

**CONTEMPORARY SLAVERY
IN THE AMAZON OF MARANHÃO:
REALITY AND RESPONSE**

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Fall 2006

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Research Problem.....	6
Personal and Professional Motives for Choosing this Research Problem.....	6
Importance of Research.....	6
Location of Research.....	7
Methodology of Research.....	7
Hypothesis of Research.....	8
Summary of Research Results.....	12
Content of Research.....	13
Chapter 1: Amazon of Maranhão.....	13
Chapter 2: Center of Defense of Life and Human Rights.....	15
Chapter 3: Reality of Contemporary Slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão.....	17
Chapter 4: Causes of Contemporary Slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão.....	23
Greed.....	23
Misery.....	27
Impunity.....	28
Chapter 5: Responses Against Slavery.....	31
Prevention.....	31
Repression.....	35
Generation of Alternatives.....	37
Chapter 6: Suggestions to Prevent Further Slavery.....	42
Chapter 7: Suggestions for What Should be done with This Research.....	44
Analysis of Research Results.....	46
Conclusions.....	47
Bibliography.....	48
Indications for Further Research.....	50
Learning Acquired During ISP Process.....	51
Application of Learning in Home Environment.....	51

Abstract

This research project addresses the reality of contemporary slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão. Through observations at the Center of Defense of Life and Human Rights (CDVDH) in the municipality of Açailândia, it gains a sense of the combat against the usage of slave labor today. Interviews with staff members at the Center and its Cooperative explain their objectives and methods in this struggle. In addition, interviews with former slaves allow for a deeper understanding of the day-to-day life of a modern slave. Over the course of three weeks of field research, the hypothesis of the gravity of slavery and the effectiveness, though on a small scale, of the CDVDH proved correct. It also came to my attention that those in the struggle are the highest authorities as to how to further improve the situation, so their suggestions are listed with recommendations to enact them.

I found that Açailândia, located in the Amazon of Maranhão, is considered an area of conflict due to the contemporary clash between slave-owners and those combating the usage of slave labor. Its very existence is due to projects of industrial development on land that is falsely owned. In this context, the CDVDH operates, combating contemporary slavery, which has been its central line of action since its opening in 1996. The causes of modern slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão are misery, greed inherent in the capitalist system, and the impunity of the offenders. Until these causes are alleviated or solved, slave labor will continue to exist in this region.

Slave labor in this region includes a combination of degrading conditions and treatment with a lack of payment and the inability to leave the location of work. The modern slave is treated like an animal in the way he is fed, housed, and worked to an extent not humanly possible. They often cannot escape due to armed guards, miles of wilderness separating the farm from civilization, and an honor code that binds them to an invented debt to the farmer.

In order to eradicate contemporary slavery, three areas of combat have been identified by the CDVDH: prevention, repression, and the generation of alternatives. In the area of prevention, the CDVDH runs cultural activities for children to teach them about the existence of slave labor and their rich culture, as well as keep them off the streets where abduction, prostitution, and drugs are a harsh reality. They also hold neighborhood meetings in five different areas of high risk, which in a Freirian style, allows the citizens to participate in their own *conscientização*. In the area of repression, the CDVDH attends to former slaves who recount their stories to the social educator in hopes of receiving some form of compensation for their labor and moral damage. The social educator then sends the testimony to government agencies which enact investigations of the farms and carvoarias and begin the process of punishment. In the area of generation of alternatives, the CDVDH has initiated two cooperatives for former slaves or those at risk of being abducted into slavery: a toy workshop and an ecological coal factory.

In order to further prevent slavery, my informants suggested a wider public education program, simply to pay the workers, agrarian reform, eradicating misery, and ensuring that the government makes combating slave labor a priority. From firsthand experience in a region where the combat of slave labor is as much of a reality of the persistence of slavery itself, it is apparent that the CDVDH has made a large impact on the community, but on a wider scale much more effort is necessary from other organizations, civil society, and the Brazilian government.

Definition of Terms

Pastoral Commission of Land – CPT
Center of Defense of Life and Human Rights of Açailândia – CDVDH
Cooperative of Dignity – COODIGMA
Biological Reserve of Gurupi – ReBio
National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform – INCRA
Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources – IBAMA
National Institute of Social Security – INSS
Terms of Behavior Adjustment – TAC
Institute of Charcoal Citizenship – ICC
Movement of Rural Workers Without Land – MST
Movement of the Liberation of Rural Workers Without Land – MLST
Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE
Regional Delegacy of Work – DRT
Public Ministry of Work – MPT
Ministry of Work and Employment – MTE
State Forum of Eradication of Slave Labor in Maranhão – FOREM
International Labor Organization – ILO
Secretary of Work Inspection – SIT
Individual Protection Equipment – EPI
Catholic Relief Services – CRS
Grand Carajás Project – PGC
National Service of Industrial Learning – SENAI
Brazilian Service of Support to the Micro and Small Businesses – SEBRAE
Non-governmental organization – NGO
Ministry of Agrarian Development – MDA

Carvoaria – The closest to an English translation would be “coal camp,” which is a location where tree trunks are brought in order to burn them and turn them into coal. This process occurs inside an igloo-like structure made of clay that reaches extremely high temperatures.¹

Grilagem – According to the Larousse pocket dictionary of Portuguese and English, *grilagem* means the “falsification of property deeds” and a *grileiro/a* is a “forger of property deeds.”² In order to own land in Brazil, one must be able to show an entire ownership chain back to before 1850. In order for most of the large-scale farmers today to own such massive plots of land, they had to go through the process of *grilagem*. A document from before 1850 would have to look ancient in order to be credible. So, to gain more land for free, many modern land-owners placed a forged piece of paper into a box full of crickets. When they secrete waste, the chemicals mix with the chemicals on the paper and make it a pale yellow color, which seems old. The word for cricket in Portuguese is *grilo*.³

¹ Romei. Work Journal. School of International Training. 2006. Event #4

² “Grilagem.” Larousse Pocket Dictionary. 2003. (159)

³ Romei. Event #32

Miséria – The Larousse Pocket Dictionary translates *miséria* as both poverty and misery. In English, poverty is considered an economic problem while misery is considered a social or psychological problem. This is one of the three reasons why members of the CDVDH claim slavery continues to exist in Brazil.

Introduction

Who would have thought that in the twenty-first century, the enslavement of human beings would still exist? Though distinct from the classic legal slave trade, contemporary slavery is a harsh reality, lived daily by hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. This research project looks at the situation in the region of the Amazon of Maranhão where the majority of slaves work on farms or carvoarias. It asks the definition of contemporary slavery and its reality. According to the DRT of Maranhão, slave labor consists of the following characteristics: 1) workers without signed work cards, 2) without salaries, 3) without the provision of potable water or hygienic conditions, 4) without the free provision of EPI, 4) without housing in adequately sanitary facilities, 5) without first aid equipment, 6) charged for the usage of services maintained by the business, 7) without private locations to defecate that is safe for public health, 8) with the worker living separate from his family, 9) without a medical admissions exam before the worker begins his activities, 10) worker under than 16-years-old, 11) worker under 18-years-old in an activity of unhealthy or dangerous location and service.⁴ Through field research consisting of observations and interviews with former slaves and those struggling to help them, these characteristics come to life.

The next question this research paper asks is why such an atrocity still exists. How does this barbarous practice perpetuate into contemporary work relations? Historical background of the geography of the Amazon of Maranhão and an understanding of modern society under a capitalist model help to answer this inquiry. Observations of daily life in the city of Açailândia show the hidden conflicts between the slave owners and those who struggle for social equality. I also take a close look at the justice system to establish why the crime of holding laborers as slaves remains unpunished.

In order to best understand the progress of the eradication of slave labor, I study the central organization that combats slavery in Açailândia, the Center of the Defense of Life and Human Rights. Interviews with those in charge and those who volunteer their time allow a deeper comprehension of what can be done to prevent, repress, and generate alternatives to slave labor. I am also able to watch, first hand, as children learn to dance and act instead of sell drugs and enter into prostitution, as former slaves build toys and ecological charcoal in cooperatives instead of reverting back to unpaid labor, and as runaway slaves tell their stories to those who have the power to help.

⁴ Sousa, Ubiragara do Pindaré Almeida. “A questão dos direitos Humanos e a escravidão contemporânea no contexto do capitalismo dependente na Amazônia Maranhense.” A escravidão contemporânea na Amazônia Maranhense: a questão dos direitos humanos na rota do capital. São Luis, 2004. (79)

Finally, with suggestions from those who know best, I have been able to put together a series of ideas for improvement, recommendations as to how best to eradicate slave labor for good.

Research Problem

What is the reality in the socio-economic situation of the Amazon of Maranhão that allows and even encourages slavery to perpetuate into the twenty-first century, and what is being done, especially by the CDVDH, to free current slaves, reinsert former slaves into society, and prevent future slavery?

Personal and Professional Motives for Choosing this Research Problem

Personally, I feel a strong affinity for people who are exploited and rendered helpless within a cycle that has no end in the near future. I have participated in groups in the United States that fight international trafficking of persons, which is another angle altogether on the issue of contemporary slavery. This research problem expands on the expertise I have already gained on international trafficking by specializing in a very precise geographical area. However, the dilemmas present in this geographical area are similar if not identical to those which cause slavery world-wide.

Professionally, I hoped to choose a research problem that is neglected in academia today that whose investigation would yield original observations and results. The case of modern day slavery is one that is an embarrassment to Brazil and to the world. It is something that needs to be repressed as effectively as possible and terminated as soon as possible. Unfortunately, many people benefit from the labor of contemporary slaves and do not even realize it. I feel it is the purpose of such unique research to inform the public of an atrocity that exists in the shadows of carvoarias and farms of the Amazon of Maranhão.

Importance of Research

The topic of contemporary slave labor is seldom studied despite its gravity, especially within the region of the Amazon of Maranhão. Because so few organizations are as dedicated as the CDVDH, very little is being done to eradicate this problem. Therefore, this research is significant both for the fact that it publicizes the reality of slavery today and it shows that there are means to prevent, repress, and generate alternatives for slavery.

Location of Research

This research took place in the city of Açailândia, which is located in the region of the Amazon in Maranhão, Brazil. Within the city, the majority of observations and interviews occurred within the offices of CDVDH and the coal and toy workshops of COODIGMA. In addition to these central points of research, I observed various other locations within the region: an MST settlement named California located 15 kilometers away from the center of Açailândia; a three day conference on slave labor and super-exploitation on farms and in carvoarias in the Masonic Temple of Açailândia held by an alliance of organizations; the local DRT; carvoarias located on allotments of MST land; etc.

Methodology of Research

Interviews constituted my main method of research. I held in-depth interviews with six former slaves, five staff members of the CDVDH, four staff members of the COODIGMA, two officials of the DRT, and five people with other linkages to the CDVDH. I had a set list of questions for each type of interview but allowed conversation to flow freely. These interviews served to explain what cannot be simply observed. In order to understand the history of each former slave and the details behind the structure of the CDVDH and the COODIGMA, interviews were necessary.

Strengths of this method include the quantity of interviews I was able to undertake and the quality of the information gained from them. A weakness would be that when interviewing people who are illiterate, uneducated, and speak with a heavy accent from the interior of the country, I needed the help of my sub-counselor, Nonnato Masson, in order to understand their responses during the interview and transcribe their responses later. My lack of understanding prevented me from asking follow-up questions, and often, Masson simply took control of the interview.

I conducted observations in the CDVDH, the two COODIGMAs, and at a local MST settlement. These observations allowed me to watch and participate in the day-to-day activities at these locations, which cannot be gained from books or even interviews. The strengths of this method consist of the vast amount of information gained from simply watching. Also, participating in the day-to-day activities at these locations served as a way to give back to those communities. Unfortunately, I was unable to conduct many days worth of solely observation, so this methodology was limited.

In addition, I was able to attend the Second Inter-participative Conference on Slave Labor and Super-Exploitation on Farms and Carvoarias from November 16th through 18th. Attending lectures and small group sessions with some of the top authorities on slave labor in Brazil today contributed a great strength to my research. A weakness of this method was that I became a classroom student instead of a field-study student for a few days. However, all of the visitors returning to their hometowns after the conference had finished facilitated my switch back to field study methods.

Hypothesis of Research

Before conducting research in the field, secondary sources found in the library and on the internet constitute the information available on the topic of contemporary slavery. Therefore, I expect to find the situation of slave labor in Açailândia to be similar to if not the same as the descriptions offered by the sources cited in the following explanation of slavery today in Brazil with modifications as to the specific part of the country in which the CDVDH is located and the specific actions that the CDVDH takes.

“Article 149 of Brazil's penal code defines slave labor as exhausting work forced through violence or the threat of it, under degrading working and living conditions. The law prohibits landowners from holding workers' documents or using control over their transportation to and from remote farms to imprison them. In addition, Article 149 defines a slightly lesser form of worker abuse as ‘degrading labor.’ Degrading labor is modern slavery without reliance on violence or distance to retain workers. Both offenses carry prison terms of two to eight years. In addition, fines are levied for a range of conditions that contribute to slave labor, such as the lack of decent housing or provisions for emergency medical care.”⁵ Another definition of reducing a person to slavery is the following: “suppressing the individual’s right to liberty, leaving him totally subjected to the domination of another.”⁶ According to Friar Xavier Plassat, an activist and member of the CPT, “False promises, a growing debt that is impossible to pay off, forced labor, physical or psychological coercion, threats and violence, and super exploitation – those are the ingredients of the so called ‘modern slavery’.”⁷

Yet why does this occur? According to Kevin Hall, a journalist who has produced a large quantity of reporting on this issue, “slavery persists in Brazil... for a simple reason and a complicated one. The simple reason is that slaves are out of sight and out of mind: Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, who dominate the national political culture, are no more likely to worry about rural slaves in the Amazon than New Yorkers are to worry about illegal immigrants in the Rio Grande Valley. The complicated reason is that Brazil's modern slaves are cogs in the global economy. Their labor makes Brazil's exports of beef, soybeans, timber and pig iron cheaper, often much cheaper than competing U.S. products.”⁸ Mr. Hall quotes Marcelo Campos, who heads anti-slavery programs at Brazil’s Ministry of Labor: “American companies may see no evil, but the working conditions on some Brazilian farms and ranches may be even worse than those endured by the 3.6 million African slaves on whom Brazil depended for four centuries.”⁹

However, the current situation is different from historical slavery for various reasons. When slavery was legal, they “were property, and watched over because they were an asset... They had food and shelter because the owner needed to make sure they stayed alive. Today's slave is not a concern (to the landowner). He uses them as an absolutely temporary item, like a

⁵ Hall, Kevin G. “Brazil's legal definition of slave and degraded labor.” Knight Riders Newspaper. Mongabay.com. 2004 <www.mongabay.com/external/slavery_in_brazil.htm>

⁶ “Forced Labor.” A Struggle for land in Brazil: Rural Violence Continues. Americas Watch Report, 1992: 52-73.

⁷ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives: Slave Labor in Brazil Today.” Human Rights in Brazil 2002, A Report by the Social Network for Justice and Human Rights. São Paulo, 2002: 85-94.

⁸ Hall, Kevin G. “Slavery exists out of sight in Brazil. Knight Riders Newspaper. Mongabay.com. 2004 <www.mongabay.com/external/slavery_in_brazil.htm>

⁹ Hall, Kevin G. “Slavery exists...”

disposable razor.”¹⁰ This is because a slave is not bought and sold for money anymore; he is no longer a commodity. According to Campos, a slave today “is a disposable object to be used and then discarded.”¹¹ Yet, “like their ancestors [of plantation owners], they revoke the liberty of the workers, a violence that takes away a fundamental right results in the convergence of four perversities: the capture of work documents, the presence of armed guards, the imposition of illegal dictates, and geographically suffocating characteristics of their location.”^{12 13}

The process begins and cycles back to poverty. “Two third of workers found in a situation of slave labor in the states of Pará, Maranhão and Mato Grosso are from the Northeastern states, mostly Piauí, Maranhão, and Ceará. It is not by chance. Lacking any survival alternatives in their places of origin, those workers are the ideal prey for scam recruiters, known as “gatos” – cats. The “gatos” drive around small towns with cars equipped with a sound system, advertising tempting promises, recruiting truckloads of workers. Unbeknownst to them, those who sign up have already become prisoners”¹⁴ The gatos “work for landowners (*fazendeiros*) by seeking out unemployed, often desperate workers from the poorest regions of the country.”¹⁵ Their targets are obvious.

The typical means of enslavement follows a pattern of lies and deceit. The soon-to-be-slaves and the “gato” enter into a contract. “This contract (which is never a contract, since it is never written nor is there any free and informed consent) is born under the sign of debt...”¹⁶ The debt is constantly revised so that the worker is prevented from receiving any monetary payment. “The blackmail of the ‘debt-to-be-paid’ will be an effective chain that will prevent him from leaving the job until he pays it off.”¹⁷ Academics often wonder why the worker does not simply leave the farm. Yet, there are deep cultural reasons as well as physical reasons for the inability to escape, such as a strong code of honor, guards and gunmen, and both physical and mental isolation.¹⁸ How is this possible in the twenty-first century? It often requires the complicity of police officers, regional labor inspectors, and environmental inspectors.¹⁹

Once enslaved, the conditions differ per worker, *fazendeiro*, and type of labor, yet there are general characteristics that cross those lines. “The forms of slavery behave habitually with the following elements: abduction in a distant region, payment anticipated from the spendings of the peon (pension, transportation), precarious and dangerous working conditions, violent coercion, threats and decreasing of liberties, the practice of indebtedness enforced by the system of buying on the large cabin of the farm or in front of the workers. The most common types of work, in the agricultural regions are deforestation, clearing to open up the farm to new fields, cleaning the land.”²⁰ The slaves “in some moments are submitted to conditions analogous with

¹⁰ Hall, Kevin G. “Slavery exists...”

¹¹ Carvalho, Sandra. “Slave labor and super-exploitation of labor in Brazil.” Human Rights in Brazil 2002, A Report by the Social Network for Justice and Human Rights. São Paulo, 2003: 69-77.

¹² Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Erradicação do Trabalho Escravo? Ficou para Outra Vez.” 2006. CPT.

¹³ All quotations taken from informants have been translated from Portuguese to English by the author. Many of the Brazilian informants, especially the former slaves, have received little or no education, so the broken English translated represents their elementary Portuguese speech. In addition, any article originally written in Portuguese or Spanish has been translated as well.

¹⁴ Sydow, Evanize.

¹⁵ Carvalho, Sandra.

¹⁶ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

¹⁷ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

¹⁸ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

¹⁹ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

²⁰ “A CPT...”

slavery, according to the denunciations of the Public Promotor and the Migrant Pastor, run on the local, regional, national and even international level. The working conditions are marked by an extremely high intensity of demanded productivity).²¹ Various cases of what is called “birolo” have occurred on farms accused of working laborers in slave-like conditions. Birolo is “death by excessive force at work.”²²

To alleviate the situation, in 1995, the Ministry of Labor created the “Special Mobile Strike Force (Grupo Especial de Fiscalização Móvel) – a roving unit that conducts surprise inspections of properties accused of exploiting workers....”²³ This group consists solely of volunteers.²⁴ “Ministry of Labor statistics indicate that in 2003, the Strike Force reached 14,518 workers, of which 6,683 were regularized and 4,932 were freed from slave-like conditions.”²⁵ However, the resources of the Strike Force are constantly being cut by the government. Though it has an increasing rate of investigations, there is “real growth in the use of slave labor in Brazil,”²⁶ and the rate of liberations is dwindling. As a result, the perpetrators grow fearless. They retain workers’ employment IDs, fire and abandon workers, and challenge inspectors. The Mobile Group, in other words, is not enough.

President Inácio Lula da Silva’s government attempted to increase its attention to the issue by initiating the “National Plan to Eradicate Slave Labor” in 2003. “Within the objectives of the National Plan to Eradicate Slave Labor is the ‘social reinsertion that would ensure that the freed workers do not return to be slaves.’ The actions include professional education, generation of work and rent, and inclusion of the workers’ families in agrarian reform, facilitating the reintegration into the worker’s region of origin and avoiding further enslavement.”²⁷ This is an initiative that is important for many reasons. “Recidivism is a problem not only of employers, but also of workers themselves, who are often so poor that they take jobs even at the known risk of being exploited.”²⁸ One example of this is that “in the most recent liberation completed by the Mobile Group in Tocantins, at least four of the 75 workers who gained their freedom already had been rescued at an earlier time in similar actions”²⁹

Many other NGOs have become involved in the issue since the National Plan was enacted. The Center of Defense of Life and Human Rights (CDVDH) serves as a resource for runaway slaves and provides preventative methods to avoid slavery in the first place.³⁰ Also, “the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT), an organization associated with the Catholic Church that advocates for landless workers and is widely recognized for its national anti-slavery work” is the most well-known nationally.³¹ The CPT’s main method of combating contemporary slavery is public denunciation of general statistics, of specific *fazendeiros*, and of the lack of punishment. These organizations work out of regional offices and are limited in their resources due to adverse local political positions. Besides the CPT and

²¹ Aparecida de Moraes Silva, Maria. “Mortes dos ‘severinos’ nos Canaviais Paulistas.” 2006. CPT.

²² Aparecida de Moraes Silva, Maria.

²³ Carvalho, Sandra.

²⁴ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

²⁵ Carvalho, Sandra.

²⁶ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Stolen Lives...”

²⁷ Tenorio, Iberê. “Directos Humanos.” *Repórter Brasil*. 6 July 2006. <www.cartamaior.com.br>

²⁸ Carvalho, Sandra.

²⁹ Tenorio, Iberê.

³⁰ “Trabalho Escravo.” *Centro de Defese da Vida e dos Direitos Humanos*. Açailândia, Maranhão. 2006. <<http://www.cdvdhacai.org.br/trabalhoescravo3.htm>>

³¹ Carvalho, Sandra.

the CDVDH, “The Ministry of Agrarian Development is beginning to initiate projects to eradicate slavery. The main one is a line of credit called Land for Liberty, in which families of freed workers receive a credit of between 12 and 18 thousand reais to buy a property and they have up to 17 years to pay with two years of leeway and subsidiaries of close to 4% per year.”³² Another group is the Instituto Carvão Cidadão in Imperatriz, Maranhão. This group “has a program that gives work in factories to freed workers that provides prime materials for the yielding of iron.”³³ However, the president of the institution claims that it is difficult to find the former slaves to offer them work. “when we found them, many ran and hid. They thought that we were employees of the farm where they used to work and that we wanted to kill them.”³⁴ This is the extent to which an experience of slavery haunts a human being. Other organizations include the Comissão Estadual de Prevenção ao Trabalho Escravo do Piauí in Teresino; the project ‘Escravo, nem pensar!’ (Don’t even think about slavery), organized by ONG Repórter Brasil, Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos (SEDH), Organização Internacional do Trabalho and Trilhas de Liberdade; among many other organizations. While these programs are bearing fruit, they have limits.³⁵

One would hope that Brazilian laws and international protocols would prevent slavery. Besides the National Plan to Eradicate Slave Labor, various other documents have prohibited slavery throughout the years including the following: Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 4; International Slavery Convention of 1923; Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956; Convention 105 of the International Labor Organization, ratified by Brazil on June 18, 1965; ILO Convention 29, article 4.2.³⁶ The punishment in Brazil for a *fazendeiro* who has been caught with slaves is 2-8 years for “crime against personal liberties,” though more often they only have to pay back salaries. According to the Social Network for Justice and Human rights, sanctions should be used because they go to the heart of the problem – money.³⁷ Because impunity is so rampant among offenders, the legal system is almost null with respect to slave labor.

In conclusion, according to secondary sources, contemporary slave labor is a serious problem of social injustice in the Northeast of Brazil. However, the problem goes deeper than forced labor. “Slavery will decrease with a reduction of social inequality. For that, it is necessary that there is a real distribution of income, of opportunities, of land, of justice, guaranteeing better living and working conditions for all. A good start, required by rural social movements, is an all-encompassing agrarian reform.”³⁸ Most importantly, though, is to note that “it is a real scandal that 188 years after its promulgation, the abolition of slavery could still be a theme of public debate, with its pros and cons.”³⁹ The consensus is that this issue should have been resolved long ago, but because it is still under fire, it needs to be placed within the consciousness of all citizens of the world, of Brazil, and of the Northeast. “Eradicating slave

³² Tenorio, Iberê.

³³ Tenorio, Iberê.

³⁴ Tenorio, Iberê.

³⁵ Tenorio, Iberê.

³⁶ “Forced Labor.”

³⁷ Carvalho, Sandra.

³⁸ Tenorio, Iberê.

³⁹ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Erradicação...”

labor in this context demands changes that are more profound than can be imagined. It is a shame that they still have not entered into the daily order.”⁴⁰

Summary of Research Results

Açailândia, located in the Amazon of Maranhão, is considered an area of conflict due to the contemporary clash between slave-owners and those combating the usage of slave labor. Its very existence is due to projects of industrial development on land that is falsely owned. In this context, the CDVDH operates, combating contemporary slavery, which has been its central line of action since its opening in 1996. The causes of modern slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão are misery, greed inherent in the capitalist system, and the impunity of the offenders. Until these causes are alleviated or solved, slave labor will continue to exist in this region.

Slave labor in this region includes a combination of degrading conditions and treatment with a lack of payment and the inability to leave the location of work. The modern slave is treated like an animal in the way he is fed, housed, and worked to an extent not humanly possible. They often cannot escape due to armed guards, miles of wilderness separating the farm from civilization, and an honor code that binds them to an invented debt to the farmer.

In order to eradicate contemporary slavery, three areas of combat have been identified by the CDVDH: prevention, repression, and the generation of alternatives. In the area of prevention, the CDVDH runs cultural activities for children to teach them about the existence of slave labor and their rich culture, as well as keep them off the streets where abduction, prostitution, and drugs are a harsh reality. They also hold neighborhood meetings in five different areas of high risk, which in a Freirian style, allows the citizens to participate in their own *conscientização*.⁴¹ In the area of repression, the CDVDH attends to former slaves who recount their stories to the social educator in hopes of receiving some form of compensation for their labor and moral damage. The social educator then sends the testimony to government agencies which enact investigations of the farms and carvoarias and begin the process of punishment. In the area of generation of alternatives, the CDVDH has initiated two cooperatives for former slaves or those at risk of being abducted into slavery: a toy workshop and an ecological coal factory.

Other organizations also struggle to combat slavery such as workers' unions which work to better conditions, the media which spreads information, MST which advocates agrarian reform, the CPT which denounces slavery, and the government which passed the National Plan for the Eradication of Slave Labor through legislature. In order to further prevent slavery, my informants suggested a wider public education program, simply to pay the workers, agrarian reform, eradicating misery, and ensuring that the government makes combating slave labor a priority.

⁴⁰ Plassat, Fr. Xavier. “Erradicação...”

⁴¹ See Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970. Intr. Donald Macedo. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 2005. Translator's Note, page 35. “The term *conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.” It is most often used to refer to popular education of the masses in order to capacitate them to fight for themselves.

Content of Research

Chapter 1: Amazon of Maranhão

The presence of both the Bank of the Amazon, which is only located within the Amazon, and the Bank of the Northeast, which is only located in the northeast, best exemplifies the combinations and contradictions of this area of Brazil. Geographically and botanically, it pertains to both regions. It also possesses the brunt of the problems present in both regions, resulting in blatant misery. According to the executive secretary of the Center of the Defense of Life and Human Rights, “The number of people living below the line of poverty is still very large. Our state, for example, is first in the state ranking of low human development. All the types of problems that Brazil has, Maranhão has: slave labor, prostitution, corruption, urban violence, concentration of land and income.”⁴²



43

It is this unique combination of poverty from the northeast and rich geographical assets from the Amazon that cause the Amazon of Maranhão to be the number one exporter of slave labor in the country and one of the few exporting states that also ranks high on the list of importers. 39% of contemporary slaves come from the state of Maranhão according to the International Labor Organization.⁴⁴

In the heart of this region of contradictions, the city of Açailândia sits amongst the rolling hills of cattle and soy and eucalyptus forests. This area is influenced by three river basins:

⁴² Romei, Interview #18 Filho

⁴³ “Brazil Travel.” <<http://www.v-brazil.com/tourism/maranhao/map-maranhao.html>>

⁴⁴ Romei, Observation #7 h v Audi

Tocantins, Pindaré, e Gurupi. The population of this city is 103,609 located on 5,806 kilometers squared. It consists of 217 municipalities with a concentration of three urban centers: Vila Ildemar, Piquiá, and the center.⁴⁵ Around the city, close to fifteen settlements are located with an average of 200 families in each one. Açailândia's location is the result of relatively recent history. The city was settled in the year 1958, not quite fifty years ago, by small-scale farmers. Nearly every current resident, when asked their origin, states somewhere outside of Açailândia.

The city expanded as a result of various projects by the military dictatorship from 1964-1984 with the intent of occupying and developing the Amazon. "This was how in 1974, the Federal Government created the Program of Agro-Cattle Farming and Mining Development Poles – Polamazônia. The plan was to implant diverse poles of development in the Brazilian Amazon, linked to agro-cattle farms, the extraction of timber, and mineral production."⁴⁶ Polamazônia was accompanied six year later by the PGC, which set out to develop the area to the west of the legal Amazon, the so-called pre-Amazon.⁴⁷ The PGC encompassed an immense number of developing activities, located in eastern Pará, western Maranhão, and northern Tocantins in the area called "bico-do-papagaio" or beak of the parrot. One of the results of the PGC was construction of two major interstate highways whose intersection consists of the epicenter of Açailândia, the BR-010 and the BR-222.⁴⁸

Simultaneously, the great landowners of the country moved into the area, due to the encouragement of the dictatorship and with the new advantage of a system of transportation with which their products could be sent to the ports and exported, feeding the global economy. In order to obtain the land by paying little or nothing, they used the process of *grilagem*, forging their ownership papers. With a great deal of certainty, one can claim that every farm in the Amazon of Maranhão is owned by a *grileiro*.⁴⁹

Because of this history of greed and deceit, within and around the city of Açailândia reside the offenders of *grilagem*, environmental degradation, and exploitation of labor. Clearly, this situation of abuse of the system necessitates an organization that defends life and human rights. For this reason, the CDVDH is located in Açailândia. Its dedication to fighting the exploitation of human beings for the purposes of development and making more money causes the creation of what is called an "area of conflict." Typically, when one thinks of conflict, violence and blood come to mind. However, real conflict exists when the two or more sides of an issue coexist in a superficially peaceful manner in the same space, in this case, the city of Açailândia. Both sides greet each other on the streets, visit the same doctors, and frequent the same grocery stores. They live daily with each other, with the formalities of civilization, both sides wishing the other did not exist. An "area of conflict" is a volcano waiting to erupt when someone of one side steps over the line of civilities.⁵⁰ It is best exemplified by the president of the CDVDH sitting a few tables over from the brother of the mayor, who is nationally known to utilize slave labor. It is the owner of an ironworks factory shaking hands with that same president in that same restaurant.⁵¹ Within this "area of conflict," the CDVDH does its best to

⁴⁵ "Site Oficial da Prefeitura de Açailândia." 2006.

<http://www.acailandia.ma.gov.br/matriz.php?pg=mapa_acai.php>

⁴⁶ Sousa, 64

⁴⁷ According to a local resident, the title pre-Amazon implies that the region contains similar assets as the Amazon itself, but in the pre-Amazon, they are allowed to be destroyed.

⁴⁸ Sousa, 64.

⁴⁹ Romei, Event #32

⁵⁰ Romei, Event #4

⁵¹ Romei, Event #52

thwart the attempts of the great landowners to exploit the land and people of Açailândia while the great landowners try to discredit the actions of the CDVDH. Silent and bloodless violence.

Chapter 2: Center of Defense of Life and Human Rights of Açailândia

The birth of the CDVDH occurred when Cármen Bascarán Collantes arrived in Açailândia in 1996, hoping for a way to “dar uma resposta as necessidades que a humanidade tinha” (give a response to the necessities that humanity had). With the support of the Mission of the Combonianos, a religious order of the Catholic Church, she held Freirian sessions with the people of Açailândia to structure a way for them to participate in their own development and education.⁵² In 1998, the CDVDH prioritized two lines of concentration: slave labor and *conscientização*. These two lines of concentration have expanded to include a total of eight today: slave labor, *conscientização* and neighborhood nuclei, capoeira, theater and dance, new CDVDHs, a community radio, the COODIGMA, and general administration.



Today, the CDVDH is organized in a hierarchical manner: Cármen is the president as of 2003, and is elected by the Assembly, which consists of 68 associates. Second on the hierarchy is Antônio Filho, the executive secretary, who is appointed by the president. Then come the eight coordinators of the eight lines of action, which constitute the executive secretariat. Each of those coordinators has a team of volunteers and/or paid workers to support them. In addition to these main lines of action, the CDVDH benefits from the services of two legal consultants.⁵³

The CDVDH receives funding from a variety of international sources including the following: Manos Unidas from Spain; principal from the government of Asturias, the region in Spain from which Cármen came; Misereor from Germany; Catholic Relief Services (CRS) from the United States; Cáritas from the Vatican City; as well as a variety of private donors.⁵⁴ This money goes to a variety of recipients, from the salaries of the executive secretariat to the administration of events such as the Second Inter-participative Conference on Slave Labor and Super-Exploitation on Farms and Carvoarias, from the basic basket of necessities given to workers at COODIGMA to the payment of housing and alimentation for runaway slaves while they wait for their cases to be investigated.

The mission of the CDVDH consists of a phrase that every staff member recites with pride upon request: “to defend life where it is most threatened and human rights where they are

⁵² Romei, Interview #22 Cármen

⁵³ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

⁵⁴ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

least respected with privileged attention to the poorest and most exploited.” This slogan is applied to a number of activities, all with the purpose of defending life and human rights.

One of their focuses is cultural activities for children and teenagers. This includes capoeira, theater, and dance. These projects are meant to teach the kids the values of their culture and to keep them off the street. During my weeks here, I was able to attend a two nights of capoeira, theater and dance presentations during the conference, a theater rehearsal,⁵⁵ as well as an end-of-the-year dance recital at the CDVDH. During this final recital, the children and teenagers gave seminars to the audience about the culture and history of these dances, noting especially those that came from Africa or those with roots in the native culture of Maranhão. Among those dances are the following: Afro-jazz, forró, hip hop, African, cacuiá, and brega.⁵⁶



A second focus is *conscientização* through neighborhood nuclei. The coordinator of the opening of new Centers of Defense explained the nuclei in the following way: “These nuclei, of which the Center of Defense has five, are located exactly in the poorest neighborhoods. Through these nuclei, we have meetings and in these meetings we explain to them, what exactly the declaration of human rights is and how it is related to the Bible. There, we take the book of Ezekiel, which talks a lot about the defense of life, the poor, orphans, etc.” He proceeds to explain that when a person does not know his own rights, they have to work together with him until he has the ability to defend himself.⁵⁷ This both prevents slave labor and provides a form of popular organization for the neighborhoods.

The third, and most vigorous, focus is against slave labor. “Our principal objective is this: combat. We know that it is difficult. And we search for the ways that work best for us, what we can do about the farms. And we what we can’t do, we are still trying to do.”⁵⁸ In this regard, the CDVDH serves as a middle-man in the lengthy and bureaucratic process of finding compensation for the former slave and punishment for the enslaver. Simultaneously, the CDVDH runs an alternative form of employment for former slaves or those in risk of being abducted into slavery called the COODIGMA. This cooperative is divided into two sections: artesian toy building and ecological charcoal production.

The staff members of the CDVDH evaluate its progress generally in a positive manner, though always looking to improve. Antônio Filho explains that “Like the CPT, the CDVDH has become a reference with regard to slave labor for the whole country, even at an international level. The Center of Defense is also a reference in Maranhão with regard to its actions. Therefore, the workers have the Center as a reference. Here in the region of Açailândia, the people, the farmers, the owners of carvoarias, the businessmen, the politicians, already see human rights in a different way than they did ten years ago. Today they know. When they sit at

⁵⁵ Romei, Observation #4 Theater Rehearsal

⁵⁶ Romei, Observation #10 Dance Presentation

⁵⁷ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

⁵⁸ Romei, Interview #16 Brígida

a table to meet, whether it be a commercial association or industrial or cattle-raising, they have a vision that is a little different. They know that there is an organization that is out there, attentive, watching out for the infractions that they can commit.” His suggestion to improve includes enacting the proposals made during the conference and ensuring that those responsible hold to their parts.⁵⁹ Cármen gives a positive evaluation as well, “and overall, as a response to all those who say that the people do not fight, that the people are passive. It is a bruising, real, efficient, clear response for when you give the means to the people” they do not fail. The only way to improve, according to her, is “with more listening, more dedication, more means.”⁶⁰

For further description and explanation of the CDVDH’s responses to slave labor, see Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Reality of Contemporary Slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão

What is the definition of contemporary slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão? When I asked former slaves how they define slavery, the following responses were given:

“Money never appeared ever.”⁶¹

“I worked but I did not receive anything.”⁶²

“What I think it is to be a slave is when a person works and does not receive any money, just food, when he is maltreated, he has to buy the boots and clothes and working materials. The knife sharpener, everything is on our bill.”⁶³

“I think slavery is awful. He was working for free, without earning even a plate of food, because they did not even leave that for him. That is to say that he ate table scraps.”⁶⁴

“To be a slave is to suffer.”⁶⁵

“When I went to work, I was watched by armed men, like a prisoner, a service of slavery.”⁶⁶

Slavery, according to those who endured it, includes subhuman treatment like not being paid or fed, with armed guards constantly vigilant over them. Slavery is suffering. According to FOREM, an organization that works to fight slavery in the state of Maranhão, in the situation of slavery, the worker cannot leave the location where he is working because the master invents debts that he has to pay, the entire salary is abolished by the farmer, the documents are held by the business or farm, they do not have the means to return home because they do not have money for the transportation, and physical violence and threats are practices by the owner of the business or by his inferiors. Maranhão leads the list of exporters of human labor. “Almost 40% of all slave labor utilized in Brazil comes from Maranhão.”⁶⁷ In addition, Maranhão is unique in that it not only exports labor, but it also exploits slave labor within its borders.

However, it is important to differentiate between slave labor and other forms of degrading labor. Leonardo Sakamoto of the Repórter Brasil explains these differences with the

⁵⁹ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

⁶⁰ Romei, Interview #22 Cármen

⁶¹ Romei, Interview #1 Manuel

⁶² Romei, Interview #4 Fulano

⁶³ Romei, Interview #5 Raimundo

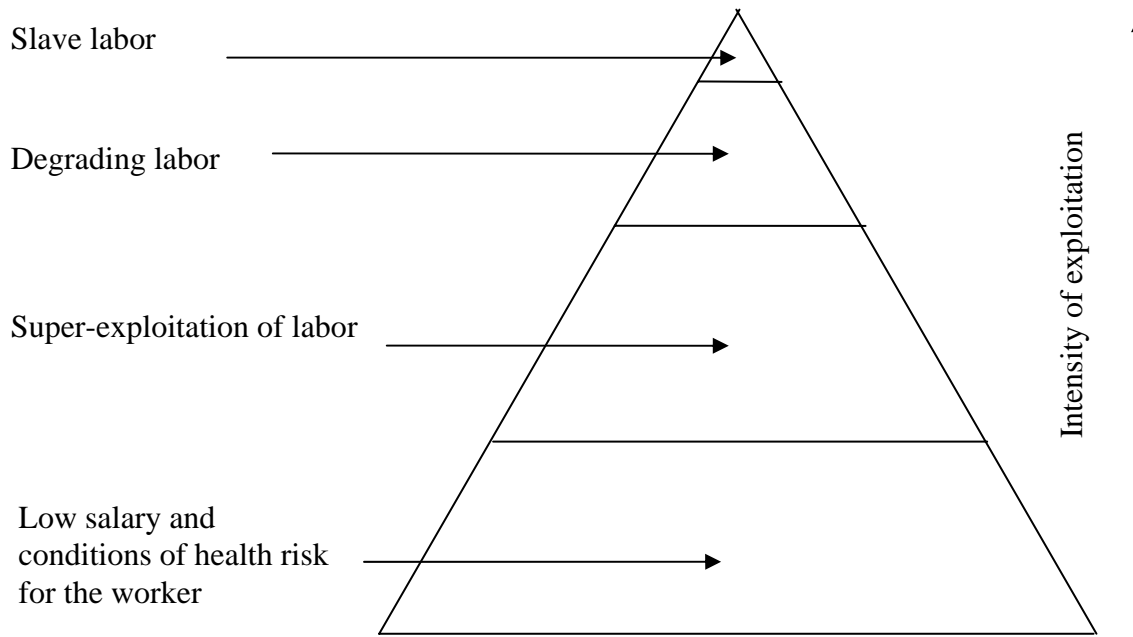
⁶⁴ Romei, Interview #6 Silvanana

⁶⁵ Romei, Interview #9 Leanora

⁶⁶ Romei, Interview #21 Vítor

⁶⁷ “Combate ao Trabalho Escravo no Maranhão.” Fórum Esdatual de Erradicação do Trabalho Escravo no Maranhão.” Dezembro 2004.

following triangle diagram, representing the quantity of workers in each level of exploitation in Brazil.



The top of the triangle has the highest intensity of exploitation and the bottom has the least. At the top, a small portion is slave labor, then more is degrading labor, then even more is super-exploitation, then the lowest level, which he claims is the majority of rural work in Brazil is low salary and conditions of health risk for the worker.⁶⁸

The question is, then, how does one reach the level of degradation of a slave in the context of Maranhão? According to a member of the DRT in Açailândia, the process of enslavement today consists of the following process:

In Maranhão, there is a lot of slave labor. It is due to two circumstances: they are poor, the poorest state, and migration. Migration, in this case, means moving from place to place, pursuing improvements, salaries to feed the kids. And when they arrive in certain places, like the cities where they have a certain opportunity of work, what do they do? Some people called 'gatos' arrive and hope to find the person that is hanging around the bus station, the people that we perceive to be beggars that have barely an opportunity at life. They approach the beggars with promises about taking them somewhere, a farm or a carvoaria, that they will have a good salary, good food, housing like that in the bus station. The gatos pay the debts of those staying in hotels. They pay that debt and tell the worker that he will be taken somewhere to work, to have a profession. When the workers arrive in the area of employment, what do they find? Only the promises of the gato. And there, they have to stay. Arriving there, when a worker wants to return to the city, he does not have the means to return, because the gato says that he already is in debt. They use this argument as a form of imprisonment in that location. Because

⁶⁸ Romei, Observation #6 j

the human being sometimes, here in our area of Maranhão, Pará, basically Tocantins, still uses loyalty as a form of respect, which ensures that the slaves won't leave. They work to pay off that debt that began in the city after leaving the hotel. From there, time continues, everyday that passes, they eat something brought by that gato and when the end of the months arrives, the balance always comes up owing the gato. They never have a salary. They are always debtors. So that they do not leave with a dirtied name, so no one in the city knows they are debtors, they submit themselves to that treatment. They forget that they left a father, mother, wife, and kids in the city, depending on that salary. The great powerful farmers use this argument to maintain high productivity.⁶⁹

In addition to this confinement based on the honor code and the culture of the region, more concrete means of preventing escape are used as well. For example, a large quantity of farms that utilize slave labor are located within the Biological Reserve of Gurupi. Not only is it against the law to enter this area, but it is also illegal to establish a farm or carvoaria, hold workers in slave labor, and prevent them from leaving.

In this case, physical isolation prevents escape or the ability for a worker to leave at will. The only way to leave this dense forestal area is by car. The only person who is rich enough to own a car and daring enough to bring it into the reserve is the farmer who is holding the worker prisoner. "The farmers adopt a method of saying, if you want to leave here, you have to leave on this day. And you stay, treated as if you were a prisoner." If a worker decides to leave without the permission of the farmer, "There is just no way. To leave the reserve, no. The closest distance to leave the Reserve would be about 50 kilometers away."⁷⁰

Isolation is coupled with armed guards, as told by former slave, Vitor, "There were vigilantes all over the place there, no one could leave, there were people all over with 765, silent rifles, no one could leave. There, there was not a way to leave because the whole area was guarded. They did not shoot, it was just security to create fear, and if someone went even just to urinate, they sent someone in with him. And for whatever reason, they shot two or three times to scare us and make us return to our barracks."⁷¹ This type of violence was confirmed by some former slaves but flatly denied by others. Some are afraid to tell the atrocities that occurred because they are embarrassed or worried that the farmer still has the power to find and kill them.

What other atrocities do the slaves suffer today? Many do not have access to potable water to drink. Raimundo lived next to a lake where the cattle drank, "we too drank from that same lake and bathed in that same lake with dirty water."⁷² Fulano, on the other hand, had to walk 800 meters to the closest cistern, whose water was used for bathing and drinking. There was no filtered water for either of them.

⁶⁹ Romei, Interview #8

⁷⁰ Romei, Interview #14 Anonymous

⁷¹ Romei, Interview #21 Antônio

⁷² Romei, Interview #5 Raimundo



Water for bathing, drinking, and cleaning.⁷³

Others live in subhuman housing, like the corral where Fulano slept along with nine other men and the cows,⁷⁴ or the canvas barracks where Leanora slept with fourteen other men, one of which was out to kill her.⁷⁵



Barrack-style housing⁷⁶

In addition to terrible sleeping conditions, the quality of the restrooms and toilets are unsanitary. Many times, there is no facility for necessary bodily functions.

The food offered to the slaves ranged from beans and rice to rotted meat to fish everyday. Raimundo's food was cooked and served on the dirty ground, next to the cattle.⁷⁷ Often it is not enough to sustain the level of work these people are subjected to, and almost exclusively, they have to pay for it. Prices of these items are frequently much higher than the market price. Their purchases are noted in a ledger kept by the gato and the overall dues are subtracted from their salaries at the end of the month.

⁷³ Investigation Nov 2004, DRT Imperatriz

⁷⁴ Romei, Interview #4 João

⁷⁵ Romei, Interview #9 Leandra

⁷⁶ Investigation Nov 2004, DRT Imperatriz

⁷⁷ Romei, Interview #5 Raimundo



Table of food for slaves⁷⁸

This leads to the question, who are these people who suffer slavery today? They are poor, unemployed, rural residents without any option other than to accept whatever work is offered to them. The average profile of a slave today in Brazil, given by the ILO is the following: men between the ages of 18 and 44 who are illiterate.⁷⁹ I was able to interview six former slaves. They range from twenty-three to seventy-five years old, include both females and males, and were subjected to a variety of different degrading situations.



Leanora



Fulano



Raimundo



Vitor (in the center)



Silvana

⁷⁸ Investigation Nov 2004, DRT Imperatriz

⁷⁹ Romei, Observation #7 h v



Group of slaves arriving at the CDVDH directly from their farm in the Biological Reserve of Gurupi. I interviewed ManuelJoel, seventh from the right.

Who then, are those who enslave these people? The enslavers are most often large landowners who value money over human life. They contract *gatos* to recruit workers and manage their land, but the real offenders are the farmers, and the *carvoaria* owners who mastermind the process. The most infamous in Maranhão are the following: Miguel de Sousa Resende, Gilberto Andrade, Olindo Chaves dos Santos, Max Neves Cangussu, Alcides Reinaldo Gava, Inocêncio Gomes de Oliveira (Federal Deputy PL/PE), Shydney Jorge Rosa, Manoel Erasmo Borges Bandeira, Sergio Marcos Santos de Assis, Agenor Alves Teixeira, and Marcos Antônio de Araújo Braga.⁸⁰ In his own defense, Marcos Antônio de Araújo Braga, known simply as Marcão, stated the following during a hearing in 2004 in a court in Imperatriz, Maranhão:

THAT he did not worry about providing sanitary installations in their housing for reasons of local customs, because he is sure that even if bathrooms existed, the workers would prefer to do the physical necessities in the woods... THAT he can affirm that the food served to the workers was of a quality superior to the quality that they are habituated, since the majority of them, daily, eat only rice; THAT it is a regional habit to drink coffee bean remains in coffee, bacon in the beans, and lung of cow in the pork; THAT it is also common that the food be prepared in dishes directly on the floor of muddy earth... THAT he knew that MUNDICO [the *gato*] maintained a notebook of the worker's debts but he never saw that notebook; THAT he believed that MUNDICO provided diverse products to the workers and noted the respective values in the notebook, because this is the practice of *gatos*... but he believes that the great majority were in debt because almost all of the cases, the workers arrive at the farm already owing the *gato* due to known advances... THAT he did not know if MUNDICO authorized the firing of certain workers that were in debt, but he believes that in those cases, the worker himself preferred to remain waiting to receive some money at the end of the employment... THAT it does not make sense to say that the workers were confined because if a worker wanted to leave, there is no way to impede him...⁸¹

Hence, either this particular farmer is ignorant of the customs of rural workers in Maranhão, or he is creating false claims in order to defend himself.

⁸⁰ “Mostra da situação dos processos criminais referentes ao trabalho escravo no Maranhão.” CDVDH, Açailândia, MA. 16 Nov 2006.

⁸¹ Ministério Público Federal vs. Marcos Antônio de Araújo Braga e outro. Proc #2004.37.01.001287-8 em trâmite na Justiça Federal, Seção Judiciária de Imperatriz, Maranhão.

The next chapter will go into detail about the reasons these people are able to maintain slave labor in the twenty-first century, 118 years after the signing of the Áurea Law, that terminated the classic system of slavery in Brazil in 1888.

Chapter 4: Causes of Contemporary Slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão

The three causes most often cited for slave labor in the Amazon of Maranhão today are greed, misery, and impunity. Beginning with greed as it is manifested in the capitalist system, I will now describe and explain these causes using observations, interviews, and background information.

Greed

To initiate a discussion of greed, we must understand its context within capitalism, which encourages and is based upon the constant lust for more. Starting with the most macro level of the world market and reaching the most micro level of a single person's desire for a better standard of living, greed is inherent in our everyday lives. When asked what is the greatest cause of slavery, Antônio Filho, the Executive Coordinator of the CDVDH responded, "Greed of those who already have a lot of money, already have a financial sustainability and still want more at whatever cost."⁸²

Beginning in the age of colonialism, Brazil became an instrument of the world powers at the time, a raw-material-exporting instrument that benefited the international market far more than itself. As Sakamoto states, "We served to provide primary materials to foreigners. We are just Europe's big farm."⁸³ In this sense, despite the lack of development in Brazil, its products were demanded on a world-wide scale. "The demands of the world market always exerted strong pressure on the exploitation of local work force, especially when taking into account the fact that the mode of production had not been sufficiently developed [in Brazil]. This determined, for example, the rhythm of exploitation during colonial or modern slavery, as Marx explains: 'When towns whose production is found in the inferior stages of slavery, of corvée labor, etc. they enter in the world market already dominated by the capitalist mode of production, becoming the vendor of their products to the exterior, the dominant interest, without regard to the barbarian horrors of slavery, servitude, etc. A civilized cruelty of work in excess.'"⁸⁴ The results of this system of organized cruelty are the diminishing of social cost and the diminishing of the cost of primary materials. The former provides profit for the rural producer and the latter provides profit for the national agroindustry and the external market. Hence, "the fault is in the whole system that benefits from the slave."⁸⁵ In the words of Professor Aluizio Leal of the University of São Paulo, "Capital is born of exploitation."⁸⁶

In the case of the Amazon of Maranhão, greed takes on two forms: industrial development and land concentration. As mentioned in Chapter 1, industrial development takes on a major function within the context of this region.

⁸² Romei, Interview #18 Filho

⁸³ Romei, Observation #6 j

⁸⁴ Sousa, 59.

⁸⁵ Romei, Observation #6 j

⁸⁶ Romei, Observation #8 j

In the setting of carvoarias, industrial coal ovens, and iron factories, slavery is a common occurrence.



Small carvoaria



Coal Oven



Oven in the process of cooking



Industrial coal ovens and their pollution



Stacks of wood used to create coal



Lines of industrial coal ovens

The system of producing iron for the world's cars, trains, boats, and bridges begins here, in the Amazon of Maranhão, from the labor of slaves. The process begins with deforestation. Once the land has been cleared of native vegetation, a section is reserved for the carvoaria or industrial coal ovens, and the rest is replanted with eucalyptus trees.



These trees are chosen because they grow quickly, occupy very little ground space, and attract no wildlife other than koalas, which are not native to Brazil. The wood from these trees is then burned in carvoarias or industrial coal ovens, which turn the timber into coal.⁸⁷ The coal is then sent to the iron factories built during the era of the PGC, five of which are located in Pará, three in the greater Maranhão, and five within the city limits of Açailândia.⁸⁸ The iron factories operate under high temperatures which are produced by the coal. Subsequently, the iron is sent on barges to port cities such as São Luís, the capital of Maranhão. From there, Brazil exports this secondary material to the so-called first world, where it is transformed into the major vehicles and structures that furnish our plush way of life.

Nearly every step of that chain of labor involves working conditions analogous to slavery. According to Marcelo Campos, the Coordinator of the Grupo Móvel of the MTE in Brasília, “slavery is clearly part of the productive process of iron factories.”⁸⁹ The most degrading is that of carvoaria work. “The carvoaria workers are privileged victims of contemporary slave labor as an expression of the super-exploitation in its most advanced stage. There are hundreds of charcoal providers, generally informal, spread about by the State, that function as contractors, or ‘gatos,’ that recruit and monitor the production of each worker, submitting him to diverse forms of degradation.”⁹⁰

Leanora spent her four years of enslavement working at a carvoaria. She worked without protection equipment, throwing wood into the igloo-like structures with her bare hands under the hot sun. Her day began at 2:00am when she began caring for three ovens. At seven, she

⁸⁷ Romei, Event #7 f, Observation #11

⁸⁸ Sousa, 75.

⁸⁹ Romei, Observation #7 g iii

⁹⁰ Sousa, 78.

changed positions with another worker and began chopping and arranging wood for the ovens. At one, she was allowed to eat lunch and take a bath. At 2:00pm she returned to the chopping and arranging of wood, which she continued until 5:00pm. At that point, she was served dinner by the cook who forced them to eat the molded meat she served. She was the only woman among fourteen men. She was never paid.⁹¹

Another assignment at carvoarias is the relocating of the charcoal from the ovens to the trucks that carry it to the iron factories. According to a member of the DRT of Maranhão, the bags of coal they carry “weigh 60 kilos. They scale the ladder running. They really run. They throw the coal in and descend running. If they miss a step, they die. In addition to the fall, they are smashed by the weight of the coal. If they don’t have momentum, they can’t make it. They need momentum.”⁹² Often, in order to ease the bodily pain that results from these degrading activities, they use steroids or other types of drugs, “because they cannot take it, they become sick, because without the drug, the majority ends up with pained backs.”⁹³



All of this constitutes the price of exporting iron. It is a costly activity in environmental damage and the degradation of human rights, but it makes money for the carvoaria owners, the iron factory owners, and the link that most benefits is the car company that turns that cheap iron into a car that sells for USD\$20,000 or more.

The other method for making money that exploits labor in the Amazon of Maranhão involves large-scale farms. This activity is closely linked to that of coal production for the basic necessity of deforestation. “It happens that the cattle farmer needs grass for the raising of cattle just as much as the carvoarias want wood obtained from deforestation. The activities depend on each other, in a combination of private interests that favor the acceleration of the capitalist offensive, which represents the environmental impact and the violation of human rights. In this context, the practice of contemporary slave labor proliferates.”⁹⁴ On these farms, the principal occupation of slaves today is clearing of brush or trees, and digging up roots in order to maintain perfect pastures for cattle farms.

⁹¹ Romei, Interview #20 Veras

⁹² Romei, Interview #10 Alan

⁹³ Romei, Interview #20 Veras

⁹⁴ Sousa, 86.



Sixty-four year old Fulano arrived at the CDVDH a few weeks before I did. He had just spent the past month working an electric saw in the sun from 6:00am until 5:00pm. He slept in a corral with the other workers and the cattle. He only left when he could not work anymore due to an injury he had suffered from an earlier job. He had been promised 300 reais, which he still has not seen.

The practice of slave labor due to lack of personal land can be traced back through centuries of land concentration in the hands of very few. This is especially true in the case of Maranhão, where an oligarchy ruled consistently until the most recent election, when the Sarney family was defeated for the governorship. The ancient tradition of land concentration developed into a policy of “conservative modernization: the process of land acquisition as it occurred in all of the Amazon region, in an illegal way, ‘the big businesses,’ bought land that was ‘supposedly free’ of a form that was ‘supposedly legitimate,’ with institutional support at their disposition, financial incentives, technical services, and security provided by the State”⁹⁵ This grilagem resulted in the following data provided by the CPT of Maranhão: “the 14 largest properties control 1,600,000 hectares of land. On the other side, over 70% of the rural properties consist of less than five hectares. They are very small.”⁹⁶

The lack of land for small farmers and families hoping to achieve a status of self-subsistence creates the need for another means of income, one that does not involve owning one’s own land. In this sense, poverty, and misery arise as a second cause of slavery.

Misery

Along with an unequal distribution of land, Brazil has an unequal distribution of income. According to Marco Gordillo Zamora of Manos Unidas, “Brazil is not a poor country. It is a rich country. It has a lot of economic, social, cultural, and natural wealth. The great problem of Brazil is the inequality. It is a problem of justice. It is a problem of the distribution of income to a very small percentage, with a large mass of poor people. This occurs also in the field of democracy, culture, and access to rights, etc.”⁹⁷ With such great gaps between the rich and the poor and such great differences in the number of rich people and the number of poor people, a base of exploitation is inherent.

⁹⁵ Silva, José Carlos Aragão. “Desdobramentos históricos da questão agrarian no Maranhão e suas consequências para os camponenses.” Conversa Bonita: O trabalho escravo na agricultura contemporânea brasileira e o aliciamento de camponenses na região dos cocais, Maranhão. Mestrado em Políticas Públicas na UFPI. Teresina, 2004. p90-100. (92)

⁹⁶ Combate.

⁹⁷ Romei, Interview #11 Marco

According to Cármen Bascarán, there is no other cause of slavery. Misery is the central and only cause.⁹⁸ Antônio Filho agrees, “I know that the misery in which part of our population lives makes those workers leave, leave their regions and search for an alternative, so I think one of the causes is misery, the poverty that still exists in our country. I think that misery, the great necessity, is the cause of slavery still.”⁹⁹ A third opinion confirms, “It is what takes someone to slavery, it is necessity. It is a question of poverty. A person that has a better life, educationally, financially, he would not go.”¹⁰⁰



Land fill where the garbage-pickers work A street in Capelloza, a neighborhood of Açailândia

When a person has no work, it is tempting to accept a job offer, whether the risk of enslavement is apparent or not. Silvana’s husband has been enslaved twice already and she thinks it could happen again: “I think it could happen again, because everyone who arrives there at the house asking him to work in a carvoaria, in these things, I now pay close attention. I say, no, don’t go. But he wants to go. He says we are in need, these things. I tell him not to go. It is not that I like that he stays home, you know? It is because I am afraid. Because they went to kill... there was a colleague of ours here. They killed her husband in a carvoaria. And I am afraid of these things, that someone will arrive like that, take him, and I will never see him again.”¹⁰¹ Without work, and without money to buy food to feed the children, it is easy for a poor person to take a job.

It is for this reason that punishment for the enslavers is important, to stop the continuance of slavery before it reaches those who will accept work at whatever cost, without any other option.

Impunity

The third cause for slavery is impunity, the lack of punishment for those responsible for enslaving others. Note the immense number of politicians who utilize slave labor in Brazil: Mutran family, Inocêncio Oliveira, João Ribeira, Picciani family, Mânica family, Beto Mansor, Quagliato family. These are accompanied by those politicians who support slave labor in Brazil: Katia Abreu, Blairo Maggi, Marconi Perillo, Ronaldo Calado, Sarney family. Why then, does slavery still exist? These people profit from it. And why do these people in power continue to encourage and use such a barbarous practice? Because they can.¹⁰² The fact is clear and simple.

⁹⁸ Romei, Interview #22 Cármen

⁹⁹ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹⁰⁰ Romei, Interview #14 Anonymous

¹⁰¹ Romei, Interview #6 Silvanete

¹⁰² Romei, Observation #6 j

Luís Camargo from the Public Ministry of Work states without a doubt, “No one goes to jail for reducing working conditions to analogous to slavery. That is an embarrassment in this country.”¹⁰³ According to the ILO, this is the primary cause of slavery in Brazil today.¹⁰⁴ Antônio Filho adds impunity to the list of causes of slavery in his opinion: “There’s also the question of impunity of the people who commit this kind of crime. They are not punished by the state.”¹⁰⁵

Those who utilize slave labor today have the power and the money that threatens those who fight against them. These threats range from basic intimidation to serious death threats. For the government and those fighting slave labor, “it is a difficult game, because we are meshing with people that have a lot of power, and those people are not accustomed to facing resistance in the sphere of public power in relation to those interests. And our case here, we establish that resistance because we have a clear compromise with the workers with respect to Brazilian law, which guarantees all Brazilians the same treatment from the point of view of work relations.”¹⁰⁶

One reason impunity is so rampant is an obstruction in the Brazilian justice system consisting of the indecision of whether enslaving a person is a federal crime or a state crime. “This has caused the majority of cases to remain in a ping-pong without end. The indefiniteness exists because according to the Constitution, the Federal Court is responsible to judge crimes against the organization of work as well as crimes against humanity. Simultaneously, the State Court is responsible for crimes against liberty. The problem is that in our Penal Code, the crime of slave labor is under the chapter of ‘crimes against liberty.’ That is the principal argument of the defenders that the responsibility is of the State Court. On the other side, the majority of the agents involved in the fight against slave labor think that the crime should be judged by the Federal Court because it is the public federal agents who are able to initiate investigations of farms and for the previously mentioned reasons. No one has ever seen a case move through neither the Federal nor State Court, more for reasons of the political force of the perpetrators than for the lack of public agent responsible for the judgment.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, nearly every case that reaches the court system ends in suspension due to the fact that the justice system has still not decided who should try this crime. In the opinion of a member of the DRT in São Luís, “the Federal Court is competent. That is what it says in the Constitution, but the people sit there fighting. If you enter in the State Court, they say no, this is for the Federal Court. And if you enter in the Federal Court, they say no, this is for the State Court. And while the competence remains undefined, no one will go to prison.”¹⁰⁸

Masson gives a few examples of the results of the indecision of who should be responsible for the trying of slave labor to show the absurdity of it all:

Various processes are stuck in this ping-pong without end, the one with which I am most familiar is the case of Shydney Jorge Rosa (recently elected Senator’s Alternate in Pará) who had a farm located in the Reserve of Gurupi, investigated during the era in which he was Mayor of Paragominas, Pará. For this fact, there was a privileged forum and the process went to the Regional Federal Court of the First Region in Brasília. Because of the mandate and the loss of privilege, the

¹⁰³ Romei, Observation #7 h iv

¹⁰⁴ Romei, Observation #7 h v 3

¹⁰⁵ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹⁰⁶ Romei, Interview #13 Bira

¹⁰⁷ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹⁰⁸ Romei, Interview #10

process was sent accidentally to the Federal Court of Belém. There, arriving, realizing it was incorrect, it was sent to the Federal Court of São Luis, which understood that the responsibility was of the State Court, sending it accidentally to the State Court of Carutapera, which sent it to the State Court of Maracaçumé, which understood that the responsibility was of the Federal Court, sending it again to the Federal Court of São Luís. Another emblematic case of the urgent necessity of defining the responsibility is the case of Campo Grande Farm, where more than 150 workers were reached, of which adolescents, elders, and indigenous people participated. In the municipality of Açailândia, despite the fact that the farmer, Olindo Chaves, resides in Açailândia, owns various farms in various states, and is a public figure in the region, for years the courts could not locate him for the citation, but when he was named a flagrant defender, Olindo himself found a lawyer to defend himself. For deliberately hiding from the courts, the MPF required the preventative imprisonment, which was decreed by the Federal Judge of Imperatriz. It occurs that after twenty days in hiding, the Regional Federal Court of the First Region decided to annul the prison decree for the fact that the responsible court had not been decided by any judge; hence, neither the Federal Court nor the State Court should act.¹⁰⁹

While the indecision as to who should try slave labor remains as the most definite reason for the impunity of perpetrators in Brazil, along with that comes a long system of bureaucracy that delays and even cancels trials. The process is divided into three types of infractions: worker relation, administrative, and criminal. All three processes begin with a former slave making a denouncement to the CDVDH or to the local DRT. For the purposes of punishing the slave owner in the worker relation's aspect, this denouncement is then sent to the MPT in São Luís, which enacts a civil action suit determining whether or not the worker deserves reparations for moral damage and unpaid work. In the cases where the worker appears to deserve compensation, the MPT orders an investigation of the farm or carvoaria from which he came. In the administrative sector, the document of denouncement and investigation is received by the MTE, which has the task of deciding whether or not the employer will be included in the "List of Shame." The MTE sends the report to INCRA to investigate the chain of land ownership. In the criminal sphere, the report is sent to the Federal Police, who proceed with a detailed criminal investigation. This investigation is sent to the Public Prosecutor or the Executive Justice who analyzes whether or not there was a crime committed. If there it is determined that a crime has been committed, a judge takes on the task of trying the accused, who then has the right to a defense lawyer.¹¹⁰ This bureaucratic process lasts even longer due to the fact that the offenders often have more power than the judges themselves and cause incredible delays in the process.

As Antônio, the first slave case to be attended at the CDVDH, asks with indignation, "where's the justice?"¹¹¹ As is apparent in the lack of punishment, something needs to be done to prevent, repress, and generate alternatives for slavery. The following chapter will define what the CDVDH does to stop slavery as well as summarize the actions of other organizations.

¹⁰⁹ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹¹⁰ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹¹¹ Romei, Interview #21 Vitor

Chapter 5: Responses Against Slavery

During the Second Inter-participative Conference on Slave Labor and Super-Exploitation on Farms and Carvoarias, the participants were divided into three groups to discuss current actions and proposals for action in the following categories of responses against slavery: prevention, repression, and generation of alternatives. This division allowed for clear and concise conversation due to the separation of the three responses. Prevention is an act directed at those who have not yet been enslaved but who have the possibility of becoming enslaved with the objective of impeding slavery in the future. Repression is directed at those who enslave and aims to punish and chastise their offenses. The generation of alternatives directs its action toward the general population and serves as an indirect means of prevention, aiming to give people at risk options other than slavery.

I will now explain how the CDVDH approaches each of these three categories and the results of these actions. Then, there will be a brief description of how other organizations including the government, workers' unions, and other NGOs combat slavery as well.

Prevention

The CDVDH handles prevention in two different ways: cultural activities for children, and neighborhood nuclei.

The cultural activities work toward prevention both by keeping the children off the street, where they can easily become involved with drugs or violence and by teaching them about slavery from a young age, so that they can be aware as they grow up of the temptations of leaving home for work. According to Cármen Bascarán, “Eighty percent of these adolescents, of these kids that pass through the Center, that are involved, would be prostitutes or slave laborers or drug traffickers. So, if we are able to show them that there is another type of life, there are other possibilities, then we are preventing slave labor.”¹¹²



¹¹² Romei, Interview #22 Cármen



For the conference, the theater group put together a powerful interpretation of a modern slave revolt, repeating incessantly the phrase: “Not even one step back, liberation or death”) This is in reference to a man named Oziel Alvez Perreira, who was 17 years old in 1996, when he was shot, screaming that phrase. He was an MST activist from Imperatriz who is widely adored by young revolutionaries. The choreographer and director of the theater group, Eliziel, who cannot be older than twenty, told about how he became involved with the CDVDH. He told me that slavery “a very strong reality in our region.” He felt the need to do something to help. He originally entered to participate in the theater sector, but as he participated, he learned more about slavery. He said that slavery instigates indignant feelings and you just need to fight back somehow.¹¹³

From my observations and interactions with these kids, as a result of their participation in these activities, their consciousness of the problems within their society is far beyond that of most children. Beyond the issue of slavery, they are proud to dance in African garb and show off their gymnastic moves in capoeira classes.¹¹⁴ In addition, they help out in other aspects of the CDVDH’s activities when they are not dancing or acting or practicing capoeira.

The second way the CDVDH approaches prevention is through neighborhood nuclei, which was one of its original lines of action. Milton Teixeira, the Coordinator of future CDVDHs, explains the process of prevention through neighborhood nuclei in the following manner: “First, what do we do with people who do not know their rights? This is a lack of knowledge. And this lack of knowledge, we have to defeat together with them, so that they have the condition to defend their own rights. Until they achieve that, we give them support.”¹¹⁵

This Freirian approach to popular empowerment allows the people of each neighborhood to take on leadership roles and shape the process of their own *conscientização*. In this way, they feel a connection to an aspect of their own neighborhood and home. This prevents the desire to leave in order to find work. Plus, this network of people enables a safety net for those who are without work or in need of temporary financial aid. Finally, these neighborhood nuclei serve as a means of information divulgation. When residents attend meetings, they learn about local issues such as slavery, prostitution, etc., and may be impelled to help in some way. According to Eliziel, the CDVDH could always use more help, more volunteers.¹¹⁶

Similarly, the expansion of CDVDHs into other cities and regions takes on a similar process. Milton has three new CDVDHs underway. The first will be completed within a year in Santa Luzia. The process of choosing new locations and educating the population is as follows:

¹¹³ Romei, Interview #3 Eliziel

¹¹⁴ Romei, Observation #10

¹¹⁵ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

¹¹⁶ Romei, Interview #3 Eliziel

We use Açailândia as a basic exemplary form. So, in a strategic manner, we verify what this region is like, a region that has a high incident of slave labor, a lack of human rights in various aspects due to the cultural question of child prostitution, slave labor, administrative corruption... Our region has a series of problems. So, we descend on that town. We do research that we call institutional research. We visit government organizations and ask them various questions. Afterwards, we do a community survey, listening to the people. Afterwards, we put together this information and cross it with that of the government. From there, the issues that speak most directly appear. We have a meeting with the people of the community and we show them, look, this is a map of your town, of your city. Do you want it to continue like this or do you want it to change? And then, they generally say, we want to change. We ask, what do you want to change? They say, for example, we want child prostitution to end. Then, we are at your disposition to help in this fight. From there, we begin to have meetings to talk about legislation and how to approach it. Like this, a year passes. Amidst that year, we have lectures with specialists, seminaries. We pass out didactic material, books, data on the issues that are changing. And after a year, we create a Center of Defense. We create a statute and choose a location. If they do not have a location, they stay in a church or in someone's house. And from there, we go about giving support, helping them. They discover a problem in the city and send it to us. We offer legal help and they make things happen.)¹¹⁷

With the principles of participation, community, and a high value on human rights, the CDVDH prevents slavery both by children's groups and adult networking.

Other groups work to prevent slavery in a number of ways. One such group is the ICC, which fights to improve the working conditions in carvoarias around the country. If conditions improve enough, the situation would no longer be considered slavery. Their primary goal is to enforce the usage of EPI. In addition, they struggle for sanitary bathroom facilities and housing for the workers.¹¹⁸ Other workers' unions fight for similar goals.

One of the most important methods of prevention is the divulgence of facts and data in the media. If everyone knew about the conditions of modern day slavery, it is doubtful that its perpetrators would remain immune to the law. Brígida Rocha, the Social Educator of the CDVDH believes that an effective preventative method is the "Media, a lot of divulgence in the media, television, radio. The quantity of information can be very large."¹¹⁹ To sell the products of the COODIGMA and publicize its progress, the Repórter Brasil has published its information on the internet. "We are expanding now, outward. We are searching for partnerships like we have with Sakamoto of the Repórter Brasil, who is informing, publishing information on the internet. There are a lot of people searching on the internet, so, we are selling already in São Francisco, and also in São Paulo."¹²⁰ The Repórter Brasil has dedicated a large portion of its publishing to slave labor and its combat, which informs the public of its atrocities and those who are fighting against it.

Another means of prevention is through basic social services that improve the standard of living for those who end up with no other choice other than accept a risky work offer. Programs

¹¹⁷ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

¹¹⁸ Romei, Observation #7 h iv

¹¹⁹ Romei, Interview #16 Brígida

¹²⁰ Romei, Interview #20 Veras

such as bolsa família, which offers a certain amount of money to each family below a certain level of income that agrees to send their children to school instead of to work, and unemployment security, which pays a worker one minimum salary of 350 reais for a certain amount of time after he is fired, allow a small level of income and freedom for those who have nothing else.¹²¹ These programs both prevent a person from entering into slavery for the first time, and also benefit former slaves in a way that will help prevent them from falling into the trap a second or third time, which is unfortunately common.

A final and more drastic means of prevention would be to solve one of the basic causes of slavery, land concentration, through means of agrarian reform. Currently, agrarian reform resides only in the minds of those who fight for it. It has a lot of progress remaining before becoming a reality. MST is the group most actively struggling for a more equal land distribution. In a participative manner, each settlement and encampment of MST is given materials and information that are discussed in small groups. Those groups decide on their ideal plan for agrarian reform and send it to the state-wide conferences, which occur during the third week of December. The state proposals are collected into a voted-upon proposal during a nationwide meeting of the directional board of MST, which is presented at the National Congress, which occurs every five years. The next national congress will be in May of 2007.¹²²



Despite the present lack of action, many people believe it is land reform that will finally do away with slavery in Brazil. Aluizio Leal says we can not eradicate slavery without agrarian reform, and agrarian reform can not occur within a capitalist system. He adds that the real sense of revolution is in the redistribution of land.¹²³ To put it frankly, Professor Arioaldo Umpelino of the University of São Paulo states that slave labor is “barbarism against the land.”¹²⁴ According to a member of the DRT of Maranhão, a person only has to be given a piece of land and taught to farm in order to terminate with slavery today. “A really efficient agrarian reform is not simply giving land. It is to give land as well as the conditions to work the land. If a person does not have condition, he will sell the land. It is not just giving the fish, it is necessary to teach a man to fish.”¹²⁵

Antônio Filho specifies that familial agriculture needs to be the priority. “If we do not produce for ourselves, to feed ourselves, we are not going to resolve the problem, because it does not help the country improve itself. And the majority that is produced here is for exportation.

¹²¹ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹²² Romei, Event #14

¹²³ Romei, Observation #8 j i

¹²⁴ Romei, Observation #8 j

¹²⁵ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

Here, our people do not enjoy what they produce. Therefore, the priority of public policies to resolve the problem of these states is an important step.”¹²⁶

Prevention of slavery is practiced in a variety of way, and is the central focus of the CDVDH.

Repression

According to the head of one of the only means of repression of slave labor in the country, “the part of repression should not even exist, it only should exist because slave labor still exists.”¹²⁷ This repression is carried out in a variety of ways, beginning with the denouncement of a former slave. As previously explained, a former slave arrives at the CDVDH or the local DRT and his story is carried from one governmental organization to the next until it reaches those that issue fines, prison sentences, and land expropriation.

The process begins when Brígida Rocha, the Social Educator of the CDVDH attends a former slave, meaning she notes every aspect of his or her story that he or she is willing to tell. When the report reaches the DRT, they send an investigation force to the farm or carvoaria to determine the situation there and the penalizations that should be issued to the farmer or carvoaria owner. It usually takes two to three months from the original denouncement to the time when the farm is investigated. However, many farms and carvoarias are never even reached. The process of investigation is a long and complicated one. A member of the DRT explains the costs of a single investigation in order to defend the low number: “Imagine six police officers, four or five judges, a prosecutor, two motorists. This is the minimum. It is expensive. We spend two weeks in the field. It is a high cost of gas, cars, daily expenses. An action like that, does not end up less than 15,000 reais from the government. So, that is expensive.”¹²⁸



The participants of an investigation¹²⁹

In addition, those in Pará that are referred to the CDVDH seldom result in any action at all. According to Brígida, “Now in 2006, 6 farms were investigated. The number of denouncements is much larger. Some 15-20. And we only have 6 investigations. It is harder to investigate in Pará. It is one of the locations with the most denouncements, but investigation is much slower. This year, we directed denouncements to Pará, but there was no investigation. It

¹²⁶ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹²⁷ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹²⁸ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹²⁹ Investigation Nov 2004, DRT Imperatriz

goes sometimes until December. So, it lasts a long time.)¹³⁰ After months waiting in Açailândia for some sort of compensation for her enslavement in a carvoaria, Leandra was sent home to São Luís without any money in her pocket, due to the fact that the carvoaria she worked in was located in Pará.¹³¹

The process continues when the legal advisors of the CDVDH follow the case of each former slave through the justice system. It is their job to “monitor the criminal processes in which the perpetrators are accused of the practice of slave labor in Maranhão. The majority of them were denounced by the Center of Defense. In a few cases, we also accompany the cases, as assistants to the accusation, facilitating the prosecution for the ex-slaves. It is difficult to act as an assistant, keeping in mind that the majority of the workers are not located, even though the CDVDH exerts great force to find them. As assistants to the accusation, we give support to the Federal or State Public Ministry of Work to solidify the accusation. The organization that can state the accusation is the Public Ministry, so what we do is collect information for them.”¹³²

After the investigation takes place and certain crimes are determined, punishments are imposed. For employing slave laborers, the sentence is two to eight years of prison. However, there are a variety of other crimes involved with utilizing slavery: “abduction, frustration of workers’ rights through fraud, previdentiary concealment, and the falsification of documents (grilagem of areas) in addition to environmental crimes that always occur in these cases.”¹³³

Legislation was passed in 2003 in the form of the National Plan for the Eradication of Slave Labor. Its purpose was to force Brazil to recognize that slave labor is still a problem and to act more powerfully toward its repression. A member of the DRT analyzes that “Of this plan, in the federal sphere, close to 60% of the goals were reached. Some clauses are in the process of being completed and others were not even touched, such as increasing the income of the investigators. That is for repression. Increasing the number of investigative judges was also promised, but it was not achieved. But many things were done.”¹³⁴ Masson states that the Plan proposes a legislative alteration of the duration of the penalty to four to eight years.”¹³⁵ However, that, too, has not yet been implemented.

According to many people involved in the struggle against slave labor, it simply is not a priority of the government, which inhibits the movement. Binka Le Breton, a British author who has studied the situation of slave labor in Brazil for years, thinks that “the Campaign against slavery did not work out right. We will never know if there are more and more slaves in existence or just more and more slaves being found and freed. Lula wanted to do it that way. It is not a priority for him. The Federal Police does not do much on the investigations. If the farmer does not want to pay, he does not have to.”¹³⁶ Antônio Filho evaluates the government in the following manner: “I believe that the government needs to apply and make it a priority in the regions where misery and poverty because they still have a large number of people. If the government does not assume this state with priority, within four more years, we will be holding another conference and elaborating new proposals to continue advancing. This cannot be. The country has the structure to attend to these people. The government knows where they are. It knows who they are. It also knows who the people are who enslave others. Therefore, this is not

¹³⁰ Romei, Interview #16 Brígida

¹³¹ Romei, Event #33

¹³² Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹³³ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹³⁴ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹³⁵ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹³⁶ Romei, Interview #12 Binka

a problem that science has yet to discover a solution. The solution is already there. Now, it needs to be applied in a really strong dose.”¹³⁷

One of the means of repression that many consider the most effective is the “List of Shame.” This list constitutes employers named by the MTE as slave owners. Today, it constitutes twenty-four properties in Maranhão, involving twenty-two offenders. Luís Camargo from the Public Ministry of Work claims that the only thing that really works is the “List of Shame,” because it attacks their wallets.¹³⁸ It works in the following manner: “One passes two years on the list without being able to take money out of any public bank. If within these two years, one re-offends, or is noted for any irregularity on the farm, then one cannot leave, until one passes two years without any type of infraction.”¹³⁹ Being on the “List of Shame” implies an investigation of the ownership of the land, in addition to the inability to withdraw money from any public bank. If that land is found to be *grilada*, it is required to be expropriated by the government. However, only one farm on the “List of Shame” has been investigated as of yet, the “Good Faith of Caru Farm, which the document says consists of 10,800 hectares, but those who have seen it say much more. And INCRA concluded that the area was *grilada*, that the documents were signed by an imaginary person. The issue is even graver because the farm on which bodies of assassinated workers have already been found, is located in the Biological Reserve of Gurupi. The farmer has responded for various processes for the practice of slave labor, already having been imprisoned preventatively for ten days, being the only farmer imprisoned for slave labor in Maranhão.”¹⁴⁰ Hence, it is debatable whether the List of Shame is actually working or not.

Generation of Alternatives

A third approach to fighting slave labor is the generation of alternative means of employment and subsistence. The CDVDH’s solution is the COODIGMA, an initiative of generation of employment and income for former slaves and those in risk of becoming enslaved. It is “located in this neighborhood of Vila Ildemar because the largest number of people that are victims of slavery or are in risk of being victims live here.”¹⁴¹ The Cooperative was dreamed up in September of 2005 and with the help of various partner organizations, it came into existence in July of 2006.

At the initiation of the cooperative, a survey was distributed to all the families in Vila Ildemar. From there, the families that filled out the surveys and were interested in participating in the COODIGMA numbered four hundred and twenty-eight. “From those 428 families, forty families were selected, and of those 40, they placed 20 in the wood cooperative and 20 in the charcoal cooperative. Through that selection, they did another to provide instruction, which were the professional courses through SENAI and SEBRAE. So, they spent various weeks taking courses with professors from SEBRAE in Human Relations, Environment, Cooperativism, etc. And after they finish this instruction, they are taught how to use the

¹³⁷ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹³⁸ Romei, Observation #7 g iv

¹³⁹ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹⁴⁰ Romei, Interview #23 Anonymous

¹⁴¹ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

machines and they begin to work. Today, each one of them understand and are making, producing. So they really feel ready and able to work.”¹⁴²

The objectives of this cooperative are to create alternatives for those who would otherwise be participating in slave labor. “And there we have a structure for maintaining themselves in this city. They will not return to slave labor anymore.”¹⁴³ On an emotional and mental level, the cooperative allows these people to return to the status of human being. “It is that they are really being recognized and they appreciate this opportunity because today they are really people, human beings, they are considered dignified people from their work. They are demonstrating abilities that they did not previously know, because generally, they do not get this opportunity.”¹⁴⁴ In the financial area, they hope that “everyone, beginning in January, will be making at least one minimum salary, which is demanded of us.”¹⁴⁵

The two areas indicated to be the central products of the Cooperative are wooden toys and ecological charcoal. The toy cooperative consists of “recycling and scraps of recycled wood to fabricate artisan and educational toys.” These scraps are donated, since the wood would be simply thrown in the trash otherwise. “The goal of the Center of Defense is to get rid of these industrial means and care for the environment.” The CDVDH has turned former slaves into dignified self-employers and recycled scraps of wood into educational toys.



¹⁴² Romei, Interview #15 Uandra

¹⁴³ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

¹⁴⁴ Romei, Interview #15 Uandra

¹⁴⁵ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

The second area of work is ecological coal. This seemingly impossible creation of inventor, João Luis de Souza Borges, was offered to various organizations before the CDVDH accepted it as a part of their objective to generate alternatives.¹⁴⁶



Ecological coal begins with simple manioc starch. This starch is boiled in large vats with water then added to sand. This produces a black powder that is then mixed with more water. A slimy substance is created then pushed through a tube into long rolls of coal material. These rolls are laid out to dry and cut into small pieces in the process.¹⁴⁷



They start with manioc starch.



The starch is stirred in with water in large vats like this one.



¹⁴⁶ Romei, Interview #19 Borges

¹⁴⁷ Romei, Observation #9

Then they put sand with the starch and water into a large machine that combines them at high temperatures.



The result is this material, which is mixed with more water, making it a slimy substance.



The slimy substance is pushed through this machine into long rolls of charcoal material.



From there, the rolls are laid out in the sun and chopped into coal-sized pieces.



Finally, the coal is bagged and sold in three sizes. The largest is worth 7 reais, which is normally sold to owners of barbeque posts in town. Those in the background are worth 3 reais and are usually sold to households.



And these bags, packaged nicely with recyclable paper and plastic, including a small baggy of ecological igniters, are worth 13 reais and are sold mostly to grocery stores.

This type of charcoal creates far less environmental and human rights damage than the carvoarias and industrial ovens that destroy the forest, send columns of smoke into the air, and utilize slave labor. It also is far different from the working conditions of a carvoaria. Veras, the coordinator of the charcoal cooperative explains the benefits of his charcoal production. “There is psychological accompaniment, social assistant, basic basket, gift of payment, and commission of all the production per month.”¹⁴⁸

Currently, there are twenty-eight families remaining. The others gave up for various reasons, including marriage problems, inability to feed the number of children they had with the low salary of the first few months of the cooperative, etc. Each person who currently works at the cooperative is in charge of a specific aspect of production or organization, giving the responsibility to the former slaves themselves. Their income currently comes from a variety of donated sources including a gift of 150 reais per month for three months from CRS and a basic basket of rice, corn, and other needs per month for ten months. Eventually, when they produce enough to sell on a wider scale, their income will be derived solely from commission from production. Until then, various organizations have agreed to continue donating for the sustenance of the workers.¹⁴⁹

In the future, Borges plans to increase the two nuclei of production to more. A cooperative for cleaning products has already been approved and is in the process of organization. There is also a project to increase the number of workers in the two cooperatives that already exist.¹⁵⁰

Not only do these cooperatives help the former slaves, but also those who organize and run them. Borges says, “I am happy because I can see this thing that I created helping thousands and thousands of people in this city.” Humbly, Cesar accepts that he is helping in a small way. “I am contributing in the way I can, trying to help these people, these families, through my

¹⁴⁸ Romei, Interview #20 Veras

¹⁴⁹ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

¹⁵⁰ Romei, Interview #19 Borges

profession. This is how I can help in the best way, in trying to value more people and decrease this embarrassment in our country, that still, in the twenty-first century, slave labor still exists.”¹⁵¹

Other means of generation of alternatives lies in economic solidarity organizations, which, according to Bira do Pindaré, are collective organizations based upon the principles of auto-production, democracy, participation, egalitarianism, cooperation, and sustainability. In Maranhão, there are 454 economic solidarity associations. Three quarters of them are located in rural areas.¹⁵² Like the cooperative, they form an alternative way of life, outside of the capitalist model.

A third alternative consists of land movements such as MST and MLST. Their objectives of equal land distribution allow for families to live and work the land. That creates a strong link to one’s homeland and therefore, a means of preventing workers from migrating or accepting distant offers of work.

Despite the fact that much is being done in regard to eradicating slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão, much more is possible. The next chapter consists of the suggestions of those who I interviewed as to what else can be done to prevent further slavery.

Chapter 6: Suggestions to Prevent Further Slavery

Those who experienced slavery and survived are often only concerned with their own well-being and ability to continue on. In concordance with this mentality, Fulano’s idea as to how to prevent slavery is to receive his money. He said, “I want to receive my money and go home. I want to finish this business here because it is all confusing, just promises. I will never work there again. In that place, God help me. For this to not have happened, it would have had to resolve well with everyone, but he [the gato] never thought to resolve anything.”¹⁵³ In other words, Fulano wants to be paid and go home. ManuelJoão has a similar idea: “I think that if I receive some money, I would put together or rent a little place for me to live.”¹⁵⁴ On a grander scale, if all workers could just be paid, slavery would not occur.

Leanora’s idea is more drastic. She is concerned for those who are still enslaved at the carvoaria she worked at. Her response is “that everyone leaves and finds a better place. They should find some place to work and discover what to be in life, like God wants. It is because that time of slavery is really awful. Because you never know, the son of the owner wanted to kill me. I was the only woman there, inside. It was really awful. I cried a lot. I held my hammock like this when I slept to just cry and cry.”¹⁵⁵

Silvana thought more along the lines of the organizations that already exist to help those who have been enslaved. She told me “I think that for slavery to end, the people have to apply more pressure. There are a lot of kids having to work from ten, nine years old, that’s how slavery begins. And there are a lot of farmers that take advantage of that. Those who have more, like the Center of Defense that is rescuing people that have been enslaved. That’s what I think. Having more opportunities for those that already were enslaved.”¹⁵⁶ Raimundo agreed. The

¹⁵¹ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

¹⁵² Romei, Observation #8 j v

¹⁵³ Romei, Interview #1 Fulano

¹⁵⁴ Romei, Interview #4 Manuel

¹⁵⁵ Romei, Interview #9 Leanora

¹⁵⁶ Romei, Interview #6 Silvana

cooperative is the best method to prevent slavery: “to have a job every day, because when morning breaks, you already know where you are going, to a fixed job.”¹⁵⁷

Cesar, who coordinates the toy cooperative agrees that more opportunities are necessary. “I believe that forms of work generation within the city, be it from the federal government or of the mayors themselves that are creating other forms of work in our municipalities to minimize that risk.”¹⁵⁸

Vitor thinks education will prevent slavery. “What I always ask for is that a kid goes and studies, never stops studying and does not fall into marginality, smoking, drugs, killing, robbing. Every time I finish an interview, I tell them not to suffer like I suffered and many of my friends suffered, because it is really awful.”¹⁵⁹ Agreeing with Vitor, Binka Le Breton would like to see a program for education. The people who are enslaved do not know about the government or about civil society. Citizenship and alphabetization.¹⁶⁰ A member of the DRT in São Luís also thinks education is the best way to prevent slavery is to invest “in the education of the worker. The worker, the more he is educated, the better he understands and flees from slave labor. He will have conditions to live from his own income, principally if he has professional education. And to teach him to do something other than clear weeds. Teach him to be a brick layer, a stone builder, a locksmith, teach him a profession with which he can make his own money. That is extremely important.”¹⁶¹ Another vote for education comes from the person with a great deal of knowledge about the Biological Reserve of Gurupi. “Just education. You need to invest in education. There is education for kids, they have the issue of the environment from eight years old. They have education for teenagers. They have education for adults, the elderly. Education is a question of values. That will resolve the problem. And there is also the financial issue. But, for you to arrive at financial stability, you need the structure that comes with education.”¹⁶²

Brígida, who attends the former slaves and sends their denouncements to the government, said there are various ways, including media, cultural activities with kids, solidarity with other organizations, and *conscientização*. “One ideal preventative method would be, I think, the issue of cultural activities in the streets that work with certain themes. Lots of divulgence in the media, television, radio. The quantity of information can be very large. And also the issue, for example, of the entities, the churches, the NGOs, everyone working on this issue of *conscientização*. Presenting themes, holding debates, lectures, questions to people. I am all for the issue of *conscientização*. I think that would be a very big form of prevention. Only, it has to be a force of everyone, not just the Center of Defense or only the CPTs, but everyone. All the NGOs.”¹⁶³ Uandra, the social assistant of COODIGMA, suggested another means of *conscientização*, “principally that this government should provide *conscientização* for the farmers about the fact that these people really went to work there to be treated like people, human beings, and that they should pay salaries concordant with production, which is what they really deserve. They deserve to be dignified in their work, recognized as citizens, because that is what they demand. They are really tricked. They leave here saying that they are going to work with a signed work card, and when they arrive there, they are deceived.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ Romei, Interview #5 Raimundo

¹⁵⁸ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

¹⁵⁹ Romei, Interview #21 Vitor

¹⁶⁰ Romei, Interview #12 Binka

¹⁶¹ Romei, Interview #10 Anonymous

¹⁶² Romei, Interview #14 Anonymous

¹⁶³ Romei, Interview #16 Brígida

¹⁶⁴ Romei, Interview #15 Uandra

Cármén gave an abstract answer by addressing the causes of slavery. Eradicating misery would be the answer. When I looked doubtful, she answered, “eu I think it would not be difficult. I think that Brazil is a country that has the ability to do this. Brazil is not a poor country. It is a very rich country. There is money. There is wealth. The problem is that it is in the hands of 5,000 families. The day that those families are dethroned from this abuse of economic power that they have, that day, the misery in Brazil will be eradicated.”¹⁶⁵

Antônio Filho listed all the above responses as ideal preventative measures, if they are all taken together. He thinks that the government prioritizing slave labor as an area of combat, a real agrarian reform, providing education for the poor, public policies, and eradicating impunity will all create a preventative barrier to slave labor.¹⁶⁶ Bira do Pindaré, former coordinator of DRT in Maranhão and current president of FOREM, agrees with the list Filho provides. “If the government is able to provide public policies for the generation of work and income in the areas of abduction, in the regions where the problem is most grave, which is the case here in Maranhão, through solidary economics, agrarian reform, settlements with higher quality, etc. This is all necessary for the people to live well. Agrarian reform is indispensable so the people have access to the land, to live off their own work. They also need education, health, so that no one needs to leave for other municipalities, other states, other countries, to find work.”¹⁶⁷

When I asked a member of the local DRT in Açailândia, she said the best method is that which the government is already enacting, the investigations of denouncements. I asked if she thought that was more remedial than preventative and if she had any other ideas. She agreed that it was remedial, but claimed it was also preventative because “it intimidates, in a certain form, the people who use this practice. Because with the fines, the infractions, the image of them published in the newspapers and in the media, this intimidates them to practice this act. So, that is a preventative method, but it is creating a great effect, like lectures, congresses, and meetings. That reflects a lot, it intimidates them due to the situation. The “List of Shame,” the names of the employers, the situation. It is one of the good methods that makes them arrive at this point.”¹⁶⁸

Summarizing, according to the people who best understand and live the situation of contemporary slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão, education, land reform, *conscientização*, further generation of employment and opportunities, solidarity and cooperation among the NGOs addressing slave labor, eradicating the situation of misery, public policies, and continuing the fight of repression will effectively prevent further slavery in the future.

Chapter 7: Suggestions for What Should be Done with This Research

In the spirit of anthropological research that gives back to the community, I asked the people I interviewed how they thought my findings would help the situation and what I should do with them in order to make that occur.

The most frequent response was to divulge the information to as far as it will reach. The people of Açailândia believe that the rest of the world does not really understand the situation here. They believe that people do not know that slavery still exists, and if they did, there would be a much stronger response. Cesar said, “I think that in the first place, it should be divulged at

¹⁶⁵ Romei, Interview #22 Carmen

¹⁶⁶ Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹⁶⁷ Romei, Interview #13 Bira

¹⁶⁸ Romei, Interview #8 Anonymous

not only a national but an international level, and taken to those forums of education of slave labor wherever it exists on our planet. And that it serves as testimony that people that are victims of slave labor actually still exist.”¹⁶⁹ Directing the response more at the fact that I came and saw the reality, the member of the local DRT thinks that seeing is believing. “If you are here in Brazil, it is because something awoke inside of you with relation to slave labor. Could it be true that slave labor still exists? Sometimes we ask ourselves, can it be true that in this century, we still have this situation of slave labor? So, your research is fundamental. It will have data and because of your conscience, it is certain that you will advance the information to others, not just a notion of the truth. You saw. You know that this still exists, unfortunately. It is a reality that we would never like to have. But it is fact, and fact is reality.”¹⁷⁰ In order to best prove the facts of slavery in Brazil, Veras of the charcoal cooperative asked me to make sure I publish photographs as well. “I would like you to amplify and expand and take it as far as you can. Through photos that you can put on some internet site until the end.”¹⁷¹ For Antônio Filho, it is not only important to spread the information in the United States, but also in Açailândia.¹⁷²

Concrete data and materials from the CDVDH and COODIGMA would be effective in proving to them that not only does slavery still exist, but there are organizations amidst all of this misery that are making progress in fighting it. Brígida wants the actions of the Center to be divulged for the purposes of giving others ideas as to how to help by denouncing, *conscientização*, and continuing to pass on the information. She also thinks it could help to “preparing didactic material to divulge to others about our activities.”¹⁷³

A common response was an indignant request for the world to know that Latin America can help itself without outside support or help from the government. While this is not entirely true due to the international donors, the effort is based in the people. Borges said he hopes “that it reaches the whole world. That the whole world knows about our project. That every living thing on the face of the earth sees this small investment of the Center of Defense for these needy people, to show that really, our Brazil and other countries are able, they can eliminate poverty, misery. That some human beings are helping.”¹⁷⁴ Cármen wanted to make sure that it does not remain under the table of academia. She told me frankly, “If we thought you were not going to publish this, we would not waste a minute of our time talking to you.”¹⁷⁵

Milton gave me a specific means of passing the information on to many people. “I think, for example, that since you are an academic, you could create a seminary, there at your university. Grab all the materials you can from the Center of Defense, and demonstrate clearly at your university. Because sometimes, universities theorize too much. That is the problem of universities. But, you could create a demonstration where you you’re your classmates at your university, with concrete materials in a concrete way, that Latin America, despite so much misery, despite so much poverty, some organizations exist that are creating this confrontation, that are modifying the reality without the support of the government. Or, when the people want to transform their life, we organize and are able to do it, whether or not the government has our backs. Many people have heard about these things, but do not know anything. I am talking

¹⁶⁹ Romei, Interview #7 Cesar

¹⁷⁰ Romei, Interview #8 Anonymous

¹⁷¹ Romei, Interview #20 Veras

¹⁷² Romei, Interview #18 Filho

¹⁷³ Romei, Interview #16 Brígida

¹⁷⁴ Romei, Interview #19 Borges

¹⁷⁵ Romei, Interview #22 Cármen

about the developed countries. It is very superficial. It is different to bring videos, didactic materials, everything. That will make things happen.”¹⁷⁶

From former slaves, a more touching response was given. A plea for their stories to be heard and recognized. They want others to know the suffering they endured. And, after leaving a situation of degrading, sub-human treatment, an attentive ear is extremely welcome. Silvana thanked me for her interview. “I wanted to say that I thank you for the opportunity. I never thought my story would be internationally known.”¹⁷⁷ Leanora simply appreciated the chance to talk to someone, “because the way I had been suffering, when I arrived here, you were like a mother to me.”¹⁷⁸

Analysis of Research Results

The results of this research project have proven similar to those included in the hypothesis, with a larger emphasis on specific situation in the Amazon of Maranhão, the actions of the CDVDH, and its methods of combating slave labor. It is important to note that many of the actions completed by the entities fighting slavery today are clandestine due to the high tensions in the area. Anonymous interviews and omitted data were essential to maintaining the safety of those who work to combat slavery and myself. Therefore, occasionally my results seem to come from unreliable sources, when they actually come from hard fact disguised in thoughts or opinions.

The definition of slave labor as it exists in this area was made clear by speaking to former slaves and those who work to help them. The experiences of the six former slaves I spoke with illustrate a range of degrading conditions to which contemporary slaves are subjected; however, by no means do they represent all instances of slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão. Also, our frequent lack of understanding must be taken into account, in addition to the fact that it is common for them lie to hide embarrassing or incriminating parts of their stories. Still, with six separate stories, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the general reality of slave labor today. Their work ranged from clearing brush to bundling timber to working a coal oven. Their housing ranged from sleeping in a corral with animals to hammocks in shacks to beds of hay. And their alimentation ranged from beans and rice to rotted meat to fish everyday. These interviews also allowed me to see what a slave looks like, how they act, and how they talk. In summary, my interviews with former slaves produced a great amount of reliable data on the situation in the Amazon of Maranhão today.

The means of maintaining a person enslaved such as armed guards, invented debts, government complicity, and physical isolation were all predicted and found to be true. Former slaves were less willing to talk about violence or armed vigilance due to a continued fear of their former master. The power of those with money and land in this region is unimaginable. It supercedes the law and common sense.

The reasons for contemporary slavery resulted in the same reasons proposed in the hypothesis: misery and greed related to capitalism. However, during my field research, the issue of impunity came to light as a cause of slavery and as an issue to be addressed with more vigor in the future. The aspect of law and the fact that it is essentially defunct in the repression of slave

¹⁷⁶ Romei, Interview #17 Milton

¹⁷⁷ Romei, Interview #6 Silvana

¹⁷⁸ Romei, Interview #9 Leanora

owning is something that had not come up in my preliminary research but that became a major function of my results. The lack of law enforcement could be seen as the prime reason for the continuance of slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão and all of Brazil. Its importance must be recognized to a higher degree than it already is.

As for the efforts against slave labor, the divisions offered by the CDVDH at its conference allow for a clearer explanation as to how to eradicate slavery. It shows that the government's actions center around repression, despite its minimal level of effectiveness, and the CDVDH's focus on prevention, whose effectiveness is almost impossible to measure. In only three weeks it is difficult to gain a full sense of activities that take place once a week or in various locations around the region. Hence, the cultural activities offered by the CDVDH must be observed in a sporadic and inconsistent manner. The generation of employment and income, such as the COODIGMA, actively prevents further slavery in a very obvious manner.

Many believe that the actions of the CDVDH help on such a small scale that its success is minimal, even laughable. However, even the fact that rural workers in the region know that the CDVDH is a reference for their rights makes a difference. The lives of the forty workers at the COODIGMA are forever changed. The children who participate in their cultural activities learn the history of their region and their people. These are concrete and exclusive results of the efforts of the CDVDH.

Finally, the suggestions given to further improve the situation of slave labor are not new or original, rather the same ones that have been given for years. The problem is that they remain uncompleted and unaddressed by those who should be held responsible. Land reform, education, public policies, and a stronger repressive hand in the government have not yet improved.

Conclusions

From my field research and analysis, I can conclude that the reality of contemporary slavery in the Amazon of Maranhão is extremely grave. The subhuman working and living conditions described in books and articles are very much true, according to those who survived them. Their water is unfiltered; their housing is in the open air or with animals; their food is rotten or limited to beans and rice; they are promised minimum wage and are paid nothing; they are watched by armed guards; they work more hours than should be allowed; they submit themselves to infernal heat, back-breaking labor, and unsafe activities; and they are forbidden from leaving their situation. This is slavery.

The reasons for its continued existence reside in the unjust system in which we live. The constant desire for more, fed by greed and competition of capitalism creates the need to produce at an ever-increasing rate. In this atmosphere, farmers and carvoaria owners are encouraged to contract slave laborers to increase their profits and decrease production costs. Simultaneously, the blatant misery which many people in this region endure today creates an extreme anxiety to find the means to feed their children. A lack of education and professional training prevents them from finding a well-paying job and leaves them with the grave options of clearing brush or working in carvoarias. They accept job offers regardless of the risk of exploitation out of pure desperation. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that those who break the law and utilize slave labor are immune to punishment due to their power and wealth. At the same time, the justice system simply does not act, creating the problem of impunity.

The CDVDH combats the usage of slave labor by attacking the three means of eradication: prevention, repression, and generation of alternatives. Their prevention methods of cultural activities for children and neighborhood nuclei for the *conscientização* of those who can be taught to defend their own rights have effectively impeded the enslavement of many, who would have fallen into the vices of drugs, prostitution, alcoholism, and the desperation that results in slavery. In the area of repression, the CDVDH has become an icon in the region for attending former slaves and sending their denouncements to the DRT in order to enact investigations. Finally, the CDVDH has built and organized the COODIGMA, which serves as a dignified alternative for those who were once treated like animals and for those who are at risk of slavery.

These methods have successfully created a safety net for former slaves and intimidated many farmers in the region from utilizing slave labor. However, the CDVDH cannot conduct this battle alone. It needs the government to apply its power in the punishment of offenders as well as expand the safety net to other regions where slavery is also a problem. The CDVDH also requires the help of civil society to refuse to accept that human beings continue to suffer enslavement. Until the entire population of Brazil opens their eyes to the reality of contemporary slavery, it will continue to be a small-scale project by a few NGOs and dedicated promoters of change.

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Indications for Further Research

There are so many other aspects of my problem statement that could not be covered in a single month in the field. Below is a list of other topics that relate to the causes of and responses to slave labor in the Amazon of Maranhão, whose study would complement the results of my research.

1. Explain the chain of capital trade that begins in slave labor and ends in a modern car.
2. Who are the owners of slaves today and why do they own them?
3. Which other laws are slave owners breaking and what gives them the courage to commit such infractions?
4. Slave labor in domestic settings, sex slavery, child labor.
5. Environmental damage of carvoarias and/or eucalyptus forests
6. Environmental ignorance on the part of Brazilians
7. Conditions of water in rural Brazil
8. Validity of IBAMA and INCRA
9. The effect of the carvoarias and/or eucalyptus forests on the populations dependent on babaçu
10. Where, along the linkages of culpability within the government, is impunity permitted?
11. Do Americans, Europeans, other foreigners know about slave labor in Maranhão?
12. Do residents in Açailândia who are not connected to the CDVDH in any way know about slave labor in Maranhão?
13. What is being done by former slaves to combat slavery today?
14. Results and history of land concentration in Brazil
15. What are the motives of the donors to the CDVDH?
16. Do the cultural activities for kids really prevent their enslavement or involvement in prostitution later in life?
17. Why has the responsibility of which court should try slave labor in Brazil not yet been decided and what is being done to push that decision along?
18. How has the National Plan for the Eradication of Slave Labor really helped or hindered the situation?
19. Which branch of remedies is really helping the most: prevention, repression, or generation of alternatives?
20. Why are the people who are contracted into slave labor not educated, illiterate? What is the situation with the schools in these rural areas?
21. Violence and threats between the two sides of slave labor in the Amazon of Maranhão
22. Personal safety and the results of the lack of in carvoarias

Learning Acquired During ISP Process

The principal lessons I learned from this ISP process include how to integrate other kinds of knowledge acquisition into my typical method of book learning. I also learned how to most effectively carry out an interview so as to not spend hours listening yet still receive all the pertinent information. In addition, I learned to manage my time around the schedules of others and squeeze in note-taking when interviews were not available

Academically, I learned a great deal as well. I knew very little about the specifics of slave labor in Açailândia and the Amazon of Maranhão before arriving. With almost constant observation, interviews, and noting of new information, I gained a respectable amount of knowledge about the history, the current situation, and the desire for change. I was reconvinced that fair trade is worth the effort and that the chain of work leading to the product I buy in the United States needs to be investigated before I buy it.

In another vein, I also learned to maintain hope and leave as much as possible up to the people. For all that the people at the CDVDH are doing, they achieve very little results. Their methods are small scale and often thwarted by inaction by the government or by simple impunity, yet they maintain hope in a way that I find extremely impressive. They also leave the majority of their work to the people who benefit from it most. As Antônio Filho says in his interview when I asked if the CDVDH has inspiration in Paulo Freire: “The Center does not have the means to solve the people’s problems alone. But we give the means, the knowledge to the people. We are an instrument, a bridge so that they can achieve their own objectives.”¹⁷⁹ And according to him and every one of the staff members at the CDVDH and COODIGMA, this method is working.

Application of Learning in Home Environment

The basic lessons of field research can be applied to future projects in the field. When I complete my undergraduate degree, I hope to apply to a master’s program that includes field research as an integral part of the learning process. In addition, interviewing and scheduling skills will stay with me for a lifetime. It is important to know how to obtain pertinent information from others, and the necessity to schedule around others will never cease to be part of my life.

Academically, I hope to bring all of the information in my work journal back to school in the states. There, I plan on writing a senior thesis during my final year as an undergraduate on the topic of slave labor. Although I do not yet know the exact topic, I want to be able to integrate the learning acquired here during these three weeks in the field and information on the more general topic of international trafficking of peoples. I will also become more active in the Fair Trade club at school, which includes avoiding buying products that come from a chain of labor ending in slavery.

Finally, the hope and solidarity I perceived in the staff members of the CDVDH and COODIGMA will always be with me. These sentiments are an essential part of the struggle for social justice. They will keep me going through the frustration of the college bubble, and beyond. They are the best way to fight the sensation of helplessness against the most powerful force in the world, that of greed.

¹⁷⁹ Romei, Interview #18 Filho