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**Countryside-city relation in pandemic times**  
**Relación campo-ciudad en tiempos de pandemia**  
**Relação campo-cidade em tempos de pandemia**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to analyze the countryside-city relation in the pandemic expansion context caused by COVID-19 in Brazil, defending that it comes to emphasize the spatial inequalities, given the class and racial-ethnic content which is expressed in the daily life of urban peripheries workers and the peasants. In addition to this scenario, one added the capital crisis, the ascension of a far right government and its genocidal policy and new thrusts over labor, marking the social reproduction spaces of poorest subjects in the countryside and the cities.

**Keywords:** Countryside-City Relation. Unequal Production of Space. COVID-19.

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**Resumen**

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la relación campo-ciudad ante el contexto de la expansión de la pandemia desatada por la COVID-19 en Brasil, defendiendo que esta viene a exponer las desigualdades espaciales, dado el contenido de clase y étnico-racial con que se expresa en la vida diaria de los trabajadores de las periferias urbanas y de las comunidades campesinas. Junto a esa, agrega-se un escenario marcado por la crisis del capital, la elevación de un gobierno de extrema derecha y su política genocida y en nuevas embestidas hacia el trabajo, marcando los espacios de reproducción social de los sujetos más pobres en el campo y en las ciudades.

**Palabras Clave:** Relación Campo-Ciudad. Producción Desigual del Espacio. COVID-19.

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**Resumo**

Este artigo visa analisar a relação campo-cidade diante do contexto de expansão da pandemia provocada pela COVID-19 no Brasil, defendendo que essa vem a escancarar as desigualdades espaciais, dado o conteúdo de classe e étnico-racial com que se expressa no cotidiano dos trabalhadores das periferias urbanas e das comunidades camponesas. A essa se soma um cenário marcado pela crise do capital, a ascensão de um governo de extrema direita e sua política genocida e em novas investidas sobre o trabalho, marcando os espaços de reprodução social dos sujeitos mais pobres no campo e nas cidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Relação Campo-Cidade. Produção Desigual do Espaço. COVID-19.

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## Introduction

The pandemic caused by the new coronavirus and, its form of expression COVID-19,<sup>2</sup> giving rise to an environment of distancing, social isolation and panic in almost all countries of the world, especially in Brazil, has led researchers and scholars, from various scientific areas, to reflect on this new reality, producing some kind of knowledge. This can help research on the virus, prevention, or even the form in which it develops unequally in society.

In the case of Geography, the pandemic came to show the spatial inequalities existing in a society composed of antagonistic social classes. And far from constituting only a health crisis, which can be minimized or resolved through the intervention of the public authorities, it reveals the crisis from the form of sociability, marked by the interests of the holders of the means of production to make viable the process of expansion and extraction of unpaid labor, regardless the social subjects who succumb to the virus. Therefore, in a society based on the exacerbated production of merchandise, where the need to maintain profit defines all social relations, it reveals that the very form of dealing with the virus will reference this content, since, as already pointed out by Marx; the “world of things” prevails significantly over the “world of human beings” (MARX, 1984). This statement, highlighted by the paper of geographer D. Volochko (2020), considering the reality of COVID-19 in Brazil, points to the “false dilemma” economics versus life placed by the federal government. Then the pandemic is seen only as another form to make explicit the existing and unsurpassed contradiction between capital and labor. In the case of Brazil, besides this structural situation of the capital crisis one added the rise of an ultraconservative power project, allied with the ruling classes

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<sup>2</sup> According to the indications of the World Health Organization (WHO), coronavirus is the name of the virus that caused the outbreak and it undergoes variations such as Sars-Cov and Mers-Cov. Sars-Cov-2 is the new variant of the virus, also known by the press and published by experts as “new coronavirus”, which means “severe acute respiratory syndrome – coronavirus 2”. COVID-19 is respiratory disease caused by infection of the new coronavirus. <https://guiadoestudante.abril.com.br/>.

(capitalists and landowners), which also puts profit above life, making the country the main epicenter of the disease, reaching the working class, as one sought to demonstrate throughout this paper.

We also argue that the social relations in their contradictions determine reality. Thus, the context that places Brazil at the epicenter of the pandemic is not restricted to the virus itself, but the lack of a serious policy of prevention and isolation, which should be the priority of the Federal Government. Instead, this takes advantage of the situation in order to continue its genocidal policy, which is made with greater weight in the concentration of deaths in the most impoverished sectors of society, precarious workers of urban peripheries and poor peasant communities.

Although the spread and concentration of the virus (as well as the speed that this happens) can be considered more evident in large cities, we cannot disregard the precarious reality of the health system in a significant part of medium-sized cities and even its non-existence in small cities, districts and rural communities in Brazil. Consequently, the stage of abandonment or isolation of many of these communities ends by leaving the population quite vulnerable to the virus and the possibility of death without any form of access to medical care.

In this context, this paper points out the challenges of discussing a historical relation in capitalism, such as the relation between the city-countryside, in times of pandemic, and reflecting on the concrete difficulties of social reproduction of social subjects who live from labor, whether peasants, or subcontractor, temporary, informal salaried workers, or those willing to employment on a salary, whether they are in the countryside or cities.

It also aims to reflect on what one may expect in a post-pandemic context, in a reality marked by historical expropriation, the exploitation of labor, control over the land and the means of reproducing life. And associated with land concentration, the exacerbation of violence against the peoples of the countryside and workers in the urban peripheries, among other issues, awakens in those who live from labor the challenge of winning, in addition to the historical forms that oppress them, the virus, in order to stay alive and reorganize the struggle, whether for land, labor, fractions of urban space, housing, or even the reproduction of life.

The pace of the city decreases dramatically, as well as the production of small producers in the countryside – which although it holds out, it suffers greater difficulties to be commercialized. Now, the so-called government aid<sup>3</sup> comes temporarily to guarantee the

<sup>3</sup> It was called for emergency aid approved by the House and Federal Senate against will of the current Government that initially pointed out the lack of resources and later, with its Minister of Economy Paulo

minimum conditions of reproduction of poor, informal and unemployed subjects, who constitute a significant portion of society. But, in fact, there was not (and there is not) a serious policy of social distancing, especially for certain functions and more precarious labors, which did not have the right to choose what was proposed by international and national health organizations. Moreover, this puts Brazil in a critical situation in relation to the world, becoming the epicenter of the disease, and the second in number of deaths, currently, and accounting for more than 10% of the number of deaths from the virus.<sup>4</sup>

The effects of the pandemic are also felt at different forms, between the countryside and the city. Although they are concentrated, often in the latter (the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro metropolises are responsible for the largest number of cases of deaths in the country), it is also expressed in the countryside, especially in poor peasant communities, indigenous peoples, *quilombola* communities, riverside populations, etc., as denounced by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) in Amazonas state and other Northern states, where mortality within these states and in rural communities is significant. In this case, apparently, one has the idea that the relative isolation of these communities and families keeps them more protected from the virus. This is not confirmed in the country of land grabbing, which advances with everything in the process of the pandemic and the lack of supervision towards the territories of the Indians and other peoples of the countryside. In addition, it puts them on the threat of land loss, leaving them vulnerable to the contagion of the virus, as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) points out to be happening in other Latin American countries (with the contamination of the peoples of the countryside and the poor ones of the city).

### **The countryside-city relation, the reproduction of the subjects and the pandemic**

In Geographic Science, given the transformations that have occurred in the spaces of the countryside and cities, especially in recent decades, an important debate has become

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Guedes, it proposed a monthly aid of R\$ 200. In Congress, the emergency aid of R\$ 600 per worker was approved in the House (on March 26 and 30). The estimated amount was R\$ 60 billion per month, but later with the 873 and 1,075/2020 bills – which expanded the right to various categories of informal, self-employed workers and artists. The monthly resource spent has passed to something around R\$ 98.2 billion; a total well below the large amounts that the government has passed on to companies, as one can be seen in some reports who had access: <https://agenciabrasil.etc.com.br/economia/noticia/2020-04/governo-can-release-resources-extras-para-aid-emergen>; <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2020/04/06/governo-libera-r-34-bilhoes-para-empresas-pagarem-salarios-na-pandemic>; <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2020/06/para-destravar-credito-a-empresas-governo-lanca-programa-de-empr>.

<sup>4</sup> According to a report published in *Folha de São Paulo*, on July 1, 2020, Brazil reached 60,713 official deaths from the new coronavirus, with more than 1,200 deaths in the last 24 hours. It also points that Brazil has 2.8% of the world population and records 11.5% of deaths from the disease in the world.

mature about the countryside-city relation, although this follows different theoretical perspectives.

It composes those who, in the face of urban expansion and industrial production, indicate the victory of the city over the countryside and, in general, the subordination of the countryside to the city. For such analyses, two paths are presented for the countryside: either the integration to the market and industrial production, where the previous debates of agro-industrial complexes and, lately agribusiness ones as a productive model for the countryside, make sense; or their disappearance. According to this conception, there is no space for peasants and the forms of reproduction of traditional communities, original peoples, extractors, fishermen, etc., in order to reproduce in the countryside. A simplistic explanation when one considers the Brazilian, Latin American reality and of even other world countries and continents.

Another conception, in general resulting from the previous one, will point out the complementarity in the relation between the countryside and cities, in which the countryside is locus of agricultural production, which is intended to its transformation into goods transformed and consumed in urban spaces. Simplistic explanation also fails to meet the concrete reality of these spaces, and their complexities in Brazil and even elsewhere in the world.

The theoretical option assumed in this paper starts from the reading and method in Marx, and understands the historical relationship established between these spaces in the context of consolidation of capitalist society, and establishes the division of labor focused on subordinating both spaces to the production of capital. To this end, one supports in the understanding of the process of expropriation of the countryside and the transformations stimulated by the capital society, referring to the process of primitive accumulation, and maintaining in the current forms of expanded reproduction.

**The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labor.** As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, **it not only maintains this separation, but also reproduces it on a constantly extending scale.** The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation, can be nothing other than the process, which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labor. The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as “primitive” because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital. (MARX, 1984, p. 262). (Our emphasis).

Thus, we seek to reflect on the relation between city and countryside from the social division of labor established between the countryside and the city – that is, starting from the concept of division of labor in general, as pointed out by Marx – an insurmountable reality as long as this mode of production endures.

(...) A growing opposition is seen between these two spaces, as bourgeois property becomes the dominant relation that prevails over the society, product of the capital relation. The classes that embody it in these different spaces become fractions that, to the extent that their interests conflict, fight each other for a greater share of the exploitation of added value. On the other hand, wage-earner workers both in the countryside and in the city find themselves in a dehumanizing relationship by which they must submit to the sale of their workforce to ensure their survival. (ROCHA, 2018, p. 68).

Based on Marx, the analyzed text by Rocha (2018) points out the interests and conflicts established between the dominant social classes of the countryside and cities. As Martins (1994) underlines in *O poder do atraso*, although these subjects (capitalists and landowners) may constitute the same people, they embody different realities.

However, in the context of structural crisis of capital, concrete investments on work, associated with the Brazilian reality marked by a far-right government, advancement of fascism and more recently, the expansion of the new coronavirus, which exacerbates the content of classes in society and materializes in the unequal production of space, the great question that we seek to elaborate in this paper is: What is it presented for the relations established between the countryside and the city? How can one think about the social reproduction of the subjects who live in these spaces, in the face of the exacerbation of the crisis? To what extent will the spread of the virus intensify the crisis and capital action on work in the current and post-pandemic context?

In a lecture held virtually on April 3, 2020, entitled “A pandemia do coronavírus: vivemos uma crise revolucionária”, Sérgio Lessa pointed out, in the post-pandemic context, the tendency to greater automation of labor relations, since capital does not want to be more dependent on the access on workers to continue production. Moreover, one will seek to develop other means that will consequently lead to expand the labor productivity, reducing the number of workers and increasing unemployment. This reality expresses the exacerbation of the crisis and the impossibility of reproduction of significant portions of the peasant and

working class, in the countryside and cities, as subjects subjected to the condition of superfluous, as we will see below.

### **Land grabbing, coronavirus and the resistance attempts of the countryside population**

The contradictions of the advance of capital in the countryside are consolidated in the expansion of private property on land, through the expropriation of workers and peasants, mainly through the land grabbing, as already evidenced by Brazilian researchers, such as Oliveira (2001, 2016). At present, this process of land grabbing continues in full swing, now facilitated both by the government that openly declares “governing for land grabber landowners”, as well as taking advantage of the fragility of these communities before COVID-19 (due to dispersion, difficulty or even lack of access to medical care). Furthermore, it promotes expropriation and increases spatial inequalities in the countryside.

In the report entitled “Indígenas, quilombolas e camponeses denunciam o aumento de ataques durante a pandemia”, by *Jornal Brasil de Fato*, on May 5, 2020, the organizations of the countryside, forest and waters met virtually in the II Seminary Land and Territory and exposed the various threats that they have been suffering mainly by land grabbers. In a note publicized on April 22, 2020,

(...) “The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) made public the effects of the pandemic of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19) among the peoples of the Amazon and the advance of illegal mining, intensified during this period.” The scenario is very worrying, especially due to the increase in the number of people infected and death by the virus, which is aggravated by the fact that the states of the legal Amazon do not have a public health infrastructure in order to serve the population, especially rural communities. The growth of illegal actions of invasion, deforestation and predatory mining, which continue to advance during the quarantine added to this problem, mainly due to the suspension of inspections. (CPT, 2020).

One of the evidences of land appropriation and grabbing in the country is pointed out by the data released by the National Institute of Space Research (INPE) in which deforestation had already surpassed in April 2020 (month of the reporting and beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in the country) the rate of all deforestation in 2019.

In the midst of a pandemic process, the Pastoral Land Commission denounces threats of eviction of *quilombola* communities in Alcântara, in the Maranhão state; of illegal

occupations on the territory of the Karipuna indigenous people, in the Rondônia state; threats by cattlemen, who clear the forest and stream areas along the Preto and Machado rivers in the Amazonas state; the invasion of loggers in the Sawré My Bu territory, located in the middle Tapajós, and the Munduruku indigenous territories, in the Pará West, among others.

In the Amazonas state, contradicting the belief that Coronavirus would not proliferate with the heat of tropical areas, the pandemic has already defused the limited medical capacities of the Manaus metropolis, which concentrates most of the population of the state. **However, the highest lethality corresponds to deaths in the interior of the state**, due to **lack of sufficient resources** for care, while the disease expands following the main rivers: the Solimões, Negro River, the Purus and the Madeira. It is in the Amazonas state where the coronavirus **is rather victimizing indigenous people in Brazil**: In Tikuna villages, in Manaus and Parintins. (CPT, 2020). (Our emphasis).

The note also shows that the Amapá state is the second in contamination for COVID-19 in the North region. In Roraima, the invasion of the territories of the Yanomamis peoples, by more than 20,000 prospectors, has served for the spread of diseases, with lethal deaths among the indigenous peoples. In this process, these communities and their territories are placed as the ball of the turn of land grabbing, also associating the destruction/appropriation of the Amazon forest and other environments in order to consolidate the passage “of the cattle”<sup>5</sup>, as already widely disseminated in the current government.

This reality points to a devastating scenario for the countryside, land concentration and expropriation of hundreds and thousands of families in the country. In 2015, Oliveira (2016) pointed to the concentration of land in large properties between 2003 and 2010 – highlighting also almost 100 million hectares to large properties. Continuing his research conducted in the Brazilian field, he emphasized in an online workshop, promoted by CPT on June 8, 2020,<sup>6</sup> which the current scenario of land concentration is going to aggravate because of the

<sup>5</sup> At a ministerial meeting on April 22, 2020, to deal with the Supreme Court inquiry investigating President Jair Bolsonaro, his Environment Minister Ricardo Salles, said that it was necessary to take advantage of “press coverage (...) only talking about COVID” and “to reinforce simplification”- namely to approve the rules to facilitate environmental exploitation and thus to open the way to large capital, and landowners. That is, nothing more suitable for Bolsonaro’s government than having an environment minister who defends the destruction of the environment.

<https://dialogosdosul.operamundi.uol.com.br/brasil/65509/documentos-mostram-que-rachadinha-de-bolsonaro-chegou-a-r-25-mil-em-mes-eleitoral>.

<sup>6</sup> The workshop “Conflitos no Campo Brasileiro: o de sempre e em tempos de bolsonarismo e pandemia” held on June 8, 2020. Promoted by the Popular Nature Forum and the Pastoral Land Commission. <https://www.facebook.com/forumpopulardanatureza/>.

numerous situations of land grabbing, sustained in the policy of the federal government and its allies.

It is noteworthy that land control and concrete difficulties of reproduction from peasant communities had already been worsened in the last decade, especially due to the process of criminalization of the struggle for land and land occupations, by the enactment of the Criminal Organization Law (12,850/2013), and the Anti-Terrorism Law (13,260/2016), both in the Dilma Rousseff Government (PEREIRA, 2018). Moreover, it follows in the coup government of Michel Temer, as demonstrated by several scholar groups of research. It is worth mentioning here “Dossiê Michel Temer e a Questão Agrária”, published in the *OKARA* Magazine of the Postgraduate Program in Geography by the Federal University of Paraíba and the paper: “Ataques aos direitos dos povos do campo: ações do legislativo e executivo federal”, published in *Conflitos do Campo*, by CPT, in 2016. Furthermore, there are dozens of bills, provisional measures and other legal apparatus that restrain the social action of the struggle for land, leaving the land and resources absolutely at the disposal of land grabbers, land rent and financial operations that are expanded in the field. A clear example of this process is the significant decrease in the actions of occupations and settlements<sup>7</sup> that constituted fundamental spaces for peasant reproduction. Reality is in actions of land grabbing, violence and deaths in the countryside from the Jair Bolsonaro Government, who has already declared ruling for the large landowners, at various times.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, agribusiness projects are expanded in the Brazilian countryside, consolidating the role of the country in the social division of labor, whose production is increasingly transformed into commodities, financial assets controlled by world markets, according to the data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply.

Brazil is the third largest food exporter in the world. It has harvest records and is in the point to be the largest producer in the coming years. According to forecasts from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, production is expected to increase from **232.6 million** tons of the 2017/18 crop to **302 million** by 2027/28, representing an increase of **69 million** tons (growth of **2.5%** per year). Currently, the Brazilian area for grain production

<sup>7</sup> Based on CPT data, Pereira (2018) points out that the encampments registered in 2005 was 90, rising to 35 (2010), 27 (2015) and only 22 (2016). The registered occupations went from 437 (2005), to 180 (2010), 200 (215) and 194 (2016). In 2018, CPT recorded only 17 camps.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/republica/bolsonaro-bancada-ruralista-agronegocio/>;  
<https://www.correiodopovo.com.br/not%C3%ADcias/rural/este-governo-%C3%A9-de-voc%C3%AAs-indica-bolsonaro-%C3%A0-ruralistas-1.349378>;  
<https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2019/09/com-apoio-de-irmao-de-bolsonaro-ruralistas-tentam-impedir-demarcacao-de-terras-indigenas-em-sp/>.

is **63 million** hectares in the 2018/19 harvest, and is expected to expand to **71 million** from the 2027/28 harvest. This growth is based on a **70%** increase in grain production in the country in the last ten years. (Verbal information).<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the expansion of food production, which acquires the form of commodities, hunger is consolidated for a portion of the peasant and working class and, as a concrete expression of the contradiction capital versus labor, where food is the commodity to be sold, instead of the possibility of remedying the hunger of the population.

**821 million** people in the world are still starving (**one in each nine** people). There is still enough lack of food for the most of the world population to live a healthy life, so **10%** of the world population are exposed to severe food insecurity.

In 2007, **13.1%** of the world people were in a state of malnutrition. According to the last data of FAO, in 2017, this percentage decreased to **10.9%**, with most of them living in Africa. (FAO Statistical Yearbook). (Verbal information).<sup>10</sup>

In Brazil, IBGE data presented in a BBC report on July 19, 2019 contradict the information of the Jair Bolsonaro Government that there is no hunger in Brazil.

According to the last survey of body on the subject, in 2013, 3.6% of Brazilians have severe food insecurity. The index corresponded to 7.2 million people in the year of the survey. In the definition of IBGE, in households with severe food insecurity, one can “go through food deprivation, and reach its most serious expression, hunger”. IBGE has not collected data on hunger in Brazil since then. However, the rate is likely to have increased in recent years, following the growth of poverty since 2016. In that year, 52.8 million people (or 25.7% of Brazilians) were considered poor, a figure that rose to 54.8 million (26.5%) in 2017. There have been no measurements of poverty since then. (Verbal information).<sup>11</sup>

In addition, it is in the face of this renter character of the land, the eagerness of capital to expand in the countryside, transforming labor and all its result into goods, that the process of expropriation and resistance of peasants make the Brazilian countryside an expression of the contradiction between capital and labor. On the one hand, land and labor become commodities; on the other, the peasants who still remain in the countryside seek means to survive to capital, to land grabbing and now to virus. Nevertheless, the expropriation of the countryside is evident and this is consolidated, above all, in the unequal production of urban

<sup>9</sup> <https://blog.jacto.com.br/agricultura-mundial/>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://blog.jacto.com.br/agricultura-mundial/>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-49039151>.

spaces, especially in the peripheries, locus of reproduction of the subjects expropriated from the countryside - migrants, poors and sellers, exclusively, of their workforce.

### **From expropriation to the reproduction of life in the spaces of the urban periphery**

To understanding the historical process of expropriation of the peoples of the land and the instruments of labor as a fundamental condition, the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, one seeks historical explanations to the spaces of reproduction of laborers in the urban area, especially in the urban peripheries, producing an unequal social and historical content, due to the product of expropriation, conversion into the labor force and the exploitation of this to produce added value. This reality intensifies with the mobility of work towards the urban peripheries, in face of the difficulties in accessing urban land and the guarantees of reproducing in it, the struggle for housing and work, as Carlos (2007) pointed out. This reality is sharpened in the pandemic process caused by COVID-19, thus the author reports that:

At the local level, public policies towards budgets unevenly distribute resources, worsening urban life with urban deprivation and loss of rights. On this scale, socio-spatial segregation illuminates the social hierarchy that takes place as a spatial hierarchy, imposing differentiated access to the city places, by imposing private property, which produces and structures the unequal society we live in and it will mirror where the pandemic will strike most strongly. This movement towards the future is done to the detriment of the human – who only survives – and now of life. (CARLOS, 2020, p. 11).

The subjects expropriated from the land and resources of nature, who sell their workforce, find the concrete condition of a very limited existence in the hard daily life of the urban peripheries.

Limitation in the objective conditions of life that extends the space of housing, denial to basic public services presents itself with greater weight in a context of pandemic, and, often, the impossibility of surviving.

This scenario already dawned and worsened at least in the context of neoliberal reforms and in Brazil; it was consolidated, above all, in the Labor Reform and Pension Reform.

The data presented by IBGE regarding unemployment in the first quarter of 2020, that is, a scenario in which COVID-19 had not yet expanded concretely, show that: the unemployment rate grew again, staying at 11.9%, regarding 12.9 million people. The research pointed to the existence of 4.8 million disheartened people and an underutilization rate of 24.4%; rates that remained or increased in relation to data from the same body and we used in a paper published in 2019.

(...) According to IBGE/PNAD data, the March-May/2019 trimester, the number of unemployed in the country was 11.8%, equivalent to 12.6 million people. However, although it points to a slightly lower percentage than the previous Dez.2018/Feb.2019 trimester, which was 12.3%, reaching 13 million people, the research body points out that in fact what occurred was a significant increase of workers without registered job, underutilized and self-employed, indicating a picture of the labor precariousness with a record of historical series that began in 2012. (SOUZA; CONCEIÇÃO, 2019, p. 64).

With the pandemic, IBGE data published by *O Globo* newspaper, in a report by Gabriel Martins, show that already in April, the unemployment rate increased to 12.6%, reaching 13.8 million people, almost one million more people only in the first month of distancing and social isolation due to the pandemic. The report also highlights that the informal laborers were the most affected.

In May, a report by Alexandro Martelo, published on *GI* portal, on June 9, 2020, presented data released by the Ministry of Economy, in which the country had over 960,000 requests for unemployment insurance, resulting in 1.9 million requests until then, namely, almost 15 million unemployed laborers in the country in May 2020.

Pointing out considerations made by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in a report published on *UOL* portal on May 27, 2020, the journalist Jamil Chad highlights that the new epicenter of the pandemic will also be the epicenter of unemployment. One can ascertain a reasoning exactly contrary to that pointed out the federal manager, by linking the increase of unemployment to purely economic issues, such as the closure of factories and trade, disregarding or even minimizing the effects of the pandemic. For the ILO and the said reporter, the inability to deal with the virus will indeed turn into increase of unemployment in Brazil. Moreover, one may added the worsening of social crisis, the capital crisis, with even more evident repercussions on the inequalities that make up the space and the urban periphery and, especially the health difficulties and the lack of access to basic health services and simple hygiene materials for these populations.

It is a distressing picture when one observes the concrete effects of the Labor Reform (approved in 2016) and the Pension Reform, which removes the possibility of retirement for the most precarious categories of the working class, which reproduced both in the urban peripheries and in the poor communities of the countryside. This reality places us before the expansion of the processes of expropriation and precariousness of work. Therefore, the expansion of the inequalities is depicted in the production of the spaces of the countryside and cities, the content of classes in the production of space and in precarious forms of reproduction of the subjects, as we will see below.

### **The content of pandemic classes and the production of spaces of countryside and cities**

By analyzing the pandemic expansion process of the new coronavirus, emphasizing the situation of the crisis of the consumerist mode of capital and the rebuttals of this process for the most precarious workers, Davis *et al.* (2020, p. 6) draws attention to the character of classes in which the pandemic is expressed. Although it “remains stable and little changeable, its impact on younger groups may be different in the poorer countries and groups”.<sup>12</sup>

Demystifying the “convenient myth” that infectious diseases do not recognize class or any other social barrier or boundary, Harvey (2020) points out that nowadays these class differences and the social impacts of it tell a very different story, which he will call “customary discrimination”, in which:

(...) the workforce that is expected to take care of the growing numbers of patients is typically highly sexist, racialized and ethnicized in most parts of the world. (...) This “new working class” is at the forefront and holds the burden of being the workforce that runs a larger risk of catching the virus through their jobs or of being wrongly dismissed because of the economic retraction imposed by the virus. There is, for example, the question of who can and who cannot work from home. This aggravates the social division, as well as the question of who can isolate or remain in quarantine (with or without remuneration) in case of contact and infection. (...) **the progress of**

<sup>12</sup> For example, it has been happening in Brazil, where the rate of young victims of COVID-19 is high in hospital beds and, even in the total number of fatal victims ranging around 22 to 30% of the total. Although, for example, the state of São Paulo was the most affected, its percentage greater than 30% of the dead is under 60 years of age. In this case, it is important to highlight the social inequalities and living conditions in which these subjects are reproduced; the exploitation of the work to which they are submitted; the existence of pre-existing diseases and even inadequate and insufficient food to which they have access; a very present reality in the urban peripheries and poor communities of the countryside. See, for example: <https://www.poder360.com.br/coronavirus/conheca-a-faixa-etaria-dos-mortos-por-covid-19-no-brasil-e-em-mais-5-paises-2/>.

**COVID-19 exhibits all the characteristics of a pandemic of class, gender and race.** While mitigation efforts are conveniently camouflaged in the rhetoric that “we are all in this together”, the practices, particularly by national governments, suggest more sinister motivations. (HARVEY, 2020, p. 21).

Also in order to uncover the class character of the pandemic, we refer to the paper entitled “Vítimas do coronavírus: a classe trabalhadora migrante”, by the authors Célia Vendramini and Soraya Conde (UFSC) who analyzed the situation of laborers and migrants in the United States, at the time that this country became the epicenter of the disease and where more people died in the world. This study will show that despite the attempt to mask the character of classes and a possible ‘democratization’ in the contagion by the virus, gradually the access to the data of fatal victims of COVID 19 point to the class condition of most of these subjects, as information about housing and income, which become public the extreme social inequality resulting from the division of classes in various parts of the world.

Data on deaths in New York City (epicenter of the epicenter) show the distinction between neighborhoods and their residents, with deaths concentrated in the districts Queens (37%), Brooklyn (32%) and Bronx (27%) where thousands of poor migrants reside from various parts of the world, especially Latin Americans and the largest concentrations of black, equally poor, Americans in the city. On the other hand, the rich Manhattan (16%) holds one of the most expensive living costs in the world, revealing that each person is worth the place where they are. One emphasizes that the fatal victims of COVID-19 in the country are people occupying “the most strenuous and precarious jobs, with long working hours and low wages. They feed poorly and irregularly, already being weakened to face the disease.” The absence of public health and xenophobia are the cause for many of these deaths without care. (VENDRAMINI; CONDE, 2020).

One also highlight the precarious situation of the most impoverished migrants, such as Venezuelans expelled from Peru, Colombia and Brazil – who return to their country at the time of a pandemic because they did not have any help in the countries in which they were. These Venezuelans still received government assistance, but the immigrants who seek to return to Bolivia did not have the same ‘luck’, since the president (who took over after the coup that removed the elected government of Evo Morales) ordered the closing of the boundaries. The USA and other countries, on the other hand, take advantage of the pandemic

to strengthen the closing of boundaries in the name of protecting their citizens and, exercising their xenophobic, racist and classist policy.

Unfortunately, the access to official data in Brazil does not allow a more detailed analysis of the economic and social profile of most victims. The data are generic and sometimes unfeasible. However, from some academic studies, denunciations of movements, slum centers and social entities that work both in the field and in the cities allows us to assess the intrinsic relation of contamination and deaths of COVID-19 that occur in the poorest sectors of workers. They are the poor people of the countryside and the cities!

With this concern, the Radical Critical Urban Geography Group (GESP) releases the publication entitled: *COVID-19 e a Crise Urbana*, collecting together papers by researchers throughout Brazil on the context of crisis and COVID-19 in their expressions, especially in the urban space. In common with previous publications, the authors highlight the reality of classes of subjects who succumb to the virus, emphasizing the political context marked by extreme conservatism and even the advance of fascism and militias.

The pandemic breaks the scheduled daily life of some social classes, the middle classes and the rich ones, but it does not break the daily life of others. The daily life of poor workers in general, informal workers, extra-job workers, cannot stop. The unequal daily life in the urban peripheries and, above all, the infra-daily life of the residents of the slums and occupations, cannot stop, because they are social groups that do not have exactly a daily life to give up, they do not have the stability of daily life, and their search for survival - which is also their search for work, for income, for their own home, ultimately for daily life - now run an enormous risk of contamination, illness and death, while also performing the necessary maintenance of the minimum levels of economic activity capable of giving survival to capital. (VOLOCHKO, 2020, p. 40).

This same perspective is pointed out by Simoni (2020) in the paper entitled: “A Covid-19 e o direito à cidade dos pobres no Brasil.” Based on official data and careful cartographic study it points to the spread of the disease of the most elitist districts of the city of São Paulo, where the first cases of the disease are concentrated. According to these data it is composed of senior executives linked to the international market and tourism and spreads towards the peripheries, due to the great “flow of workers in the metropolitan space, with a mass of men and women impelled to move from their homes to the spaces of wealth, every day”. The displacement of the virus to such spaces of the disease “found in the peripheries and spaces of

poverty a much more favorable environment for its dissemination”, constituting them true “pandemic powder kegs” (p. 32).

Another issue that evidences the class content of the diffusion and the dissemination of COVID-19 in São Paulo pointed out by the author is the irregularity between the high rates of confirmed cases among the residents of the elite districts of the city (which effectively had access to tests and adequate medical care), to the detriment of the few case confirmations in the poorest districts. However, with the highest cases of death, demonstrating the underreporting of these cases concerning poor workers, it evidences a process of more advanced dispersion of the virus, under which “militia neoliberalism” finds fertile ground to develop its necropolitics.

From the point of view of international organizations, it is emphasized by the direction of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) that, in alerting to the situation of the pandemic in the American continent, highlights the imminence of recurrent outbreaks of disease. It was interspersed with limited transmission period, over two years, and how this process has reached the poorest classes of society, in the countryside and urban peripheries. One points out that the Americas has already surpassed (on June 24, 2020) 4.5 million cases of the disease. With more than 226,000 deaths, these are mainly concentrated in the United States (more than 121,000 deaths) and Brazil (more than 50,000 deaths), but these deaths spread in poor regions of the continent, such as Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and other countries. As PAHO’s director noted:

We will not overcome this crisis without addressing the needs of the most vulnerable: those most likely to fall sick and the least likely to receive care, such as indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, the urban poor and migrant populations. If we neglect them, we run the risk of the next two years looking like the past few months. (PAHO, 2020).

She reinforced the need to “prioritize early detection of suspect cases, laboratory testing, contact tracing and quarantine” (a situation far removed from poor Brazilian workers, who often only have the identification of contagion by the virus after death); as well as the importance of strengthening health systems, considered by her as the “defense against COVID-19; she insisted on PAHO’s recommendation that countries invest in public health at least 6% of GDP, something that “is relevant now, more than ever” (a recommendation that contrasts with neo-liberal privatization ideologies – which aim to pass these services – with

emphasis on health and education to the large market). Thus, PAHO's director points out that migrants and people dependent on the informal economy everyday to survive are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and the least likely to receive care.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Professor Larissa Bombardi,<sup>13</sup> taking as reference studies conducted in other world countries, warned that sanitary conditions in Brazil led to an explosion of these cases in the most vulnerable communities and populations, which do not even have access to basic sanitation. Research highlighted the survival of the virus in the feces for weeks and, joined with sanitary conditions, lack of planning, low air circulation between homes already, it pointed out a catastrophic scenario if effective control and distancing measures were not taken, a fact that has been confirmed. In response to this serious social problem, the Federal Senate responds with the approval, through a virtual session on June 24, 2020, of the New Legal Framework for Sanitation,<sup>14</sup> taking a fundamental step towards the privatization of these services. Now transformed into merchandise, they will be made viable for subjects who are able to pay for them, aggravating existing inequalities.

One of the most flagrant expressions of the federal government's genocidal policy becomes known with the president's speech that "some will die" ("So what?"), demonstrating an absolute disregard, not to mention the debauch, concerning the fatal victims of COVID-19 and their families. However, it is not a naive or inconsequent posture, but a reality through which its necropolitics is effective, by 'practically' defining (and corroborating) the poor workers who will die and those others who, by surviving the pandemic, will continue the process of exploitation of labor by capital. It does not matter how many they will be; what it matters is to continue the production of wealth and further increase the gap between the classes, reproducing the subjects in their proper places.

In order to emphasize the class character and the sharpening of spatial inequalities, we seek to gather information about the categories of workers that have become more contaminated, or are in greater eminence of precariousness of their workforce. In this process, we highlight the situation of Uber Eats messengers, who are assuming the most of the circulation for food consumption of that portion of the population who are, in whole or in part, in social distancing, but who do not have the minimum security in their working conditions. The equipment that must be provided by the employer who exploits their

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<sup>13</sup> In online activity held in March and organized by the Research Group Geography of Work (CEGET/UNESP-PP).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2020/06/24/senado-aprova-novo-marco-legal-do-saneamento-basico>.

workforce, being exposed to constant risks. In this sense, we are faced with a complaint published by journalist Leonardo Sakamoto, on *UOL* portal, on April 15, 2020, in which a sentence on working conditions pointed that:

“Many workers do not come back home, they sleep on the street, because they have to work hard to get enough of the platform to support their families. Imagine their hygiene conditions”, says Eliane Lucina, job prosecutor responsible for the action. “Therefore, the distribution of gel alcohol on a large scale is so fundamental. This can help prevent contagion.” “Workers of transportation companies for goods by digital platforms play a very important role in the social isolation recommended by health experts, since the receipt at home of medicines, food and other products, through the delivery system, helps to reduce the movement of people”, says Josiane Grossl, judge of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Labor Court of São Paulo, in her decision. “Those who carry out deliveries are exposed to the contagion of Covid-19 and, therefore, there is need of taking measures to reduce the risk of spreading the virus among these workers”, she said. Similar preliminary decisions had been uttered against the companies that administer iFood and Rappi, but were overturned by appeals in court.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the situation of iFood messengers, application drivers, the hospital environment and public cleaning workers and several other precarious categories that, in general, do not have rights to social distancing, one clearly ascertains the increase of spatial inequalities, the class and ethnic-racial character of the pandemic, also expressed in the standstill of Uber Eats workers on July 1, showing the contradictions between capital and labor, and so this form of sociability will not be overcome.

## Final Considerations

The paper sought to provoke the discussion about the unequal form in which COVID-19 develops in Brazil, especially concerning the number of fatal victims, and its class and ethnic-racial character, allowing understanding its expressions in the spaces of the countryside and the city. Although one points out the concentration of these cases in the periphery spaces, especially in large Brazilian cities, one also considers the reality of the countryside, as the dispersion and abandonment in times of pandemic, in which they live, leaves them vulnerable to the action of land-grabber and COVID-19. One may add to it the difficulties of obtaining any form of medical care. In this case, these contaminated subjects run the concrete risks of

<sup>15</sup> <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/leonardo-sakamoto/2020/04/15/coronavirus-justica-demanda-que-uber-eats-proteja-saude-de-entregadores.htm?cmpid=copiaecola&cmpid=copiaecola>.

expropriation of the work land. In the pockets of misery from the urban peripheries, locus of reproduction of the most precarious workers, genocidal politics continues in full swing, whether by the exploitation of work, or the murders, especially of young black people, and now COVID-19.

To this disease one adds the context of the structural crisis of capital, its perverse attacks on labor, and the necropolitics headed by the federal government, which now acquires the character of choosing who dies and who lives. To capital, it does not matter how many subjects from the countryside and cities, poor workers and peasants will die. What it really matters, it is to restore the levels of accumulation in the post-pandemic context.

Therefore, as pointed out by Carlos (2020, p. 15) “(...) it is necessary to consider that the post-pandemic world will continue to be capitalist, because we are not experiencing a social revolution capable of changing the face of the world”. Moreover, the most precarious workers, in the struggle for survival, and in the challenge of political organization and resistance to retake the historical struggles of the working class. Thus, one must survive the virus, defeat fascism, without losing sight of the overcoming of this form of sociability.

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