dwellers; (ii) *agrarian pluriactivity*, which involves a combination of activities within the agricultural and livestock sector, such as agricultural production for commercialisation and/or subsistence, complemented by income from agricultural wage labour<sup>50</sup>; (iii) *traditional pluriactivity*, related to different cultural practices of peasants, indigenous communities,

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<sup>48</sup> Administrative Resolution n° 981/2003.

<sup>49</sup> Normative Instruction INCRA n° 38/2007.

<sup>50</sup> Another somewhat different type of agrarian pluriactivity is the combination of agricultural production with activities that process and transform it for sale or self-consumption. We are referring to family farming agroindustry, which, from the perspective of the production processes involved, may also be classified as intersectoral pluriactivity (Sakamoto et al., 2016).

quilombos, and other traditional communities frequently menaced by agricultural modernisation processes (Grisa, 2018a), in contrast to the other types of pluriactivity.

In light of these distinctions, many are the determinants involved, as well as the subjects putting in practice reproduction strategies related to pluriactivity (Sakamoto et al., 2016). A pluriactive family might be composed of highly qualified family members with a comfortable financial situation. In contrast, another family might resort to pluriactivity to escape the line of extreme poverty, while food and money deprivation are a true menace. In this horizon, it is reasonable to expect that the concept of family farming takes into consideration this multiplicity of scenarios and experiences since it is precisely family farmers that employ income diversification strategies through the combination of farm and off-farm activity, as well as agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Nevertheless, the legal concept of family farmers has excluded from its framework a significant share of pluriactive families (Del Grossi et al., 2022), to the detriment of their access to targeted public policies such as PRONAF, PNAE and PAA. Law 11.326/2006, article 3<sup>rd</sup>, defines a family farm as one which<sup>51</sup>:

- I – does not possess, in any capacity, an area larger than 4 (four) fiscal modules;
- II – predominantly uses the family workforce in the economic activities of the farm or enterprise;
- ~~III – has family income predominantly obtained from economic activities related to the farm or enterprise; (revoked by Law 12.512/2011)~~
- III – has a minimum percentage of family income obtained from economic activities related to the farm or enterprise, in the form defined by the Executive Power; (Law 12.512/2011)
- IV – manages the farm or the enterprise with the family.

Note that the exclusion of many pluriactive families by item III, which significantly constrained family farmers' possible strategies of income diversification, could have been remedied, after 2011, by Law 12.512, which could have given more flexibility to the normative, depending on the choices made by the Executive Power. Unfortunately, Decree 9.064, which regulated the Family Farming Law in 2017, did not attenuate the rigidity of the income criterion, still requiring that at least half of the family income came from sources related to the farm. This notorious discrepancy between the legal framework and the concrete experience of family farming is expressed in the last Agricultural and Livestock Censuses: there is evidence that a significant number of pluriactive farmers have been included in the category of non-family farmers because they do not attend income criterion (Escher et al., 2014).

Using PNAD (Annual National Household Sample Survey) data from 2006 to 2015, Del Grossi et al. (2022, p. 12, Table 3) reveal that 96.3% of families of self-

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<sup>51</sup> My translation.

employed workers<sup>52</sup> excluded from the legal concept of family farming in 2015 had pluriactivity as a subsistence strategy, and an increasing fraction – on that year, 90.4% – depended on intersectoral pluriactivity. Conversely, families self-employed in agricultural commercial production and legally recognised as family farms are increasingly agrarian: in 2015, the authors classified only 14.8% of those families as pluriactive.

In view of the above, it is indisputable that family farms in Brazil, in its historical, social, economic and political sense, are facing a dilemma that stems from the legal definition of family farming (Del Grossi et al., 2022): each family will have to deal with the trade-off between, on the one hand, resorting to pluriactivity to increase household income (Sakamoto et al., 2016), reduce financial instabilities and protect or improve farm production with off-farm earnings (Schneider, 2003; Schneider et al., 2010; Ploeg et al., 2012) or, on the other hand, to restrain the family's array of reproduction strategies to simple commodity production in a “pure” sense (Friedmann, 1978a; 1978b) in order to gain access to policy measures targeted at family farms, such as subsidised credit via PRONAF.

Evidence suggests that the Brazilian institutional framework (not only the legal concept of family farming but agrarian development policies in a broader sense) constantly repositions social practices and their strategical role in the reproduction of rural families, with consequences to the dynamics and the structure of rural classes of capital and labour. In what follows, I show that such classes are articulated with race and gender relations and that women and black people – hence, black women in particular – are overrepresented in classes of labour marked by a higher degree of proletarianisation (that is, expropriation of the means of production) and/or by a smaller degree of commodification of social (relations of) reproduction. In this sense, pluriactivity, especially when it involves off-farm and non-agricultural activities, has proven to be a relevant condition of reproduction for many households headed by women and black people.

#### **4. Methodology**

The meaning of pluriactivity depends on the choice of the unit of analysis (Sakamoto et al., 2016). Possible questions change whether we look for pluriactivity in

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<sup>52</sup> Families with no members occupied in the position of employers and at least one member occupied as a self-employed worker.

family units<sup>53</sup>, productive units or individuals<sup>54</sup>. Here, I explore mainly the concept of pluriactivity of the family unit because it is not only convenient from the point of view of data availability, but it also captures the notion of pluriactivity as a family strategy of social reproduction, therefore, involving non-capitalist relations of production, such as kinship relations that defy the idea of a full absorption by market relations. At the same time, the productive unit, or more specifically, farm units, is also the focus of this study when the source of empirical information is the Agricultural and Livestock Census.

The use of two distinct datasets, the Agricultural and Livestock Census and the Quarterly National Household Sample Survey (PNADc), both conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), is justified by the concern for assembling the maximum number of evidence. For the former, I follow the official categories of IBGE, which, on the one hand, sharpens the precision of the statistics produced and, on the other, imposes a certain rigidity on the investigation, since the investigation is aimed at classes of labour more generally, not only family and non-family farmers.

In turn, PNADc presents microdata at the household level, with no detailed information on agricultural farms. Despite shortcomings, this confers more flexibility to the analysis of non-official social categories, since reproduction strategies are decided and practiced at the level of the family. I apply a methodology for identifying (approximately) official and non-official categories of interest. In this sense, after a brief comparison between rural and urban occupations and labour market specificities, I select rural families with at least one member occupied in agricultural activity for a more detailed and focused investigation.

Using an adaptation of the methodology applied by Del Grossi et al. (2022), I combine three types of classification to construct the main categories of interest: the first considers the position in occupation of members of each family unit: families of employers, own-account (self-employed) workers, employees or auxiliary family workers; the second considers the inclusion or exclusion of the units from the social

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<sup>53</sup> A broader understanding of pluriactivity also concerns families that do not live in the same house or even homestead but share a strategy of reproduction corporified in the family budget and, frequently, in the land plot cultivated by the family (a source of food security for migrant labour). For example, in Mozambique, “rural households had members both farming and using remittances to invest in cattle, implements and housing, to hire labour, to purchase food and to pay school and health fees” (O’Laughlin, 2002, p. 525).

<sup>54</sup> Alatriza (2019), in a sense, studies the effects of individual pluriactivity on rural women in Peru. The author investigates the increasing entry of rural women into the labour market and employment in non-agricultural activities. Although beneficial to their independence as it increased their access to monetary resources, pluriactivity was also responsible for their time scarcity, given these women’s double or triple labour journey: wage labour, domestic labour and, frequently, farming on the family plot.



and/or legal concept of family farming (non-family farm households, social family farms, legal family farms); the third classifies families with respect to the practice of pluriactivity (exclusively agrarian, agrarian pluriactivity and intersectoral pluriactivity).

Following Del Grossi et al. (2022), families of employers have at least one member occupied in the position of an employer; families of self-employed workers have at least one member occupied in the position of a self-employed worker, and none occupied in the position of an employer; families of employees have no member in the position of an employer or self-employed worker, and at least one member occupied as an employee; finally, families of auxiliary workers have not a single member occupied in the position of an employer, self-employed worker or employee, but have at least one auxiliary family worker. Since the focus of the analysis is the dynamics and structure of classes of labour, families of employers are excluded from the investigation, in contrast to the methodology applied by Del Grossi et al. (2022).

I rely on two criteria to define agricultural units as non-family, social, and legal family units. The first is the selection of families with at least one member engaged with production of agricultural goods for self-consumption or employed as a self-employed (own-account) worker in the agricultural and livestock sector. This criterion estimates farm units through the PNADc dataset, excluding, however, families of employers. In this way, the legal criteria of items II and IV of article 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Family Farming Law are automatically verified since employee, self-employed, and auxiliary worker families *i*) do not hire wage workers and, therefore, predominantly use family labour in the economic activities of the farm; and *ii*) they do not hire an external manager. It is possible to argue that this criterion also controls for the condition of item I of article 3<sup>rd</sup> because few families of the self-employed, much less families of employees or auxiliary workers, possess an area bigger than four fiscal modules, as shown by Del Grossi et al. (2022) for the former type of family, using PNAD. Unfortunately, PNADc does not disclose information on the size of the property.

The second criterion differentiates the legal definition from a social definition of family farming: households with monthly “farm” income equal to or higher than monthly “off-farm” income are classified as legal family farms (LF), whereas those which do not meet this condition but comply with the first are classified as social family farms (SF). This methodological choice is a necessary implication of one of our central arguments: that pluriactivity is a reproduction strategy largely adopted by family farmers and, hence,

off-farm income should not be a criterion of exclusion from the concept of family farms and, in particular, from the legal protection it entails.

I consider “farm” income all income from agricultural activities related to the income received by self-employed workers. By contrast, income from non-agricultural activities or income related to the remuneration of wage labourers is classified as “off-farm” income. By discriminating only between farm and off-farm income from the main (self-declared) work of each family member, I underestimate the amount of “off-farm” income, since I do not take into consideration other secondary employments and, more importantly, other sources of income. In this regard, for families of self-employed workers living in the Brazilian countryside, the average monthly income from the main occupation is R\$ 2,219.90, the average monthly income from all occupations is R\$ 2,288.30, and the average monthly income from all sources is R\$ 3,066.20 (PNADc, 2022). This inevitably increases the number of households classified as legal family farms. From another perspective, and as a counterbalance, PNADc underestimates the income from agricultural activities more than the income from non-agricultural activities, which diminishes the number of households classified as legal family farms.

For the last classification, I distinguished between exclusively agrarian and pluriactive families, practicing agrarian or intersectoral pluriactivity. Households with at least one member in agricultural activities and one member in non-agricultural activities are, evidently, embraced by intersectoral pluriactivity. Households with no members in non-agricultural activities, as well as with at least one member occupied as a self-employed worker and another wage-earning member, or one member as a self-employed worker or employee, and one member engaged with agricultural production for self-consumption, are grounded on agrarian pluriactivity. Households that do not fit the former conditions are considered exclusively agrarian. Again, I focused on the main occupation of each member, underestimating both types of pluriactive families<sup>55</sup>.

The research focuses primarily on the period between 2017 (the year of the most recent Agricultural and Livestock Census) and 2022, but I also refer to the previous 2006 Census. For the tables that used PNADc as a data source, information was collected for the years 2016, 2019 and 2022. Finally, I chose to limit the analysis to a comparison between white and black women and men, since they represented 99.1% of rural and 98.9% of urban populations (PNADc, 2022). Therefore, considering the specific

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<sup>55</sup> Since an individual with two or more occupations is, by definition, pluriactive (as long as one of them takes place in the agricultural and livestock sector).

categories I used in the study, the sample size for yellow and indigenous populations was not large enough for a robust statistical investigation. A possible and necessary extension of this study, however, would be the inclusion of these demographic groups in the analysis.

## 5. Results

### *a. General features of rural and urban labouring populations (PNADc)*

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 present information about key variables related to rural and urban labouring populations, disaggregated by gender and race. They have a lot to say about classes of (capital<sup>56</sup> and) labour in Brazil<sup>57</sup>. First, it points out that black people represent the majority of the labouring population in both rural and urban spaces, but their relative participation is greater in the countryside. This result is expected since 65.7% of the rural population is black and 33.4% is white, whereas, for the urban population, the proportion falls to 54.1% against 44.8%. Lower average income levels accompany this overrepresentation of black people in rural areas: Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show that the average monthly income<sup>58</sup> in urban sites is higher for all the analysed categories of race/gender – white women, black women, white men, and black men. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between white men’s average monthly income and white women’s, black men’s, and especially, black women’s average monthly income is surprisingly larger in rural areas: respectively, 1.39, 1.84 and 2.27 times the average monthly income of these demographic groups, and 1.35, 1.66 and 2.15 times the average monthly income in the urban scenario (PNADc, 2022).

Additionally, although smaller than urban white men’s workforce participation rate (72.6%), rural white men’s workforce participation rate (67.4%) is much higher and their unemployment rate (3.7%) is much lower than the respective rates for rural black men (64%, 7.1%), white women (39.3%, 6.1%) and black women (32.9%, 12.5%). Note

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<sup>56</sup> The idea is that, even within classes of labour, some labourers are more capitalised than others. This is particularly true for simple commodity producers, who combine family labour with ownership of capital.

<sup>57</sup> Before digging into this direction, I would like to present some observed trends: between 2019 and 2022, in urban and rural areas, both the unemployment and workforce participation rates have fallen, whereas *Bolsa Família* participation rate (the proportion of people receiving the income transfer benefit aimed at protecting poor and vulnerable families) has risen. This phenomenon is intimately related to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the correlated mass unemployment or withdrawal of many people from the labour market.

<sup>58</sup> Income from all employments, excluding other sources such as rentier income and social transfers. Note that the former’s exclusion from the present analysis underestimates inequality, while the latter’s exclusion overestimates it.

that white men's participation rate is more than twice as large as, and their unemployment rate, less than one-third of, black women's respective rates, a discrepancy not present in the urban scenario, at least not to that degree. Hence, Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show that the polarisation between classes of labour in rural sights – capitalised white men on one extreme and dispossessed black women on the other – is even more pronounced than in urban spaces, which is surprising, given the higher average income of urban dwellers. From another perspective, I would like to highlight that rural women have a workforce participation rate significantly lower than urban white (55.4%) and black (54.5%) women, even considering only people under 65 years old (PNADc, 2022). Two things may be behind this result.

Table 1.1 - Key variables for rural and urban labouring populations, by gender (white people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	White women			White men		
	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022
<b>Rural</b>						
In the workforce	1,603,140	1,536,736	1,457,030	2,971,443	2,756,677	2,738,310
Outside the workforce	2,155,438	2,050,836	2,247,768	1,081,946	1,111,596	1,326,435
Workforce participation rate	42.7%	42.8%	39.3%	73.3%	71.3%	67.4%
In the workforce (under 65)	1,577,035	1,501,712	1,410,448	2,846,319	2,608,346	2,587,628
Outside the workforce (under 65)	1,733,813	1,601,596	1,689,009	735,667	750,052	840,959
Workforce participation rate (under 65)	47.6%	48.4%	45.5%	79.5%	77.7%	75.5%
Employed population	1,470,114	1,381,052	1,367,424	2,823,235	2,616,424	2,636,019
Unemployed population	133,027	155,684	89,606	148,208	140,252	102,292
Unemployment rate	8.3%	10.1%	6.1%	5.0%	5.1%	3.7%
Average monthly income*	R\$ 1,614.15	R\$ 1,713.79	R\$ 1,737.01	R\$ 2,168.85	R\$ 2,121.46	R\$ 2,417.05
<i>Bolsa Família</i> participation rate	11.4%	11.5%	12.6%	1.1%	1.0%	1.8%
<b>Urban</b>						
In the workforce	19,238,244	19,566,010	19,984,879	22,682,380	22,166,822	22,758,809
Outside the workforce	15,632,977	14,639,868	16,073,023	7,765,201	7,685,528	8,597,015
Workforce participation rate	55.2%	57.2%	55.4%	74.5%	74.3%	72.6%
In the workforce (under 65)	18,894,751	19,121,971	19,521,247	22,045,720	21,350,925	21,990,478
Outside the workforce (under 65)	11,339,033	10,141,224	10,842,574	5,324,969	5,132,725	5,457,206
Workforce participation rate (under 65)	62.5%	65.3%	64.3%	80.5%	80.6%	80.1%
Employed population	17,103,776	17,266,044	18,100,677	20,734,393	20,235,163	21,252,365
Unemployed population	2,134,468	2,299,966	1,884,201	1,947,988	1,931,658	1,506,444
Unemployment rate	11.1%	11.8%	9.4%	8.6%	8.7%	6.6%
Average monthly income*	R\$ 2,935.63	R\$ 3,117.03	R\$ 2,928.67	R\$ 4,036.50	R\$ 4,258.03	R\$ 3,958.07
<i>Bolsa Família</i> participation rate	3.3%	2.9%	4.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%

\* Income from all employments. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022). Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

First, for several reasons, there is usually a sub-notification of non-remunerated agricultural and non-agricultural activities to the detriment of an adequate register of female occupations (Deere, 2006; Singer, 1981). In the case of PNADc, this means the possible underestimation of the “auxiliary family workers” category in rural areas. This is, for sure, one of the expressions of the artificial separation between the so-called productive and reproductive spheres, with the corresponding devaluation and

invisibilisation of the latter (Federici, 2017a; 2017b; Vogel, 1983). Thus, the blurred division between productive and reproductive labour time in actual labour processes (Stevano, 2023; Mezzadri, 2019) confounds official statistics, limiting their capacity to grasp female participation in economic activities.

But taking data evidence seriously, the second explanation could be associated with the overall absence of job or enterprise opportunities for rural women, especially black women, since agricultural activities are highly masculinised. Abramovay and Camarano (1999) have already demonstrated the continuous masculinisation of rural life since the 1960s in Brazil.

Table 1.2 - Key variables for rural and urban labouring populations, by gender (black people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	Black women			Black men		
	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022
<b>Rural</b>						
In the workforce	2,568,283	2,572,245	2,347,102	5,530,408	5,251,120	5,042,680
Outside the workforce	4,665,596	4,881,454	4,780,974	2,440,668	2,945,549	2,838,726
Workforce participation rate	35.5%	34.5%	32.9%	69.4%	64.1%	64.0%
In the workforce (under 65)	2,536,492	2,529,520	2,306,510	5,367,135	5,078,195	4,872,707
Outside the workforce (under 65)	4,033,470	4,168,650	4,064,058	1,875,262	2,273,433	2,139,897
Workforce participation rate (under 65)	38.6%	37.8%	36.2%	74.1%	69.1%	69.5%
Employed population	2,227,060	2,141,699	2,052,928	5,088,659	4,712,603	4,685,323
Unemployed population	341,223	430,546	294,174	441,748	538,517	357,358
Unemployment rate	13.3%	16.7%	12.5%	8.0%	10.3%	7.1%
Average monthly income*	R\$ 989.91	R\$ 1,037.37	R\$ 1,065.94	R\$ 1,173.04	R\$ 1,253.18	R\$ 1,311.29
<i>Bolsa Família</i> participation rate	23.5%	23.0%	26.2%	2.3%	2.2%	3.3%
<b>Urban</b>						
In the workforce	20,299,871	22,762,196	22,677,495	26,435,234	28,810,503	29,115,143
Outside the workforce	17,255,868	18,030,770	18,935,598	9,222,810	9,842,104	10,494,855
Workforce participation rate	54.1%	55.8%	54.5%	74.1%	74.5%	73.5%
In the workforce (under 65)	20,070,304	22,416,305	22,361,096	25,988,967	28,236,569	28,533,939
Outside the workforce (under 65)	14,127,916	14,245,351	14,669,042	7,084,859	7,399,330	7,696,804
Workforce participation rate (under 65)	58.7%	61.1%	60.4%	78.6%	79.2%	78.8%
Employed population	16,985,086	18,825,673	19,459,321	23,160,113	25,145,373	26,397,002
Unemployed population	3,314,785	3,936,524	3,218,174	3,275,120	3,665,130	2,718,142
Unemployment rate	16.3%	17.3%	14.2%	12.4%	12.7%	9.3%
Average monthly income*	R\$ 1,765.88	R\$ 1,878.77	R\$ 1,845.57	R\$ 2,341.00	R\$ 2,412.03	R\$ 2,386.84
<i>Bolsa Família</i> participation rate	9.6%	9.2%	12.2%	0.7%	0.9%	1.5%

\* Income from all employments. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022). Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Indeed, female participation in agricultural activities is considerably smaller than male participation. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show that, on this point, the greater discrepancy is between rural black men and rural black women: while 62% of employed rural black men work in the agricultural and livestock sector, only 33.2% of employed rural black women find occupation in this sector. The discrepancy between rural white men (59.9%) and women (41.1%) is also significant (PNADc, 2022). Services in both urban and rural areas

are the main source of female occupation. Then, for rural women in particular, off-farm activities are a relevant source of employment, especially if we consider that, in their case, farm activities are usually non-remunerated. This evidence corroborates the hypothesis that women have in pluriactivity an important strategy of resistance (Silva, 2009), not only to guarantee the reproduction of their families but also to increase their financial autonomy in relation to men (husbands, fathers and brothers).

Table 2.1 - Rural and urban occupied population by economic sector, by gender (white people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	White women						White men					
	2016		2019		2022		2016		2019		2022	
<b>Rural</b>												
Agriculture and livestock	561,622	38.2%	532,721	38.6%	561,540	41.1%	1,693,767	60.0%	1,565,060	59.8%	1,578,578	59.9%
Non-agricultural sectors	908,491	61.8%	848,331	61.4%	805,884	58.9%	1,129,468	40.0%	1,051,365	40.2%	1,057,440	40.1%
Industry	162,740	11.1%	143,127	10.4%	148,587	10.9%	283,643	10.0%	255,214	9.8%	257,908	9.8%
Construction	4,569	0.3%	5,642	0.4%	1,347	0.1%	206,283	7.3%	170,033	6.5%	186,785	7.1%
Transport and trade	160,854	10.9%	151,823	11.0%	152,547	11.2%	320,568	11.4%	311,417	11.9%	290,752	11.0%
Education, health and social services	204,901	13.9%	189,034	13.7%	181,527	13.3%	47,201	1.7%	45,119	1.7%	54,194	2.1%
Domestic services	181,458	12.3%	176,064	12.7%	156,242	11.4%	56,823	2.0%	54,515	2.1%	72,627	2.8%
Other services	193,969	13.2%	182,510	13.2%	165,633	12.1%	214,532	7.6%	214,267	8.2%	194,698	7.4%
Poorly-defined activities	-	-	130	0.0%	-	-	419	0.0%	799	0.0%	476	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,470,114</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,381,052</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,367,424</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,823,235</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,616,424</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,636,019</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Urban</b>												
Agriculture and livestock	172,637	1.0%	149,403	0.9%	158,432	0.9%	903,092	4.4%	809,040	4.0%	861,972	4.1%
Non-agricultural sectors	16,931,139	99.0%	17,116,641	99.1%	17,942,246	99.1%	19,831,301	95.6%	19,426,123	96.0%	20,390,393	95.9%
Industry	1,993,293	11.7%	1,919,670	11.1%	1,930,973	10.7%	3,676,579	17.7%	3,498,434	17.3%	3,546,301	16.7%
Construction	143,050	0.8%	125,013	0.7%	159,536	0.9%	2,241,314	10.8%	2,042,774	10.1%	2,124,869	10.0%
Transport and trade	3,657,298	21.4%	3,761,580	21.8%	3,700,825	20.4%	6,299,679	30.4%	5,998,256	29.6%	6,402,727	30.1%
Education, health and social services	3,862,197	22.6%	4,001,854	23.2%	4,280,154	23.6%	1,274,957	6.1%	1,400,985	6.9%	1,557,018	7.3%
Domestic services	1,798,734	10.5%	1,662,122	9.6%	1,555,598	8.6%	107,648	0.5%	98,143	0.5%	99,415	0.5%
Other services	5,474,734	32.0%	5,642,114	32.7%	6,311,505	34.9%	6,225,978	30.0%	6,376,674	31.5%	6,649,002	31.3%
Poorly-defined activities	1,835	0.0%	4,288	0.0%	3,655	0.0%	5,147	0.0%	10,858	0.1%	11,061	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,103,776</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>17,266,044</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>18,100,677</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>20,734,393</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>20,235,163</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>21,252,365</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 2.2 - Rural and urban occupied population by economic sector, by gender (black people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	Black women						Black men					
	2016		2019		2022		2016		2019		2022	
<b>Rural</b>												
Agriculture and livestock	767,117	34.4%	648,990	30.3%	682,518	33.2%	3,169,872	62.3%	2,765,316	58.7%	2,904,551	62.0%
Non-agricultural sectors	1,459,943	65.6%	1,492,709	69.7%	1,370,410	66.8%	1,918,788	37.7%	1,947,288	41.3%	1,780,772	38.0%
Industry	190,787	8.6%	195,995	9.2%	176,378	8.6%	419,399	8.2%	377,404	8.0%	365,179	7.8%
Construction	4,740	0.2%	3,285	0.2%	5,489	0.3%	456,089	9.0%	399,637	8.5%	397,711	8.5%
Transport and trade	262,415	11.8%	272,699	12.7%	231,880	11.3%	521,941	10.3%	553,971	11.8%	456,684	9.7%
Education, health and social services	340,257	15.3%	329,042	15.4%	327,774	16.0%	104,210	2.0%	121,809	2.6%	114,031	2.4%
Domestic services	383,422	17.2%	376,915	17.6%	364,403	17.8%	107,573	2.1%	114,693	2.4%	118,373	2.5%
Other services	278,322	12.5%	314,773	14.7%	264,402	12.9%	309,576	6.1%	377,809	8.0%	328,409	7.0%
Poorly-defined activities	-	-	-	-	85	0	-	-	1,964	0.0%	384	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227,060</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,141,699</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2,052,928</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>5,088,659</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>4,712,603</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>4,685,323</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Urban</b>												
Agriculture and livestock	258,612	1.5%	218,269	1.2%	263,808	1.4%	1,479,270	6.4%	1,445,118	5.7%	1,420,475	5.4%
Non-agricultural sectors	16,726,474	98.5%	18,607,404	98.8%	19,195,513	98.6%	21,680,844	93.6%	23,700,255	94.3%	24,976,527	94.6%
Industry	1,545,720	9.1%	1,719,997	9.1%	1,835,141	9.4%	3,447,752	14.9%	3,715,302	14.8%	3,941,270	14.9%
Construction	80,001	0.5%	106,169	0.6%	138,284	0.7%	4,177,395	18.0%	3,876,051	15.4%	4,183,534	15.8%
Transport and trade	3,785,590	22.3%	3,901,810	20.7%	4,235,881	21.8%	7,025,694	30.3%	7,711,282	30.7%	8,167,686	30.9%
Education, health and social services	3,207,568	18.9%	3,726,079	19.8%	3,937,933	20.2%	1,091,453	4.7%	1,287,640	5.1%	1,439,669	5.5%
Domestic services	3,224,696	19.0%	3,311,411	17.6%	3,132,993	16.1%	207,008	0.9%	220,520	0.9%	203,311	0.8%
Other services	4,879,372	28.7%	5,835,203	31.0%	5,907,280	30.4%	5,729,322	24.7%	6,877,031	27.3%	7,031,724	26.6%
Poorly-defined activities	3,527	0.0%	6,735	0.0%	8,002	0.0%	2,221	0.0%	12,429	0.0%	9,333	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,985,086</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>18,825,673</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>19,459,321</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>23,160,113</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>25,145,373</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>26,397,002</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Female subordination within the family hierarchy is reflected in the subordinate position of women in the labour market. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that, in both urban and rural contexts, women proportionally occupy less the position of an employer and the position of a self-employed worker in comparison to men, particularly white men, but this disparity is much more pronounced in the countryside, where both positions are frequently related to the management of farms. As a consequence, rural women are overrepresented as auxiliary family workers, even if, as I have argued, they are underestimated in this occupation. In other words, women belong much more to the class position of labour than men (Bernstein, 1988; Stevano, 2023).

In this sense, conditional on being included in the employed population, women are more likely to be in the position of an employee (Tables 3.1 and 3.2), although in the case of urban and, specially, rural white women, self-employment has been growing steadily in the last years: from 22.6% of total employment of rural white women in 2016, to 24.4% in 2019, and 29.8% in 2022, with a corresponding fall in the share of auxiliary family workers and, interestingly, female employees. Black men, in turn, moved from self-employment towards wage work in the private sector. These trends seem to reflect, at one hand, cyclical movements across non-capitalist and capitalist segments (Bhattacharya et al., 2023), and at the other hand, ongoing structural changes in the Brazilian path of proletarianisation<sup>59</sup>.

Domestic labour and the public sector, in particular, represent a significant fraction of female employment. While, for black women, the former represents around 17% of total employment in urban and rural sites, for white women the proportion is much lower, which points to racial inequality in employment opportunities and, more generally, in the proletarianisation process, understood as dispossession of the necessary means of production (Palmer, 2014). Similarly, even though a significant proportion of rural black men are self-employed workers (many of whom family farmers), an even bigger proportion are private-sector employees, especially in recent years. The situation is inverted for rural white men, with access to land, technology, inputs, machinery, credit and knowledge to manage a farm.

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<sup>59</sup> The time series are not long enough to confirm the hypothesis, but it is possible that the increase in the share of private sector employees in the total employment of rural black men (from 42.5% in 2016 to 46.5% in 2022) and the corresponding fall in self-employment (from 43.7% in 2016 to 39.1% in 2022) reflect a long-term trend of racially biased deagrarianisation.

Table 3.1 - Rural and urban employed population by position in occupation, by gender (white people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	White women						White men					
	2016		2019		2022		2016		2019		2022	
<b>Rural</b>												
Employee (private sector)	400,934	27.3%	363,882	26.3%	349,635	25.6%	1,058,530	37.5%	976,248	37.3%	999,054	37.9%
Employee (domestic labour)	178,341	12.1%	174,128	12.6%	154,261	11.3%	55,926	2.0%	53,591	2.0%	70,399	2.7%
Employee (public sector)	198,124	13.5%	184,791	13.4%	183,744	13.4%	116,180	4.1%	110,422	4.2%	116,607	4.4%
Employer	29,900	2.0%	29,451	2.1%	27,440	2.0%	108,069	3.8%	107,581	4.1%	112,948	4.3%
Own account	332,451	22.6%	337,435	24.4%	407,592	29.8%	1,317,571	46.7%	1,229,790	47.0%	1,239,336	47.0%
Auxiliary family worker	330,364	22.5%	291,365	21.1%	244,751	17.9%	166,960	5.9%	138,792	5.3%	97,676	3.7%
Total occupied	1,470,114	100.0%	1,381,052	100.0%	1,367,424	100.0%	2,823,235	100.0%	2,616,424	100.0%	2,636,019	100.0%
<b>Urban</b>												
Employee (private sector)	8,428,343	49.3%	8,169,388	47.3%	8,663,046	47.9%	11,503,469	55.5%	10,880,356	53.8%	11,374,946	53.5%
Employee (domestic labour)	1,763,552	10.3%	1,653,836	9.6%	1,546,305	8.5%	105,886	0.5%	97,641	0.5%	96,712	0.5%
Employee (public sector)	3,000,960	17.5%	2,943,004	17.0%	3,060,624	16.9%	2,232,228	10.8%	2,135,596	10.6%	2,254,788	10.6%
Employer	754,035	4.4%	888,145	5.1%	783,871	4.3%	1,635,871	7.9%	1,702,484	8.4%	1,608,014	7.6%
Own account	2,890,755	16.9%	3,344,325	19.4%	3,825,241	21.1%	5,153,613	24.9%	5,276,539	26.1%	5,805,182	27.3%
Auxiliary family worker	266,131	1.6%	267,346	1.5%	221,590	1.2%	103,326	0.5%	142,548	0.7%	112,723	0.5%
Total occupied	17,103,776	100.0%	17,266,044	100.0%	18,100,677	100.0%	20,734,393	100.0%	20,235,163	100.0%	21,252,365	100.0%

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 3.2 - Rural and urban employed population by position in occupation, by gender (black people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	Black women						Black men					
	2016		2019		2022		2016		2019		2022	
<b>Rural</b>												
Employee (private sector)	438,058	19.7%	456,683	21.3%	433,821	21.1%	2,160,954	42.5%	2,188,455	46.4%	2,180,263	46.5%
Employee (domestic labour)	378,887	17.0%	373,461	17.4%	361,737	17.6%	106,097	2.1%	113,361	2.4%	117,143	2.5%
Employee (public sector)	363,410	16.3%	344,101	16.1%	348,161	17.0%	191,439	3.8%	219,993	4.7%	215,331	4.6%
Employer	12,815	0.6%	19,943	0.9%	21,058	1.0%	85,615	1.7%	100,871	2.1%	100,258	2.1%
Own account	594,589	26.7%	556,167	26.0%	554,655	27.0%	2,221,302	43.7%	1,861,636	39.5%	1,859,112	39.7%
Auxiliary family worker	439,301	19.7%	391,344	18.3%	333,497	16.2%	323,253	6.4%	228,289	4.8%	213,216	4.6%
Total occupied	2,227,060	100.0%	2,141,699	100.0%	2,052,928	100.0%	5,088,659	100.0%	4,712,603	100.0%	4,685,323	100.0%
<b>Urban</b>												
Employee (private sector)	7,535,264	44.4%	8,147,479	43.3%	8,771,305	45.1%	13,367,742	57.7%	14,227,361	56.6%	15,001,028	56.8%
Employee (domestic labour)	3,205,916	18.9%	3,301,543	17.5%	3,119,859	16.0%	203,981	0.9%	216,286	0.9%	198,701	0.8%
Employee (public sector)	2,554,114	15.0%	2,890,883	15.4%	3,013,530	15.5%	2,218,088	9.6%	2,497,936	9.9%	2,547,343	9.7%
Employer	285,187	1.7%	417,196	2.2%	393,172	2.0%	788,391	3.4%	992,590	3.9%	985,082	3.7%
Own account	3,094,535	18.2%	3,730,954	19.8%	3,906,398	20.1%	6,418,280	27.7%	6,981,299	27.8%	7,466,371	28.3%
Auxiliary family worker	310,070	1.8%	337,619	1.8%	255,057	1.3%	163,632	0.7%	229,900	0.9%	198,478	0.8%
Total occupied	16,985,086	100.0%	18,825,673	100.0%	19,459,321	100.0%	23,160,113	100.0%	25,145,373	100.0%	26,397,002	100.0%

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

In this scenario, Tables 4.1 and 4.2 reveal that, for rural black residents, non-agricultural activities guarantee a higher average monthly income than agricultural activities<sup>60</sup>, which suggests that intersectoral pluriactivity might be an important reproduction strategy for them. For rural white individuals, these averages are very close, and no source of income is prevalent. In any case, the average monthly income of non-agricultural activities is still higher for white people, another expression of racial inequality in the Brazilian rural class structure. Another feature that reinforces the importance of non-agricultural occupations for rural residents is that, for white and black men, wage earners' agricultural informality rate is higher than the non-agricultural informality rate. On the other hand, black women have an impressive non-agricultural

<sup>60</sup> According to the PNADc dictionary, agriculture, livestock farming, forestry, timber harvesting, fishing or aquaculture, or activities supporting agriculture, livestock farming, forestry, timber harvesting, fishing or aquaculture.



informality rate of 73.4% (PNADc, 2022), probably due to the significant role of domestic labour in the occupation of this demographic group, among other explanations.

Table 4.1 - Agricultural and non-agricultural sectors: key variables for the rural population, by gender (white people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	White women			White men		
	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022
Agricultural average monthly income*	R\$ 1.458,83	R\$ 1.536,13	R\$ 1.785,38	R\$ 1.996,66	R\$ 1.926,65	R\$ 2.416,33
Non-agricultural average monthly income*	R\$ 1.622,20	R\$ 1.711,59	R\$ 1.643,26	R\$ 2.269,51	R\$ 2.200,51	R\$ 2.259,39
Formal agricultural wage earners	30.181	33.979	39.071	209.592	210.520	204.814
Informal agricultural wage earners	30.297	32.252	34.063	241.161	238.182	261.054
Agricultural informality rate	50,1%	48,7%	46,6%	53,5%	53,1%	56,0%
Formal non-agricultural wage earners	340.015	280.805	255.572	486.327	422.136	431.145
Informal non-agricultural wage earners	250.121	259.434	247.896	214.459	206.428	226.828
Non-agricultural informality rate	42,4%	48,0%	49,2%	30,6%	32,8%	34,5%

\* Income from the main occupation. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022). Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 4.2 - Agricultural and non-agricultural sectors: key variables for the rural population, by gender (black people above age 14) – 2016, 2019, 2022

	Black women			Black men		
	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022
Agricultural average monthly income*	R\$ 592,06	R\$ 759,63	R\$ 833,64	R\$ 943,66	R\$ 1.041,17	R\$ 1.170,07
Non-agricultural average monthly income*	R\$ 1.085,02	R\$ 1.078,40	R\$ 1.120,48	R\$ 1.464,44	R\$ 1.460,05	R\$ 1.438,20
Formal agricultural wage earners	45.870	53.939	53.124	452.476	443.999	434.385
Informal agricultural wage earners	67.750	78.425	92.642	815.826	843.360	919.467
Agricultural informality rate	59,6%	59,2%	63,6%	64,3%	65,5%	67,9%
Formal non-agricultural wage earners	281.302	247.312	219.818	586.710	542.309	504.146
Informal non-agricultural wage earners	588.314	605.104	605.936	507.273	576.297	552.208
Non-agricultural informality rate	67,7%	71,0%	73,4%	46,4%	51,5%	52,3%

\* Income from the main occupation. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022). Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

### *b. General features of farm units (Agricultural and Livestock Census)*

According to the definition of family farming given by Decree 9.064/2017, between 2006 and 2017, there has been a decrease in the absolute and relative numbers of family farms, as well as of people employed in them (Table 5). However, if we consider the definition of FAO/INCRA, also used by Guanziroli et al. (2013), the participation of both family farms and their workforce in agricultural and livestock production increased<sup>61</sup> between 1996 and 2017. In any case, family farms, an indispensable source of life

<sup>61</sup> According to Guanziroli et al. (2013), family farms represented 85.17% and 87.95% of total farms in 1996 and 2006, respectively. In 2017, they reached 91.4% (Table 5). Similarly, family farming workforce participation rose from 76.85%, in 1996, to 78.75% in 2006 and 80.9% in 2017.

subsistence for many people in the country, still represent the great majority of farms<sup>62</sup> (at least 3.9 million, or 76.8% of total farms) in Brazil.

Table 5 - Family farming in Brazil – key variables: absolute value and proportion in relation to total farms – 2006 and 2017

	2006		2017			
	Decree 9.064/2017		Decree 9.064/2017		FAO/INCRA	
Number of farms	4.3 mi	83.2%	3.9 mi	76.8%	4.6 mi	91.4%
Area (hectares)	81.3 mi	24.4%	80.9 mi	23.0%	117.6 mi	33.5%
GVP (R\$)*	56.6 bi	34.5%	107 bi	22.9%	133.9 bi	28.2%
Workforce	12.3 mi	74.1%	10.1 mi	67.0%	12.2 mi	80.9%

\* Gross Value of Production in current values.

Source: own elaboration, with the 2006 and the 2017 Agricultural and Livestock Censuses.

Disaggregating data by race and gender, Table 6 shows that 87.1% of white women and 94.6% of black women employed in farms have kinship ties to the producer, in contrast to the proportion observed for white (64.4%) and black men (57.5%). Moreover, and this is also true for black men, women are usually employed in farms with smaller cultivation areas (thus, with probably less financial and other resources). Female labour is more demanded in small family farms, and is rarely associated with capitalised agriculture and agribusiness.

Table 7 presents evidence that women rarely manage agricultural production compared to men: only 7% and 11.7% of farms directly managed by the producer are managed by white and black women, respectively. But when they do, they usually manage family farms, particularly those that meet the criteria of PRONAF B, that is, annual gross family income equal to or lower than R\$ 23,000<sup>63</sup>. In other words, women are usually excluded from the management of agricultural production (Magalhães, 2009), and the few that are able to do so are overrepresented in farms engaged with marginal family farming, usually lacking sufficient resources to adequately guarantee their social reproduction. For black women, the numbers are eloquent: 75% of farms managed by them are included in the PRONAF B category. It is worth noting that a greater proportion of farms managed by black men (62.1%) meet the criteria of PRONAF B, in comparison to white women (58.4%).

<sup>62</sup> Regarding total cultivated area and gross value of production (GVP), however, non-family farms predominate (Table 5).

<sup>63</sup> Approximately US\$ 4,581. This maximum annual amount is valid until June 30, 2023. For more information: <https://www.bndes.gov.br/wps/portal/site/home/financiamento/produto/pronaf-microcredito-grupo-b>.

Table 6 - People employed in farm units, by groups of area, disaggregated by race and gender (people above age 14) – 2017

	White women		Black women		White men		Black men	
Total number of people employed								
Total (1)	1,834,899	100.0%	2,313,982	100.0%	4,900,134	100.0%	6,735,033	100.0%
Up to 1 ha	121,184	6.6%	402,797	17.4%	206,613	4.2%	662,469	9.8%
From 1 to 20 ha	933,248	50.9%	1,256,473	54.3%	1,981,446	40.4%	2,546,236	37.8%
From 20 to 100 ha	523,427	28.5%	513,302	22.2%	1,425,917	29.1%	1,235,396	18.3%
From 100 to 500 ha	170,236	9.3%	116,476	5.0%	755,252	15.4%	399,603	5.9%
More than 500 ha	86,804	4.7%	24,934	1.1%	530,906	10.8%	128,894	1.9%
People employed with kinship ties to the producer								
Total (2)	1,598,732	100.0%	2,190,159	100.0%	3,156,875	100.0%	3,870,066	100.0%
Up to 1 ha	117,586	7.4%	391,774	17.9%	181,527	5.8%	582,103	15.0%
From 1 to 20 ha	873,195	54.6%	1,202,845	54.9%	1,574,917	49.9%	2,093,982	54.1%
From 20 to 100 ha	462,335	28.9%	481,311	22.0%	961,668	30.5%	922,642	23.8%
From 100 to 500 ha	113,315	7.1%	99,465	4.5%	323,974	10.3%	228,945	5.9%
More than 500 ha	32,301	2.0%	14,764	0.7%	114,789	3.6%	42,394	1.1%
Participation of people with kinship ties to the producer in the total number of people employed								
Total (2)/ Total (1)	87.1%		94.6%		64.4%		57.5%	

Source: own elaboration, with the 2017 Agricultural and Livestock Census.

Table 7 - Number of farm units directly managed by the producer, according to the type of farming, and the gender and race of the producer – 2017

	White women		Black women		White men		Black men	
Total	345,575	100.0%	580,368	100.0%	1,951,438	100.0%	2,091,589	100.0%
Non-family farms	75,872	22.0%	97,449	16.8%	528,024	27.1%	440,564	21.1%
Family farms (FF)	269,703	78.0%	482,919	83.2%	1,423,414	72.9%	1,651,025	78.9%
Pronaf B (FF)	201,931	58.4%	435,455	75.0%	742,083	38.0%	1,298,366	62.1%
Pronaf V (FF)	66,581	19.3%	47,173	8.1%	660,908	33.9%	349,123	16.7%
non-pronafian (FF)	1,191	0.3%	291	0.1%	20,423	1.0%	3,536	0.2%
Participation of each gender/race								
Total	7.0%		11.7%		39.3%		42.1%	
Non-family farms	6.6%		8.5%		46.2%		38.6%	
Family farms (FF)	7.0%		12.6%		37.2%		43.1%	
Pronaf B (FF)	7.5%		16.3%		27.7%		48.5%	
Pronaf V (FF)	5.9%		4.2%		58.8%		31.1%	
non-pronafian (FF)	4.7%		1.1%		80.3%		13.9%	

Source: own elaboration, with the 2017 Agricultural and Livestock Census.

The lack of opportunities for rural women in agriculture and, conversely, their increasing participation in non-agricultural activities is supported by evidence displayed in Table 8: in 2006, female agricultural producers with off-farm activities worked predominantly in non-agricultural occupations, a tendency only verified in non-family

farms for men. This supports the argument that pluriactivity<sup>64</sup> might be an alternative to the female rural exodus (Deere, 2006; Silva, 2009), given male predominance in agricultural activities (as workers and direct producers), as well as men's privileged access to resources (Magalhães, 2009) such as land, ecological capital, social capital (expressed by their greater participation in labour unions, cooperatives and other social organisations), financial capital (subsidised credit) and human capital (courses and training).

Table 8 also shows that, overall, it is less common for women producers to work in off-farm activities<sup>65</sup>, which is probably related to women's oppression and their corresponding domestic confinement and/or lack of job opportunities. The flip side of this reality is that it is more common for women producers to have a family member, probably male, engaged in an off-farm activity. This means that even though women producers usually do not have an off-farm occupation, farms managed by them or households of which they are heads frequently have other sources of income. Table 9 corroborates this hypothesis.

According to the Agricultural and Livestock Census of 2017 (Table 9), a higher proportion of farms managed by black women (60%) have self-consumption as the primary purpose of agricultural production, in comparison to farms managed by white men (25.3%), white women (41.8%) and black men (48.8%). Moreover, this proportion increases if we consider only family farms and, especially, those that meet the criteria for PRONAF B. However, it is interesting to notice that, regardless of the production purpose, consumption or commercialisation, female-headed households (here expressed by female-managed farms) have a greater chance of obtaining a higher proportion of the family income from sources other than direct agricultural production, which sustains the idea that pluriactivity is an important subsistence or social ascension strategy for women.

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<sup>64</sup> In this aspect, Silva's (2009) research in two municipalities of Rio Grande do Sul points to a positive correlation between pluriactive productive units and female participation in the family workforce, especially regarding young and single women.

<sup>65</sup> Table 8 also presents evidence that non-family farms are more likely to rely on off-farm activities as an alternative source of income. This result is interesting, since pluriactivity is a concept conceived for a better understanding of the reproduction strategies of family farms, but also expected, since it reflects the limits of the legal definition of family farming and the already mentioned exclusion of pluriactive families from such category. From another perspective, it might express the current widespread dependence on pluriactivity.

Table 8 - Number of farm units with and without off-farm activity during the year, according to the type of farming and the producer's gender – 2006

	Men		Women	
	Off-farm activity of the producer			
Non-family farms	753,595	100.0%	55,773	100.0%
No off-farm activity	408,797	54.2%	33,817	60.6%
Any off-farm activity	344,798	45.8%	21,956	39.4%
Agricultural	123,949	16.4%	5,855	10.5%
Non-agricultural	206,342	27.4%	15,414	27.6%
Agricultural and non-agricultural	14,507	1.9%	687	1.2%
Family farms (Law 11.326/2006)	3,765,785	100.0%	600,482	100.0%
No off-farm activity	2,767,445	73.5%	486,160	81.0%
Any off-farm activity	998,340	26.5%	114,322	19.0%
Agricultural	513,091	13.6%	43,771	7.3%
Non-agricultural	456,081	12.1%	67,803	11.3%
Agricultural and non-agricultural	29,168	0.8%	2,748	0.5%
	Off-farm activity of a family member			
Farms (all types)	4,519,380	100.0%	656,255	100.0%
No off-farm activity	3,638,075	80.5%	490,954	74.8%
Any off-farm activity	881,305	19.5%	165,301	25.2%
Agricultural	325,583	7.2%	76,057	11.6%
Non-agricultural	585,627	13.0%	95,730	14.6%
Agricultural and non-agricultural	29,906	0.7%	6,486	1.0%

Source: own elaboration, with the 2006 Agricultural and Livestock Census.

Table 9 - Number of farm units managed by the producer\*, according to the primary purpose of production and participation in total household income, by race and gender of the producer – 2017

	White women		Black women		White men		Black men	
Total	342,529	100.0%	578,206	100.0%	1,935,134	100.0%	2,081,869	100.0%
Self-consumption and family consumption	143,207	41.8%	346,868	60.0%	488,980	25.3%	1,016,016	48.8%
Commercialization, including exchange and barter	199,322	58.2%	231,338	40.0%	1,446,154	74.7%	1,065,853	51.2%
	Total							
Total	342,529	100.0%	578,206	100.0%	1,935,134	100.0%	2,081,869	100.0%
Income is higher than other sources of income	121,068	35.3%	160,062	27.7%	976,784	50.5%	807,237	38.8%
Income is lower than other sources of income	221,461	64.7%	418,144	72.3%	958,350	49.5%	1,274,632	61.2%
	Self-consumption and family consumption							
Total	143,207	100.0%	346,868	100.0%	488,980	100.0%	1,016,016	100.0%
Income is higher than other sources of income	22,804	15.9%	62,953	18.1%	102,767	21.0%	248,317	24.4%
Income is lower than other sources of income	120,403	84.1%	283,915	81.9%	386,213	79.0%	767,699	75.6%
	Commercialization (including exchange and barter)							
Total	199,322	100.0%	231,338	100.0%	1,446,154	100.0%	1,065,853	100.0%
Income is higher than other sources of income	98,264	49.3%	97,109	42.0%	874,017	60.4%	558,920	52.4%
Income is lower than other sources of income	101,058	50.7%	134,229	58.0%	572,137	39.6%	506,933	47.6%

\* This includes farms directly managed by the producer, co-managed by couples or managed by the producer, through a foreman or a relative.

Source: own elaboration, with the 2017 Agricultural and Livestock Census.

*c. Family farming, pluriactivity and rural classes of labour (PNADc)*

This subsection focuses on rural families with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity. I divided families into the following categories: legal family farms of self-employed (own-account) workers (LFOA), that is, households with no employers and with at least one member employed as a self-employed worker in an agricultural activity, provided that the income criterion is observed (off-farm sources of income must account for less than half of total household income); social family farms of self-employed (own-account) workers (SFOA), which have the same specifications as LFOA households, except for not meeting the income criterion; households with no employers and with at least one member employed as a self-employed worker are not considered family farms (NFOA) if such self-employed worker is not one of the family members employed in an agricultural activity, and if no member is engaged with agricultural production for self-consumption; wage-earning families are those with no employers or self-employed workers, and with at least one family member occupied as an employee. They are divided between households with agricultural production for self-consumption (SFWE), seen as social family farms, and households with no such feature (NFWE); finally, households with only auxiliary family workers and non-occupied (unemployed or outside of the workforce) family members are classified as SFAW households, if some member cultivates agricultural goods for self-consumption, and NFAW households, otherwise.

Moreover, households that do not resort to any type of pluriactivity are classified as “agrarian”. Note that only LFOA, NFWE, SFAW and NFAW households<sup>66</sup> may possibly meet this requirement since SFOA, NFOA and SFWE are, by definition, pluriactive families. The latter, in turn, are divided into “agrarian pluriactivity” and “intersectoral pluriactivity” (see the methodology section). Agrarian pluriactivity is, by definition, not an option for NFWE families, with no agricultural production for self-consumption. Thus, they might be classified as exclusively agrarian (family members are employees in the agricultural and livestock sector) or pluriactive, in which case they are necessarily intersectoral. In the same sense, NFOA households, where at least one member is employed in an agricultural activity, and another (the self-employed worker)

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<sup>66</sup> Since the number of SFAW and NFAW households classified as pluriactive is negligible, and the total number of SFAW and NFAW households is, per se, small, I do not make any distinction between pluriactive and agrarian families.

is employed in a non-agricultural activity, are, by definition, engaged with intersectoral pluriactivity.

In Table 10, we see that more than half (55%) of total households, or 2,258,984 households are legal family farms (LFOA), which illustrates the importance of this social category in the Brazilian countryside<sup>67</sup> (PNADc, 2016). From another perspective, a significant and rising fraction of total households (35% in 2016, and 39,6% in 2019), or 1,439,119 households (1,464,135 in 2019), are wage-earning families, which indicates the increasing relevance of wage labour as a source of income for rural families, even if we consider, as I have, only households with at least one member occupied in an agricultural activity. Nevertheless, many wage-earning families (525,934 in 2016, and 619,006 in 2019) depend on agricultural production for self-consumption to survive and/or improve their living conditions.

Moreover, Table 10 shows that a small but significant proportion (8.8% in 2016, and 8.2% in 2019) of total households, or 360,547 households (304,196 in 2019), are classified as social family farms (SFOA), which reinforces the hypothesis of Del Grossi et al. (2022) that many pluriactive families are being arbitrarily excluded from the legal concept of family farming. Finally, Table 10 highlights the weight of intersectoral pluriactivity as a reproduction strategy of rural families: such practice is present in 9.9% of LFOA, 86% of SFOA, and 17.9% of SFWE households. In turn, agrarian pluriactivity is crucial for 49.1% of LFOA, 14% of SFOA, and 82.1% of SFWE households.

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<sup>67</sup> In fact, as Table 5 shows, the actual number of legal family farms is much higher: at least 3.9 million in 2017. The exclusion of urban households and families of employers partly explains this underestimation.

Table 10 - Number and distribution of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by type of family\* – 2016, 2019

	Number of households		Distribution of households			
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	2,258,984	1,883,397	55.0%	51.0%	100.0%	100.0%
LFOA Agrarian	1,005,652	771,398	24.5%	20.9%	44.5%	41.0%
LFOA Pluriactivity	1,253,332	1,111,999	30.5%	30.1%	55.5%	59.0%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	1,035,595	925,277	25.2%	25.0%	45.8%	49.1%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	217,738	186,721	5.3%	5.1%	9.6%	9.9%
SFOA	360,547	304,196	8.8%	8.2%	100.0%	100.0%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	43,116	42,535	1.0%	1.2%	12.0%	14.0%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	317,431	261,660	7.7%	7.1%	88.0%	86.0%
NFOA	42,831	33,514	1.0%	0.9%	100.0%	100.0%
SFWE	525,934	619,006	12.8%	16.7%	100.0%	100.0%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	427,039	508,069	10.4%	13.7%	81.2%	82.1%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	98,895	110,937	2.4%	3.0%	18.8%	17.9%
NFWE	913,185	845,129	22.2%	22.9%	100.0%	100.0%
NFWE Agrarian	749,170	690,576	18.2%	18.7%	82.0%	81.7%
NFWE Pluriactivity	164,016	154,553	4.0%	4.2%	18.0%	18.3%
SFAW	5,353	6,122	0.1%	0.2%	100.0%	100.0%
NFAW	3,763	5,064	0.1%	0.1%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	4,110,597	3,696,428	100.0%	100.0%	-	-

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 11 compares the income sources of these types of families or classes of labour. It shows that the total average monthly income of social family farms is higher than the total average monthly (labour) income of legal family farms: R\$ 2,552.28 for SFOA households and R\$ 1,740.60 for LFOA households (PNADc, 2019). This perhaps surprising result is explained by the great proportion of agrarian LFOA households and those engaged with agrarian pluriactivity, which represent 41% and 49.1% of LFOA households, respectively (Table 10), and have a total average monthly (labour) income – equal or very close to their average monthly “farm” income – of R\$ 1,481.52 and R\$ 1,596,37 (PNADc, 2019). This evidence adds to the results of Sakamoto et al. (2016) and reaffirms the importance of pluriactivity, especially intersectoral, as a strategy for increasing family income. Indeed, Table 11 points out that LFOA households engaged with intersectoral pluriactivity have a total average monthly (labour) income twice as large as agrarian LFOA households and, perhaps more significantly, have a higher average monthly “farm” income<sup>68</sup>: R\$ 3,525.62 and R\$ 2,433.89, respectively. They are also the

<sup>68</sup> This evidence corroborates the hypothesis that off-farm income is an important source of monetary resources not only to meet the family’s consumption needs, but also to finance investments in agricultural production.



type of family with the highest average monthly per capita income (considering all sources of income): R\$ 1,295.76 (PNADc, 2019).

Hence, concerning intersectoral pluriactive families, Table 11 presents evidence that legal family farms have a better financial condition than social family farms. In this sense, the legal concept of family farming, on the one hand, privileges better-off pluriactive rural households that can complement their family income with off-farm activities while still having access to public policies targeted at family farmers; on the other hand, excludes pluriactive families with a relatively low average monthly “farm” income and prevents agrarian family farms from investing in pluriactivity, for such strategy might hinder their access to public policies.

Table 11 - Income of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity: key variables, by type of family\*\*\* – 2016, 2019

	Average monthly "farm" income*		Average monthly "off-farm" income*		Ratio of "farm" to "farm" + "off-farm" income*		Average monthly per capita income**		Proportion of households receiving Bolsa Família	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	R\$ 1,499.28	R\$ 1,621.00	R\$ 105.97	R\$ 119.60	93.4%	93.1%	R\$ 878.61	R\$ 984.78	39.6%	33.5%
LFOA Agrarian	R\$ 1,412.97	R\$ 1,481.52	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	R\$ 851.80	R\$ 900.09	39.3%	35.5%
LFOA Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,568.53	R\$ 1,717.77	R\$ 190.99	R\$ 202.56	89.1%	89.5%	R\$ 900.12	R\$ 1,043.53	39.8%	32.1%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,425.99	R\$ 1,573.25	R\$ 20.06	R\$ 23.12	98.6%	98.6%	R\$ 840.14	R\$ 992.63	41.5%	33.2%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 2,246.51	R\$ 2,433.89	R\$ 1,003.98	R\$ 1,091.73	69.1%	69.0%	R\$ 1,185.42	R\$ 1,295.76	31.8%	26.9%
SFOA	R\$ 668.99	R\$ 653.13	R\$ 1,813.39	R\$ 1,899.15	26.9%	25.6%	R\$ 904.73	R\$ 951.94	37.1%	36.0%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 565.16	R\$ 522.69	R\$ 1,302.40	R\$ 1,233.13	30.3%	29.8%	R\$ 746.32	R\$ 714.72	47.3%	48.1%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 683.10	R\$ 674.33	R\$ 1,882.80	R\$ 2,007.42	26.6%	25.1%	R\$ 926.25	R\$ 990.51	35.7%	34.0%
NFOA	-	-	R\$ 2,499.54	R\$ 2,526.03	-	-	R\$ 751.42	R\$ 827.63	40.5%	39.0%
SFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,427.94	R\$ 1,480.07	-	-	R\$ 641.64	R\$ 685.61	49.5%	44.5%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 1,194.47	R\$ 1,247.88	-	-	R\$ 598.15	R\$ 646.64	50.2%	45.8%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 2,436.10	R\$ 2,543.46	-	-	R\$ 829.44	R\$ 864.08	46.1%	38.4%
NFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,787.95	R\$ 1,866.85	-	-	R\$ 788.00	R\$ 820.72	36.1%	34.5%
NFWE Agrarian	-	-	153926.4%	164604.2%	-	-	R\$ 752.0	R\$ 788.3	37.8%	35.9%
NFWE Pluriactivity	-	-	292384.5%	285344.2%	-	-	R\$ 952.4	R\$ 965.6	28.3%	28.4%
SFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 803.7	R\$ 755.3	24.5%	37.4%
NFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 353.5	R\$ 563.4	30.6%	47.8%

\* Income from the main occupation of each family member. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022).

\*\* Income from all sources.

\*\*\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

For example, in a poor “commercial” household, the “husband”<sup>69</sup> frequently manages agricultural production for sale and family self-consumption. His “wife” probably works as an auxiliary family worker on the farm. Sometimes, she also sells her labour-power in the market, frequently finding employment in remunerated domestic labour. This extra monetary income is surely welcome in a rural family that regularly faces deprivation. If wage labour becomes large enough to guarantee more than half of

<sup>69</sup> Or any other person occupying this social and economic position, given historical kinship and gender relations.

the household's expenses, this productive unit's pluriactivity will exclude it from the legal concept of family farms. Not only SFOA but also SFWE households face this dilemma. Notably, the latter is the type of family that mostly depends on monetary transfers such as *Bolsa Família* (Table 11). In other words, they are usually poor, wage-earning families which hinge on agricultural production for self-consumption and social protection from the government for survival.

A distinctive feature of pluriactive families is the greater availability of family labour within the household (Table 12), in comparison to exclusively agrarian families (Schneider, 2003). For instance, the average number of household members is higher for pluriactive families. Also, a greater percentage of pluriactive households comprise a married couple and/or have a (step) son/daughter or son/daughter-in-law as a family member. In this scenario, and considering the increasing use of labour-saving technologies in agricultural production, the legal concept of family farming does not account for different phases of the demographic cycle (Friedmann, 1978a), discriminating against larger families, since it is expected that the idle family workforce will seek job opportunities in off-farm activities.

Another demographic feature of interest is the average age of the household head. Table 12 shows that LFOA and SFOA households are usually headed by middle-aged individuals, whereas the average age of the head of SFWE and NFWE households is somewhat lower: 44 and 40 years old, respectively (PNADc, 2019). On the one hand, this might reflect younger individuals' limited access to land and, on the other, their greater opportunities regarding education and wage employment. In turn, SFAW and NFAW families are headed by older individuals, many of whom are probably retired. This older profile is also indicated by the low average number of household members, as well as the relatively small percentage of households composed of a married couple and/or with a (step) son/daughter or son/daughter-in-law.

Table 12 - Key demographic features of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by type of family\* – 2016, 2019

	Average number of household members		Average age of the head of household		Proportion of households with a married couple		Proportion of households with a (step) son/daughter or a son/daughter-in-law	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	3.4	3.3	48.5	49.4	81.3%	81.2%	67.1%	64.3%
LFOA Agrarian	3.3	3.1	47.8	47.6	77.3%	76.4%	65.0%	62.2%
LFOA Pluriactivity	3.6	3.4	49.1	50.6	84.5%	84.5%	68.9%	65.7%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	3.5	3.3	49.5	50.9	82.5%	82.8%	66.3%	63.0%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	3.8	3.8	47.4	49.1	93.8%	92.9%	81.1%	79.3%
SFOA	4.2	4.1	49.4	49.8	88.4%	87.8%	86.1%	85.0%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	4.6	4.2	51.7	50.8	74.4%	80.8%	85.8%	89.9%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	4.2	4.1	49.1	49.7	90.3%	89.0%	86.1%	84.2%
NFOA	4.1	3.9	41.3	41.2	93.1%	87.2%	85.1%	80.0%
SFWE	3.7	3.6	43.1	44.0	83.6%	82.4%	75.6%	73.6%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	3.6	3.5	42.8	43.8	82.1%	80.4%	74.1%	71.3%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	4.2	4.1	44.2	45.2	89.8%	91.4%	82.2%	84.3%
NFWE	3.3	3.3	41.1	40.4	77.1%	77.3%	69.9%	68.2%
NFWE Agrarian	3.2	3.2	40.7	40.2	74.3%	75.0%	67.0%	65.6%
NFWE Pluriactivity	3.9	3.7	42.9	41.7	89.8%	87.7%	83.2%	79.9%
SFAW	3.2	2.4	57.5	52.8	55.7%	63.6%	45.6%	32.5%
NFAW	2.0	2.8	48.9	50.7	37.6%	56.7%	38.7%	54.8%

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Disaggregating the types of families by region, Tables 13.1 and 13.2 highlight the concentration of LFOA households in the North (67.8% of the region's total households in 2019) and in the South (67.2%), as expected, given the high percentage of family farms in those regions, according to the last Agricultural and Livestock Census. In turn, the Northeast region has the greater absolute number of households for all types of families, and legal family farms declined from 52.6% of total households, in 2016, to 44.4%, in 2019, falling slightly behind wage-earning families, corresponding to 44.5% of total households in the region (25.6% SFWE and 18.9% NFWE). The only region with a higher (and notorious) concentration of wage-earning families (22.1% SFWE and 35% NFWE) is the Midwest, with a relatively small share of LFOA (35.6%) and SFOA (4.8%) households (PNADc, 2019), given the region's historical connection to agribusiness. Finally, although representing a modest fraction of total households in all regions, social family farms (SFOA) are more frequently situated in the two poorest regions, the Northeast (9.7%) and the North (8.3%).

Table 13.1 - Number and distribution of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by region and type of family\* – 2016

	North		Northeast		South		Southeast		Midwest	
LFOA	431,323	67.2%	876,292	52.6%	470,776	70.8%	384,000	45.5%	96,594	33.0%
LFOA Agrarian	168,596	26.3%	461,661	27.7%	183,353	27.6%	155,264	18.4%	36,778	12.5%
LFOA Pluriactivity	262,727	40.9%	414,631	24.9%	287,423	43.2%	228,736	27.1%	59,816	20.4%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	226,802	35.3%	354,854	21.3%	225,548	33.9%	181,581	21.5%	46,811	16.0%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	35,925	5.6%	59,778	3.6%	61,875	9.3%	47,155	5.6%	13,005	4.4%
SFOA	60,064	9.4%	174,051	10.4%	55,173	8.3%	57,835	6.9%	13,424	4.6%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	5,615	0.9%	21,298	1.3%	5,372	0.8%	9,148	1.1%	1,683	0.6%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	54,449	8.5%	152,753	9.2%	49,801	7.5%	48,687	5.8%	11,741	4.0%
NFOA	5,791	0.9%	18,609	1.1%	3,489	0.5%	10,205	1.2%	4,737	1.6%
SFWE	59,334	9.2%	231,486	13.9%	49,439	7.4%	135,891	16.1%	49,784	17.0%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	49,626	7.7%	193,217	11.6%	39,886	6.0%	105,550	12.5%	38,761	13.2%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	9,707	1.5%	38,270	2.3%	9,553	1.4%	30,341	3.6%	11,023	3.8%
NFWE	84,047	13.1%	362,446	21.7%	84,470	12.7%	254,557	30.2%	127,664	43.6%
NFWE Agrarian	72,026	11.2%	305,242	18.3%	62,147	9.4%	203,626	24.1%	106,127	36.2%
NFWE Pluriactivity	12,021	1.9%	57,204	3.4%	22,322	3.4%	50,931	6.0%	21,537	7.3%
SFAW	703	0.1%	1,778	0.1%	1,053	0.2%	1,386	0.2%	434	0.1%
NFAW	566	0.1%	2,128	0.1%	212	0.0%	381	0.0%	475	0.2%
Total	641,828	100.0%	1,666,790	100.0%	664,611	100.0%	844,255	100.0%	293,112	100.0%

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 13.2 - Number and distribution of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by region and type of family\* – 2019

	North		Northeast		South		Southeast		Midwest	
LFOA	377,509	67.8%	617,874	44.4%	410,424	67.2%	365,802	44.5%	111,789	35.6%
LFOA Agrarian	153,998	27.7%	319,074	22.9%	135,655	22.2%	127,709	15.5%	34,962	11.1%
LFOA Pluriactivity	223,511	40.1%	298,800	21.5%	274,768	45.0%	238,093	28.9%	76,827	24.5%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	192,056	34.5%	256,703	18.4%	224,088	36.7%	192,052	23.3%	60,378	19.2%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	31,454	5.6%	42,097	3.0%	50,680	8.3%	46,041	5.6%	16,449	5.2%
SFOA	46,085	8.3%	135,400	9.7%	44,637	7.3%	62,932	7.6%	15,142	4.8%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	7,008	1.3%	21,347	1.5%	3,668	0.6%	9,405	1.1%	1,108	0.4%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	39,077	7.0%	114,053	8.2%	40,970	6.7%	53,527	6.5%	14,034	4.5%
NFOA	4,090	0.7%	15,287	1.1%	3,998	0.7%	5,515	0.7%	4,623	1.5%
SFWE	52,690	9.5%	263,702	18.9%	56,807	9.3%	176,474	21.4%	69,333	22.1%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	45,029	8.1%	219,256	15.8%	46,390	7.6%	144,563	17.6%	52,832	16.8%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	7,661	1.4%	44,447	3.2%	10,417	1.7%	31,912	3.9%	16,501	5.3%
NFWE	74,201	13.3%	356,902	25.6%	93,627	15.3%	210,591	25.6%	109,807	35.0%
NFWE Agrarian	55,661	10.0%	300,545	21.6%	71,226	11.7%	171,185	20.8%	91,959	29.3%
NFWE Pluriactivity	18,540	3.3%	56,357	4.0%	22,401	3.7%	39,407	4.8%	17,848	5.7%
SFAW	1,165	0.2%	1,759	0.1%	1,532	0.3%	1,426	0.2%	241	0.1%
NFAW	1,101	0.2%	884	0.1%	-	-	-	-	3,079	1.0%
Total	556,840	100.0%	1,391,807	100.0%	611,025	100.0%	822,741	100.0%	314,014	100.0%

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Concerning gender and race relations, female-headed households represent a small but increasing share of total households: for white women, from 3.8%, in 2016, to 6.8% of households, in 2019, and for black women, from 11.2% to 14.1%, in the same period. Besides attesting to the predominance of black people in all types of families, Tables 14.1 and 14.2 present their distribution within each demographic group. Black women and men are overrepresented as SFWE and NFWE household heads, and these wage-earning families have increased their share between 2016 and 2019, to the detriment

of LFOA households: for families headed by black women, SFWE rose from 13% to 20.6%, NFWE from 23.9% to 29.1%, and LFOA dropped from 51.3% to 37%; for households headed by black men, SFWE ascended from 15.3% to 18.8%, NFWE from 24.5 to 25.2%, and LFOA decreased from 50.1% to 46.8%. In contrast, 64% of households headed by white men and 54.7% of households headed by white women are classified as legal family farms (PNADc, 2019), which means that white people, and especially, white men, are overrepresented as LFOA heads.

In this scenario, it becomes evident that proletarianisation as expropriation (Palmer, 2014) affects disproportionately black people, as racism (Grosfoguel, 2016) and colonial relations of power (Quijano, 2005) are constitutive of classes of labour. Those racialised classes are also grounded on gender relations of production (Bernstein, 1988; 2010; Stevano, 2023). Intriguingly, and corroborating the hypothesis that pluriactivity is a key reproduction strategy for rural women (Silva, 2009), in 2016, SFOA households represented 12.3% and 10.7% of total households headed by white and black women, respectively, while for white and black men, this share was reduced to 7.9% and 8.6%. From another perspective, in 2019, SFOA families represented 8.1% of households headed by white women and black men alike, which reinforces the notion that pluriactivity is articulated to gender and race relations.

Table 14.1 - Number and distribution of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by race and gender of the household head, and by type of family\* – 2016

	White women		White men		Black women		Black men	
LFOA	85,462	55.8%	800,072	65.0%	234,794	51.3%	1,122,296	50.1%
LFOA Agrarian	38,000	24.8%	338,675	27.5%	115,938	25.3%	503,808	22.5%
LFOA Pluriactivity	47,462	31.0%	461,397	37.5%	118,856	26.0%	618,488	27.6%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	38,434	25.1%	363,796	29.5%	100,688	22.0%	526,321	23.5%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	9,028	5.9%	97,600	7.9%	18,168	4.0%	92,167	4.1%
SFOA	18,819	12.3%	97,231	7.9%	48,802	10.7%	193,112	8.6%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	895	0.6%	8,692	0.7%	7,207	1.6%	26,165	1.2%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	17,924	11.7%	88,540	7.2%	41,596	9.1%	166,948	7.5%
NFOA	1,840	1.2%	8,129	0.7%	4,509	1.0%	28,352	1.3%
SFWE	14,545	9.5%	107,658	8.7%	59,340	13.0%	341,589	15.3%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	12,969	8.5%	82,544	6.7%	47,564	10.4%	281,302	12.6%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	1,575	1.0%	25,113	2.0%	11,776	2.6%	60,287	2.7%
NFWE	31,508	20.6%	216,374	17.6%	109,238	23.9%	549,267	24.5%
NFWE Agrarian	23,690	15.5%	172,720	14.0%	85,031	18.6%	462,619	20.7%
NFWE Pluriactivity	7,818	5.1%	43,654	3.5%	24,207	5.3%	86,647	3.9%
SFAW	705	0.5%	1,020	0.1%	597	0.1%	3,031	0.1%
NFAW	240	0.2%	1,224	0.1%	429	0.1%	1,868	0.1%
Total	153,119	100.0%	1,231,709	100.0%	457,710	100.0%	2,239,515	100.0%

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 14.2 - Number and distribution of rural households with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity, by race and gender of the household head, and by type of family\* – 2019

	White women		White men		Black women		Black men	
LFOA	135,234	54.7%	680,726	64.0%	191,386	37.0%	859,348	46.8%
LFOA Agrarian	47,372	19.2%	262,071	24.6%	82,508	15.9%	372,321	20.3%
LFOA Pluriactivity	87,862	35.5%	418,655	39.4%	108,877	21.0%	487,027	26.5%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	68,152	27.6%	342,585	32.2%	93,213	18.0%	412,845	22.5%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	19,710	8.0%	76,071	7.2%	15,665	3.0%	74,182	4.0%
SFOA	20,026	8.1%	76,151	7.2%	58,049	11.2%	147,991	8.1%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	4,031	1.6%	9,488	0.9%	8,314	1.6%	20,356	1.1%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	15,994	6.5%	66,663	6.3%	49,735	9.6%	127,635	7.0%
NFOA	2,151	0.9%	8,197	0.8%	8,546	1.7%	14,619	0.8%
SFWE	33,014	13.3%	126,319	11.9%	106,836	20.6%	345,273	18.8%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	28,070	11.3%	103,431	9.7%	81,910	15.8%	287,848	15.7%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	4,943	2.0%	22,888	2.2%	24,926	4.8%	57,425	3.1%
NFWE	55,795	22.6%	169,700	16.0%	150,855	29.1%	462,276	25.2%
NFWE Agrarian	41,649	16.8%	136,168	12.8%	119,478	23.1%	387,610	21.1%
NFWE Pluriactivity	14,146	5.7%	33,532	3.2%	31,377	6.1%	74,666	4.1%
SFAW	541	0.2%	2,235	0.2%	820	0.2%	2,526	0.1%
NFAW	600	0.2%	571	0.1%	1,351	0.3%	2,448	0.1%
Total	247,360	100.0%	1,063,899	100.0%	517,844	100.0%	1,834,482	100.0%

\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Moreover, Tables 15.1 and 15.2 show that, within the white demographic group, the average monthly per capita income of female-headed SFOA and pluriactive LFOA households is closer to, and sometimes even higher than, the average monthly per capita income of families of the same types headed by men. This highlights the importance of non-agricultural and/or off-farm sources of income for households headed by women. In this vein, the ratio of “farm” to “farm” plus “off-farm” income for social family farms (SFOA) is smaller for female-headed households: 25.1% (Table 15.1) and 22.6% (Table 15.3) for white and black women, respectively, compared to 30.3% (Table 15.2) and 25.4% (Table 15.4) for white and black men (PNADc, 2016). Note that SFOA households headed by black men are also fairly dependent on “off-farm” income, which underscores the importance of pluriactivity for black people.

Corroborating this argument and related to the evidence presented in Table 4, Tables 15.1 and 15.2 show that, for white people, not only pluriactive LFOA and SFOA households have the highest average monthly per capita income, but also agrarian LFOA households have an average monthly per capita income higher than SFWE and NFWE families. Conversely, according to Tables 15.3 and 15.4, for black people, wage-earning families are better remunerated than agrarian LFOA households. Indeed, SFOA and

NFWE families have the highest average monthly per capita income. The latter, for instance, has the smallest proportion of households (headed by black men) receiving *Bolsa Família* (Table 15.4). Therefore, off-farm sources of income are indispensable to the black rural population, and pluriactivity, in the case of SFOA households, is an alternative to their full proletarianisation.

Table 15.1 - Income of rural households headed by white women, with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity: key variables, by type of family\*\*\* – 2016, 2019

	Average monthly "farm" income*		Average monthly "off-farm" income*		Ratio of "farm" to "farm" + "off-farm" income*		Average monthly per capita income**		Proportion of households receiving Bolsa Família	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	R\$ 2,041.60	R\$ 2,262.25	R\$ 137.16	R\$ 263.23	93.7%	89.6%	R\$ 1,246.58	R\$ 1,252.04	22.4%	15.8%
LFOA Agrarian	R\$ 2,063.12	R\$ 1,938.27	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	R\$ 1,203.03	R\$ 1,051.35	24.1%	21.9%
LFOA Pluriactivity	R\$ 2,024.38	R\$ 2,436.93	R\$ 246.98	R\$ 405.15	89.1%	85.7%	R\$ 1,281.45	R\$ 1,360.24	21.0%	12.5%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,866.20	R\$ 2,213.84	R\$ 8.84	R\$ 56.18	99.5%	97.5%	R\$ 1,250.89	R\$ 1,290.27	20.1%	12.9%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 2,697.80	R\$ 3,208.30	R\$ 1,260.86	R\$ 1,611.82	68.1%	66.6%	R\$ 1,411.57	R\$ 1,602.19	24.7%	11.3%
SFOA	R\$ 788.01	R\$ 810.24	R\$ 2,356.90	R\$ 2,451.43	25.1%	24.8%	R\$ 1,151.64	R\$ 1,408.38	27.9%	18.7%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 606.70	R\$ 735.63	R\$ 951.31	R\$ 1,140.31	38.9%	39.2%	R\$ 865.83	R\$ 757.16	33.8%	38.4%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 797.06	R\$ 829.04	R\$ 2,427.06	R\$ 2,781.89	24.7%	23.0%	R\$ 1,165.91	R\$ 1,572.52	27.6%	13.8%
NFOA	-	-	R\$ 1,701.79	R\$ 2,672.23	-	-	R\$ 624.39	R\$ 1,074.21	58.3%	28.5%
SFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,556.98	R\$ 1,531.09	-	-	R\$ 804.61	R\$ 761.87	35.9%	40.9%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 1,325.89	R\$ 1,276.15	-	-	R\$ 745.76	R\$ 691.27	40.3%	43.9%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 3,459.76	R\$ 2,978.78	-	-	R\$ 1,289.21	R\$ 1,162.79	0.0%	24.2%
NFWE	-	-	R\$ 2,315.08	R\$ 2,032.61	-	-	R\$ 944.37	R\$ 814.43	24.7%	26.7%
NFWE Agrarian	-	-	191675.4%	175340.8%	-	-	R\$ 863.5	R\$ 758.1	30.8%	28.3%
NFWE Pluriactivity	-	-	352198.8%	285461.8%	-	-	R\$ 1,189.3	R\$ 980.4	6.5%	22.1%
SFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 1,796.8	R\$ 950.3	0.0%	18.1%
NFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 473.3	R\$ 1,477.6	100.0%	0.0%

\* Income from the main occupation of each family member. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022).

\*\* Income from all sources.

\*\*\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 15.2 - Income of rural households headed by white men, with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity: key variables, by type of family\*\*\* – 2016, 2019

	Average monthly "farm" income*		Average monthly "off-farm" income*		Ratio of "farm" to "farm" + "off-farm" income*		Average monthly per capita income**		Proportion of households receiving Bolsa Família	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	R\$ 2,473.68	R\$ 2,432.66	R\$ 171.73	R\$ 168.30	93.5%	93.5%	R\$ 1,280.55	R\$ 1,346.21	21.3%	19.4%
LFOA Agrarian	R\$ 2,430.54	R\$ 2,304.84	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	R\$ 1,274.46	R\$ 1,269.83	21.7%	22.9%
LFOA Pluriactivity	R\$ 2,505.34	R\$ 2,512.68	R\$ 297.78	R\$ 273.65	89.4%	90.2%	R\$ 1,285.03	R\$ 1,394.02	21.0%	17.3%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 2,341.57	R\$ 2,350.83	R\$ 30.39	R\$ 27.05	98.7%	98.9%	R\$ 1,213.20	R\$ 1,340.75	23.2%	18.4%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 3,115.77	R\$ 3,241.55	R\$ 1,294.47	R\$ 1,384.22	70.6%	70.1%	R\$ 1,552.76	R\$ 1,633.94	12.8%	12.2%
SFOA	R\$ 1,057.01	R\$ 1,065.59	R\$ 2,429.91	R\$ 2,481.15	30.3%	30.0%	R\$ 1,286.26	R\$ 1,331.01	16.6%	16.0%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,068.37	R\$ 804.05	R\$ 1,982.14	R\$ 1,592.15	35.0%	33.6%	R\$ 1,193.67	R\$ 925.98	22.6%	35.5%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,055.89	R\$ 1,102.82	R\$ 2,473.86	R\$ 2,607.68	29.9%	29.7%	R\$ 1,295.35	R\$ 1,388.66	16.0%	13.3%
NFOA	-	-	R\$ 3,375.09	R\$ 3,220.21	-	-	R\$ 978.18	R\$ 1,084.10	25.1%	32.3%
SFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,831.86	R\$ 1,831.30	-	-	R\$ 777.17	R\$ 823.54	38.1%	31.2%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 1,511.88	R\$ 1,557.15	-	-	R\$ 712.67	R\$ 786.46	39.4%	31.8%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 2,883.60	R\$ 3,070.17	-	-	R\$ 989.17	R\$ 991.06	33.8%	28.6%
NFWE	-	-	R\$ 2,344.41	R\$ 2,285.05	-	-	R\$ 974.41	R\$ 1,010.43	25.9%	24.9%
NFWE Agrarian	-	-	201680.6%	197393.7%	-	-	R\$ 929.1	R\$ 966.1	28.5%	28.1%
NFWE Pluriactivity	-	-	364060.6%	354843.0%	-	-	R\$ 1,153.6	R\$ 1,190.7	15.5%	11.8%
SFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 552.1	R\$ 1,260.5	65.9%	0.0%
NFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 677.1	R\$ 531.6	0.0%	28.6%

\* Income from the main occupation of each family member. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022).

\*\* Income from all sources.

\*\*\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 15.3 - Income of rural households headed by black women, with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity: key variables, by type of family\*\*\* – 2016, 2019

	Average monthly "farm" income*		Average monthly "off-farm" income*		Ratio of "farm" to "farm" + "off-farm" income*		Average monthly per capita income**		Proportion of households receiving Bolsa Família	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	R\$ 753.36	R\$ 838.11	R\$ 45.87	R\$ 58.32	94.3%	93.5%	R\$ 584.95	R\$ 594.81	54.9%	51.8%
LFOA Agrarian	R\$ 745.90	R\$ 847.97	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	R\$ 567.65	R\$ 590.18	55.9%	51.2%
LFOA Pluriactivity	R\$ 760.63	R\$ 830.64	R\$ 90.61	R\$ 102.52	89.4%	89.0%	R\$ 601.83	R\$ 598.32	53.9%	52.3%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 702.40	R\$ 775.80	R\$ 6.20	R\$ 28.10	99.1%	96.5%	R\$ 565.58	R\$ 564.55	53.8%	53.5%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,083.38	R\$ 1,156.94	R\$ 558.40	R\$ 545.37	66.0%	68.0%	R\$ 802.75	R\$ 799.30	54.5%	44.6%
SFOA	R\$ 454.96	R\$ 403.83	R\$ 1,558.38	R\$ 1,495.94	22.6%	21.3%	R\$ 663.13	R\$ 722.65	47.9%	43.4%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 268.71	R\$ 313.25	R\$ 944.90	R\$ 788.52	22.1%	28.4%	R\$ 513.89	R\$ 520.77	62.0%	47.7%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 487.23	R\$ 418.97	R\$ 1,664.66	R\$ 1,614.19	22.6%	20.6%	R\$ 688.98	R\$ 756.40	45.4%	42.6%
NFOA	-	-	R\$ 2,329.45	R\$ 1,771.82	-	-	R\$ 827.94	R\$ 567.24	54.2%	47.3%
SFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,059.99	R\$ 1,257.03	-	-	R\$ 586.91	R\$ 614.14	51.2%	50.9%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 795.48	R\$ 930.88	-	-	R\$ 555.74	R\$ 551.98	50.0%	54.4%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 2,128.32	R\$ 2,328.78	-	-	R\$ 712.82	R\$ 818.37	56.1%	39.2%
NFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,405.68	R\$ 1,719.07	-	-	R\$ 612.79	R\$ 692.22	49.8%	44.3%
NFWE Agrarian	-	-	113494.6%	153108.7%	-	-	R\$ 570.8	R\$ 665.4	51.4%	45.1%
NFWE Pluriactivity	-	-	235664.7%	243489.6%	-	-	R\$ 760.3	R\$ 794.3	44.2%	41.3%
SFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 304.7	R\$ 637.6	0.0%	52.4%
NFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 290.1	R\$ 424.6	61.6%	73.2%

\* Income from the main occupation of each family member. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022).

\*\* Income from all sources.

\*\*\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

Table 15.4 - Income of rural households headed by black men, with at least one member employed in an agricultural activity: key variables, by type of family\*\*\* – 2016, 2019

	Average monthly "farm" income*		Average monthly "off-farm" income*		Ratio of "farm" to "farm" + "off-farm" income*		Average monthly per capita income**		Proportion of households receiving Bolsa Família	
	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019	2016	2019
LFOA	R\$ 926.10	R\$ 1,050.81	R\$ 70.46	R\$ 72.45	92.9%	93.6%	R\$ 629.12	R\$ 745.56	50.4%	43.0%
LFOA Agrarian	R\$ 836.68	R\$ 985.06	-	-	100.0%	100.0%	R\$ 606.79	R\$ 687.74	48.1%	42.6%
LFOA Pluriactivity	R\$ 998.94	R\$ 1,101.07	R\$ 127.85	R\$ 127.83	88.7%	89.6%	R\$ 647.32	R\$ 789.76	52.3%	43.4%
LFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 908.06	R\$ 1,003.04	R\$ 16.64	R\$ 13.65	98.2%	98.7%	R\$ 610.84	R\$ 758.00	53.1%	43.5%
LFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 1,517.92	R\$ 1,646.64	R\$ 762.91	R\$ 763.24	66.6%	68.3%	R\$ 855.62	R\$ 966.53	47.7%	42.5%
SFOA	R\$ 512.27	R\$ 524.93	R\$ 1,503.28	R\$ 1,695.30	25.4%	23.6%	R\$ 743.90	R\$ 791.37	45.5%	45.6%
SFOA Agrarian Pluriactivity	R\$ 480.14	R\$ 442.83	R\$ 1,188.34	R\$ 1,279.75	28.8%	25.7%	R\$ 659.04	R\$ 695.78	51.6%	55.0%
SFOA Intersectoral Pluriactivity	R\$ 517.31	R\$ 538.02	R\$ 1,552.64	R\$ 1,761.57	25.0%	23.4%	R\$ 757.20	R\$ 806.62	44.6%	44.1%
NFOA	-	-	R\$ 2,327.33	R\$ 2,556.20	-	-	R\$ 682.47	R\$ 799.76	41.6%	39.4%
SFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,360.18	R\$ 1,422.47	-	-	R\$ 601.05	R\$ 653.82	53.6%	47.6%
SFWE Agrarian Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 1,161.71	R\$ 1,229.94	-	-	R\$ 563.81	R\$ 622.25	54.3%	48.5%
SFWE Intersectoral Pluriactivity	-	-	R\$ 2,286.27	R\$ 2,387.55	-	-	R\$ 774.85	R\$ 812.08	50.4%	43.3%
NFWE	-	-	R\$ 1,617.23	R\$ 1,740.76	-	-	R\$ 741.79	R\$ 795.87	38.1%	35.7%
NFWE Agrarian	-	-	141774.7%	155536.3%	-	-	R\$ 714.4	R\$ 769.6	39.2%	36.4%
NFWE Pluriactivity	-	-	268227.2%	270317.3%	-	-	R\$ 888.0	R\$ 932.4	32.0%	31.8%
SFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 755.6	R\$ 304.7	21.1%	69.7%
NFAW	-	-	-	-	-	-	R\$ 140.6	R\$ 425.4	34.5%	49.8%

\* Income from the main occupation of each family member. Values were adjusted for inflation (deflator for the last quarter of 2022).

\*\* Income from all sources.

\*\*\* Families of employers (with at least one member occupied as an employer) were excluded from the sample.

Source: own elaboration, with the PNADc dataset.

## 6. Final considerations



Social reproduction conditions at Brazilian rural sites are constantly changing, given the country's historical process of proletarianisation and, not least, resistance to it. On this horizon, the constant renovation of non-capitalist forms of production within capitalist social formations indicates that such forms do not present any tendency toward being eliminated. On the contrary, they are reproduced by global capitalism. As it happens, non-waged labouring individuals must renew their conditions of existence, hence, they cannot give up on self-employment. For instance, simple commodity production in agriculture is an indispensable source of monetary income and subsistence farming is a way of securing rural households' direct consumption of foodstuff. Thus, even if family farms are increasingly marginalised by agribusiness forces, and their subordinated integration into market circuits frequently leads them to indebtedness, their option is not to declare bankruptcy or to move to another economic sector (as is the case for a capitalist enterprise), but to compress the family standard of living (Friedmann, 1980; Bhattacharya et al., 2023).

In this context, pluriactivity, or the diversification of sources of income through the combination of more than one economic activity<sup>70</sup>, is a reproduction strategy against proletarianisation that represents an alternative to rural exodus and a way of preserving or enhancing the family's conditions of reproduction (for instance, ownership of land, family labour, off-farm and farm income). As a permanent, albeit constantly renovated, reproduction strategy against expropriation of the means of production, it is fundamentally linked to classes of labour and, therefore, to other social structures grounded on class structure, such as gender and race oppression.

In Brazil, black people represent the great majority of the rural population (65.7%, PNADc, 2022). Hence, in absolute terms, households headed by black men are also the majority of households in all classes of labour analysed in this study: legal family farms, social family farms, non-family farm households, wage-earning families with and without production for self-consumption and households with (agricultural) auxiliary family workers. But in relative terms, white men largely surpass black men (and white women largely surpass black women) as heads of households classified as legal family farms. Additionally, the high average monthly per capita income of households headed by white men expresses their relatively "privileged" (or capitalised) position in rural classes of labour. Conversely, black men and women are widely represented in wage-earning

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<sup>70</sup> For instance, simple commodity production, wage labour and/or subsistence production, provided that one of them is undertaken in the agricultural sector.

families and low-income family farms, as historical and current colonial relations of production sustain capital accumulation through ongoing primitive accumulation and, therefore, the proletarianisation of racialised classes of labour.

From another related perspective, rural women are rarely heads of households and are frequently excluded from agricultural activities, except as frequently invisible auxiliary family workers. Such invisibility and marginalisation are, in a way, the consequence of women's social responsibility for reproductive labour and the latter's devaluation and artificial separation from productive labour in the capitalist mode of production. In practice, however, productive and reproductive spaces and labour processes are blurred, especially in agrarian contexts, where production for self-consumption is a usual practice, especially for classes of labour, constantly struggling to guarantee daily and generational reproduction. Defying such artificial separation and, at the same time, conforming to it, women increasingly find employment in remunerated non-agricultural activities, essential to their families' social reproduction as well as their autonomy from men.

The merits of the Family Farming Law and the agrarian development policies implemented in the last decades (before the defeat of the left-of-centre governments) are undeniable. For the first time, many simple commodity producers had access to the means of production necessary for elevating their conditions of reproduction. Besides, rural development policies more generally and social policies such as *Bolsa Família* were indispensable for the reproduction of the Brazilian rural classes of labour in the last decades. Now that the pink tide somewhat returned with the re-election of Lula da Silva in 2022, disputes over the meaning and the objectives of public policies are once again possible. One of the examples of this healthy (yet fragile) recovery of social democracy in Brazil is the announcement, by the reinstated Ministry of Agrarian Development, of the creation of an emergency land reform programme<sup>71</sup>.

In this context, I contend that the legal concept of family farming should not discriminate against pluriactive families since this implies the further marginalisation of women and black people. As race, gender and class relations are intertwined (Vogel, 1983; Davis, 2016; Federici, 2017a; Bhattacharya, 2017; Gago, 2019; Stevano, 2023), I argue that the exclusion of pluriactive families from the legal concept of family farming burdens

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<sup>71</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/economia/governo-lancara-programa-emergencial-de-reforma-agraria-em-maio-diz-ministro-a-cnn/>.

rural households headed by black women proportionately more, with dire consequences regarding the social reproduction of poverty and inequality.

Pluriactivity is an enduring resistance strategy of family farmers. In fact, given the constant production of a surplus population (Marx, 1867) by agricultural modernisation and (biased towards capital) labour-saving technologies, pluriactivity is more and more the most viable option for family farms – or simple commodity producers – who seek to transform (and also preserve) their conditions of reproduction. Provided the other legal criteria are met, the diversification of income sources as a reproduction strategy should not prevent households from being acknowledged as family farmers. As I have shown, an array of crucial public policies specifically promotes the latter's well-being, which means that the legal definition of family farming matters.

Moreover, and beyond the dispute over the meaning of this legal category, recognition of pluriactivity as an authentic strategy of family farmers, or more generally, of rural workers and peasants engaged with simple commodity production and/or subsistence agriculture, also calls for the acknowledgment of the diversity of rural classes of labour and their dependence on heterogeneous conditions of reproduction. In this sense, agrarian development policies should account for such diversity and encompass, at a much higher rate than in the (first) pink tide, food sovereignty policies, agrarian reform, demarcation and effective protection of indigenous lands, structural reforms related to the rural labour market, local development programmes and social security policies.

Similarly, strengthening family farms' capacity to resist proletarianisation, including the promotion of their autonomy in the face of the unpredictable and hegemonic movements of upstream and downstream markets (Schneider et al., 2010), should be (at least) as important a purpose as their integration into commodity circuits. Hence, the Food Procurement Programme (PAA) and the National School Meals Programme (PNAE), which guarantee family farmers' access to nested or protected markets (Ploeg et al., 2012), should be among the government's priorities. Furthermore, and beyond the idea of "*autonomy through the market*" (Bretón et al., 2022, p. 570), agroecology, food sovereignty and local development policies should be recognised as strategic in an era "marked by a continuous marginalisation of peasant producers and a greater (adverse) integration into the markets" (p. 571). In this way, maybe the current Brazilian tide will be resilient enough to compete against, better avoiding working alongside, gender and racial inequalities in the rural class structure.



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