

“The Dictatorship Only Caught Those Who Were Vagabonds”: The Fruits of the 1964 Coup on Peasants in Northern Minas Gerais¹

“A ditadura pegava era só quem era vagabundo”: frutos do
golpe de 1964 sobre camponeses norte-mineiros

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Abstract

The claim that the Brazilian military dictatorship only caught those who were vagabonds is an idea that some people in Brazil hear. Starting from this provocative idea and considering sources such as newspapers, interviews, articles, and books, this article demonstrates how a developmentalist model, based on the 1964 military coup, intensified violence against peasants in northern Minas Gerais. By looking at this region of the country, it is possible to learn about the violence and repression that occurred against rural people and their supporters. There, a colonel called Georgino Jorge de Souza emerged, who embodied the intentions of the military coup and dictatorship from 1964 onwards. In and from the city of Montes Claros, a scheme was set up, with transactions and exchanges of services benefiting certain individuals who took advantage of the spirit established in the region. Large landowners, with the city of Montes Claros as their center of activity, sought to increase their power and expand their territories. The colonel, symbolized by his 10th

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Military Police Battalion, acted by evicting the posseiros from the places where they lived. To support such actions, discourse, narratives, and violence were used to classify peasants as communists, obstacles to the intentions of social groups that sought to expand their territorial properties and thus reap benefits from the government. The results of this study show that during the military dictatorship, under the consequences of the military discourse in favor of economic advancement, large landowners perpetrated violence against peasants and their defenders to gain more land and, consequently, money.

Keywords: Peasants. Colonel Georgino. Military dictatorship. 1964 coup. Northern Minas.

Resumo

A afirmação que *a ditadura militar brasileira só pegava quem era vagabundo* é uma ideia que se ouve por parte de algumas pessoas no Brasil. A partir dessa ideia provocativa, e considerando fontes como jornais, entrevistas, artigos e livros, este artigo busca mostrar como um modelo desenvolvimentista, assentado a partir do golpe militar de 1964, intensificou violências contra camponeses no norte de Minas Gerais. A partir de um olhar para essa região do país, é possível ter conhecimento de que violências e repressões ocorreram contra pessoas do campo e seus apoiadores. Ali, emergiu um coronel, chamado Georgino Jorge de Souza, que encarnou em si intentos do golpe e ditadura militar a partir de 1964. Em e a partir da cidade de Montes Claros, um esquema foi montado, com transações e trocas de serviços beneficiando alguns indivíduos, os quais se aproveitaram de ímpetos do espírito que vinha sendo instaurado na região. Grandes fazendeiros, tendo a cidade montesclarensense como centro de atuação, buscaram ampliar seu poderio e expandir territórios. O referido coronel, simbolizado por seu *10º Batalhão de Polícia Militar*, age despejando posseiros de lugares onde viviam. Para amparar modos de ação assim, uso foi feito de discursos, narrativas e violências, classificando camponeses como comunistas, obstáculos para intenções de grupos sociais que buscavam ampliar suas propriedades territoriais e, com isso, colherem benefícios do governo. Os resultados deste estudo demonstram que, durante a ditadura militar, sob as consequências do discurso militar a favor do avanço econômico, grandes fazendeiros perpetraram violências contra camponeses e seus defensores a fim de terem mais terras e, conseqüentemente, dinheiro.

Palavras-chave: Camponeses. Coronel Georgino. Ditadura militar. Golpe de 1964. Norte de Minas.

Introduction

[...] look, when I argue with someone, I say it was the best time of my life, I'm 80 years old, it was the best time of my life [...] They talk about dictatorship as something like that, but no *they only caught people who were vagabonds* [...]²

The statement above, taken from an interview with elderly people in the central part of the city of Montes Claros, in the north of Minas Gerais, shows an idea that is present in some parts of Brazilian society, that the dictatorship was only harsh and violent with indolent people, lawbreakers, and communists. This reality is characterized in this way, as a rule, from the point of view of the country's large urban centers, where there were more organized groups, combatants, and militants in vehement opposition to military power, or simply to characterize people who broke the law. Indiscriminately applying this idea is complicated, as it falls into simplification and generalization since there are many records of arbitrary acts carried out under the military and intentional attempts to benefit those who walked hand in hand with those in power.³

In the case of rural workers in Minas Gerais, for example, to say that many were caught by the military because they were vagabonds is a historical inaccuracy, given that, specifically in the north of this Brazilian state, there were many cases of action being taken surreptitiously and under the pretext of fighting communism, also known as *anti-communism*⁴. In addition, the economic model put in place was a segregating model that marginalized certain social groups. With its eagerness to develop the country economically, militarism ended up choosing, either actively or passively, the people who would most easily lead the nation to economic triumph.⁵

² ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza; Athayde, André Luiz Mendes. Retratos e recortes montesclarenses: histórias da cidade no período da ditadura militar. *Revista Hydra*, v. 7, n. 13, p. 255, 2023. Ênfase nossa.

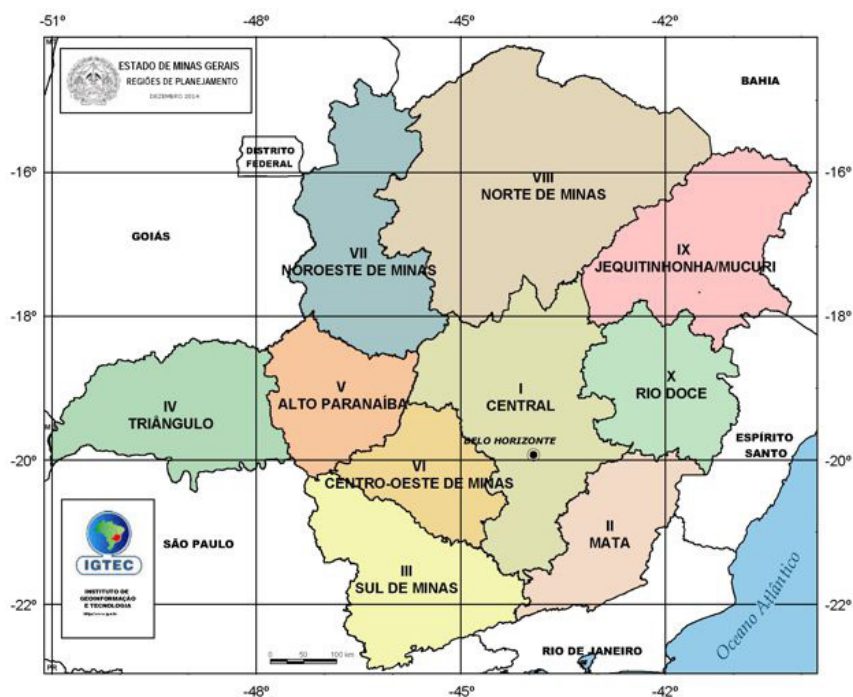
³ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseio bom é posseio morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

⁴ Anti-communism refers to the posture of individuals and groups dedicated to fighting communism, whether by word or deed (BERSTEIN, Serge; BECKER, Jean-Jacques. *Histoire de l'anticommunisme*. Paris: Olivier Orban, 1987). Anti-communism is based on an attitude of active rejection of communism and its projects (MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá. *Em guarda contra o perigo vermelho: o anticomunismo no Brasil (1917 – 1964)*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002).

⁵ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseio bom é posseio morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

In the case of rural northern Minas Gerais, by benefiting groups of society with more possessions and land, because more land would mean the opportunity to contract higher amounts of financing and benefits from the regime, the military ended up aggravating rural conflicts against rural individuals, inducing and supporting violence against lower-ranking individuals, such as in the emblematic case of *posseiros* (*posseiros*)⁶ in the Cachoeirinha region when they were evicted from there in 1964 and 1967.⁷

MAP 1 - Minas Gerais planning regions.



Source: MG. *Geografia*. Available at: <https://www.mg.gov.br/pagina/geografia>. Access on: 05 Feb. 2024.

⁶ In this article, *posseiros* are people who have lived for generations on land that was passed down from one ancestor to another but without documentation that could prove that they owned it.

⁷ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

The conflict that occurred there against the peasants goes back to the early 1960s, and the village was subjected to mistreatment for more than 15 years⁸. About two hundred kilometers from Montes Claros, in the north of Minas Gerais (on Map 1, VIII NORTE DE MINAS GERAIS), the village is now part of Verdelândia. At the time of the conflicts, it was part of the municipality of Varzelândia. When we speak about the North, we consider the delimitation of the state into ten regions, following the 1992 division into planning regions, according to the *João Pinheiro Foundation (Fundação João Pinheiro)*⁹ (see Map 1).

On the other hand, and in reaction to the arbitrariness and intentions of the development model established in Brazil with the 1964 coup, peasant movements sought to strengthen themselves and come together in battles for the recognition of rights and obtaining land. Several cases and examples of human rights violations intensified during this period, systematically targeting rural workers and their supporters. Social and political tensions marked the rural workers' struggle for agrarian reform. There are records of the military trying to control and suppress these rural actions. The military dictatorship in Brazil can be characterized as a time when some governed and others were part of the political pact.¹⁰

Labor unions took a stand against the political and economic model implemented by the dictatorship. Because of abuses in the countryside, the role of unions gained popularity among peasants, highlighting contradictions and the growth of violence¹¹ against rural people, issues resulting from abuses and breaches of human rights. These problems and land disputes occurred via public action, all intensified by projects put in place by the military to modernize Brazil and its countryside.¹²

⁸ COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

⁹ DINIZ, Alexandre Magno Alves; BATELLA, Wagner Barbosa. O Estado de Minas Gerais e suas regiões: um resgate histórico das principais propostas oficiais de regionalização. *Sociedade & natureza*, v. 33, n. 33, p. 59-77, 2005.

¹⁰ MARTINS, José de Souza. *Os camponeses e a política no Brasil: as lutas sociais no campo e seu lugar no processo político*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981.

¹¹ Alan Page Fisk and Tage Shakti Rai state that violence is an action in which the perpetrator inflicts pain, suffering, fear, anguish, injury, mutilation, disfigurement, or death as the intrinsic, necessary, or desirable means to an end. In the theory of virtuous violence outlined by these authors, violence is the harm, suffering, or death that people commit on purpose (FISKE, Alan Page; RAI, Tage Shakti. *Virtuous violence: hurting and killing to create, sustain, end, and honor social relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015).

¹² ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

The *Truth Commission in Minas Gerais* (*Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais*)¹³ argues that rural people should be treated differently within the context of the Brazilian dictatorship that began in 1964, due to the exclusion of peasants from official counts of victims and reparations processes, which contributes to the impression that there was an absence of conflict and political opposition during that time. In this article, the words *peasant* and *posseiro*, used interchangeably, follow the definition given by the *Truth Commission in Minas Gerais* and by Rosely Carlos Augusto¹⁴, i.e., people, workers, and rural dwellers who depend on a way of being connected to the land. They are people dependent on this territory for their individual and community development. It is against them and their supporters, considered obstacles, that aggressors have directed a pattern of violence. These offenders sought to stifle movements related to land conflicts and labor claims, even resorting to the summary, arbitrary, and extrajudicial execution of these individuals.

Repressions in the countryside of northern Minas Gerais

From 1946 to 1988, conflicts spread in the Brazilian countryside, which persist to varying degrees and depending on the region. The peasants' political demands for access to land, labor rights, working conditions, and the market are related to those conflicts. During João Goulart's presidency (1961 – 1964), state agencies responsible for the agrarian question were reorganized. The *Superintendence of Agrarian Policy* (*Superintendência de Política Agrária*) (SUPRA) was created in 1963, incorporating the *National Institute of Immigration and Colonization* (*Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização*), the *Rural Social Service* (*Serviço Social Rural*), and the *National Agrarian Reform Council* (*Conselho Nacional de Reforma Agrária*)¹⁵. SUPRA aimed to activate preparatory reform measures before they were approved by Congress and create political and institutional conditions for their implementation.¹⁶

¹³ COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais*: relatório final. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

¹⁴ COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais*: relatório final. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2; AUGUSTO, Rosely Carlos. *Aprender na prática*: narrativas e histórias de lideranças camponesas, no sertão, norte de Minas, nas últimas três décadas. 2011. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2011.

¹⁵ BRASIL. *Comissão camponesa da verdade*: relatório final. Violações de direitos no campo. 1946 – 1988. Brasília: CNV, 2014.

¹⁶ CAMARGO, Aspásia de Alcântara. A questão agrária: crise do poder e reformas de base (1930-1964). In: FAUSTO, Boris. *História geral da civilização brasileira*. 9. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2007. v. 10.

The reaction of rural workers and their organizations was due to the agrarian reform projects and the mobilization of rural workers who could signal a move towards agrarian reform by force, pointing to a possible break in the traditional alliances that sustained forms of domination in the countryside¹⁷. Between 1946 and 1964, the democratic regime did not guarantee citizens' rights to peasants. Instead, it repressed their struggles and organizations. The 1964 coup ensured the persistence of forms of domination in the countryside and the agrarian structure in effect at the time. From 1964 to 1985, the period of the military dictatorship, peasants had their freedom suppressed and were persecuted, beaten, tortured, and killed. The same happened to lawyers, religious people, and journalists who supported them. Even between 1985 and 1988, permissive policies of human rights violations existed in the countryside.¹⁸

A repression pattern is practiced in the countryside of northern Minas Gerais. Farmers and their goons (*jagunços*) acted in a standardized pattern, threatening and intimidating rural people. They reported the incident to public bodies, which, in turn, tended to act lethargically. What can be seen is that *posseiros* suffered the consequences of power asymmetries¹⁹ in a period of arrests, illegal detentions, torture, vile treatment, abuse of authority, political persecution, threats, and impeded access to justice.²⁰

In the case of the northern Minas Gerais countryside, human rights violations are observed not only in the expulsion and expropriation of *posseiros* from a given piece of land but also through an economic model that has been implemented. Some individuals, at the beginning of the military dictatorship, in the case of the north of Minas Gerais, took advantage of impunity and alliances with people with influence in and before the system to obtain and

¹⁷ MENDONÇA, Sonia Regina de. *O patronato rural no Brasil recente (1964-1993)*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2012.

¹⁸ BRASIL. *Comissão camponesa da verdade: relatório final. Violações de direitos no campo. 1946 – 1988*. Brasília: CNV, 2014.

¹⁹ TEIXEIRA, Raquel Oliveira Santos; LIMA, Maryellen Milena de. A política do tempo no desastre: disputas pela reparação no reassentamento da comunidade de Paracatu de Baixo. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais*, v. 24, p. 1-22, 2022; SOUZA, Jessé. A invisibilidade da luta de classes ou a cegueira do economicismo. In: BARTELT, Dawid Danilo (Org.). *A “Nova Classe Média” no Brasil como conceito e projeto político*. Rio de Janeiro: Heinrich Böll, 2013; FERNANDES, Florestan. *A revolução burguesa no Brasil: ensaio de interpretação sociológica*. 5. ed. São Paulo: Globo, 2006.

²⁰ ARNS, Paulo Evaristo. *Brasil: nunca mais*. 10. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1985; FERREIRA, Jorge; DELGADO, Lucília de Almeida Neves (Org.). *O Brasil republicano: o tempo da ditadura – regime militar e movimentos sociais em fins do século XX*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2007. v. 4; REIS, Daniel Arão; RIDENTI, Marcelo; MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá (Org.). *A ditadura que mudou o Brasil: 50 anos do golpe de 1964*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2014.

expand land. They lived in Montes Claros, but from there, they expanded their arms of power over the countryside.

Information from the *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics* (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*) (IBGE) (see Table 1) on the growth in the number of tractors also shows an intervention in the economy aimed at industrializing the country, which included the agricultural sector and its mechanization. The modernization policy, also known as *developmentalism*²¹, impacted the social sphere by strengthening and penetrating the agro-industrial environment and increasing the price of land. Through a transformation of the productive structure of agriculture caused by the intensification of the implementation of an extensive industrial park, a movement that had begun in the 1950s and intensified even more during the dictatorship, the intention was to increase the speed of industrialization and the substitution of imports.²²

Table 1 - The increase in the number of tractors in agricultural establishments in Brazil (1940 – 1980).

Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
Period	10 years	10 years	10 years	10 years	10 years
Tractors	3.380	8.372	61.345	165.870	545.205

Source: Adapted from IBGE. *Censo agropecuário*. Available at: <https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/1033>. Accessed on: May 24, 2023.

With incentives and subsidies for production, agriculture became more incorporated into the process of capitalist accumulation, producing raw materials, and food, besides playing a market role for the industrial park, due to the acquisition of machinery and agricultural inputs²³. Another issue

²¹ During the military dictatorship, developmentalism meant strengthening the role of the state and increasing its capacity for intervention. The country's social issues were neglected to focus purely on Brazil's economic growth. Among other problems, there was a lack of access to land and a lack of concern for issues relating to income distribution, i.e., income concentration was aggravated (PRADO, Luiz Carlos Delorme. O desenvolvimentismo autoritário de 1968 a 1980. In: BIELSCHOWSK, Ricardo; PRADO, Luiz Carlos Delorme; PAULANI, Leda; LACERDA, Antonio Corrêa de; POCHMANN, Márcio; BACELAR, Tania. *O desenvolvimento econômico brasileiro e a Caixa*: palestras. Rio de Janeiro: Caixa Econômica Federal, 2011).

²² MARTINE, George (Org.); GARCIA, Ronaldo Coutinho (Org.). *Os impactos sociais da modernização agrícola*. São Paulo: Caetés, 1987; SZMRECSÁNYI, Tamás (Org.); SUZIGAN, Wilson (Org.). *História econômica do Brasil contemporâneo*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2002; DELGADO, Guilherme Costa. *Capital financeiro e agricultura no Brasil*. Campinas: Ícone, 1985.

²³ MARTINE, George (Org.); GARCIA, Ronaldo Coutinho (Org.). *Os impactos sociais da modernização agrícola*. São Paulo: Caetés, 1987.

observed during the dictatorship was the increasing effects of a rural credit policy for the modernization of the countryside, with tax incentives, rural credit, and financing at the federal and regional levels, implemented over the years. Having more land could mean having more access to money from the government.²⁴

During this period, the industrial logic of the cities spread to the countryside, which was subject to capitalist development, with peasants being proletarianized and their lives changed to the point where they lost their traditions and cultures. This occurred through a model of industrialization that was economically dependent on developed central countries and without breaking with the Brazilian rural oligarchy that generated the new economic elites in the country²⁵: “[...] The field of socially active forces is only open to the ‘champions of development,’ all adherents of the ‘economic miracles’ provided by the industrialization of dependence, underdevelopment, and the ruthless exploitation of the people.”²⁶

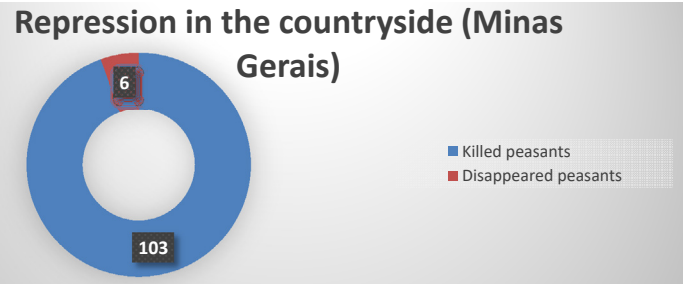
This model relegated peasants to certain roles, providing cheap labor for industry in the city, putting downward pressure on wages in industries, producing food for the cities at low prices, and producing agricultural raw materials at low prices for the industrial sector and for export. The implementation of government development projects in the period sometimes had consequences for the north of Minas Gerais that were not remedied and used violence, an example being the forced displacements inside the state (see Graph 1, Graph 2, and Table 2).

²⁴ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

²⁵ STEDILE, João Pedro (Org.). *A questão agrária no Brasil: o debate tradicional. 1500-1960*. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2005.

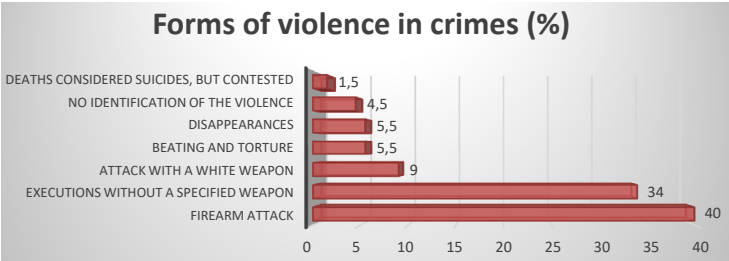
²⁶ FERNANDES, Florestan. *Capitalismo dependente e classes sociais na América Latina*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1975. p. 84.

Graph 1 – Repression in the countryside during the military dictatorship (Minas Gerais)²⁷.



Source: Adapted from COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

Graph 2 – Violence in the countryside during the military dictatorship (Minas Gerais).



Source: Adapted from COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

Table 2 – Minas Gerais cities with the highest number of deaths during the military dictatorship.

CITY	REGION	DEATHS
Varzelândia	Norte	8
Miradouro	Zona da Mata	7
Porteirinha	North	4

continua

²⁷ COVEMG identified at least 109 deaths linked to territorial conflicts, demands for labor rights, and political mobilizations in the rural areas of northern Minas Gerais (COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2).

conclusão

Frei Gaspar	Jequitinhonha e Mucuri	3
Malacheta	Jequitinhonha e Mucuri	3
Paracatu	Noroeste	3
Sabinópolis	Rio Doce	3
Santa Maria do Suaçuí	Rio Doce	3
São Domingos do Prata	Central	3
São Francisco	Norte	3

Source: Adapted from COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

Therefore, the state was involved directly, indirectly, and by omission in violations against certain groups of civilians, acting alone and with private agents. Among those responsible for the acts perpetrated were people whose duty was to ensure the law, such as police officers and officials in public office. There were disappearances involving state and private agents through a relationship of complicity²⁸. There were disappearances involving state and private agents through a relationship of complicity. The public power either omitted or colluded with measures against *posseiros*. Private agents included ranchers, land grabbers, rural companies, guards, goons, and gunmen. The Minas Gerais government was complacent with notary fraud and land-grabbing schemes.

The *Minas Gerais Rural Foundation (Fundação Rural Mineira)* (RURALMINAS) legitimized land grabbing and disadvantaged *posseiros*. During the military dictatorship, according to Antônio Inácio Correia²⁹, a farmer and one of the leaders of the *Januária Rural Workers' Union (Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais de Januária)*, that institution had the responsibility of legalizing the land. At times of confrontation involving a land grabber, a reforestation company, and a community of peasants, RURALMINAS, in the case of the Casa-de-Telha farm, carried out a survey, charged a measurement fee, but did not give the title to the *posseiros*. According to Inácio, he even went to Belo Horizonte with the payment receipt, and they gave him a deadline for resolving the issue, but they never went to the peasants. Instead, RURALMINAS protected land

²⁸ BRASIL. *Camponeses mortos e desaparecidos: excluídos da justiça de transição*. Brasília: Secretaria de Direitos Humanos, 2013.

²⁹ CORREIA, Antônio Inácio. In: RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães (Org.). *História dos gerais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.

grabbers and brought companies to the region. The idea of attracting jobs and money to the state ended up resulting in violence against people and deaths.

There have been cases of police officers supporting landowners. One example is that of the colonel of the *10th Military Police Battalion* (*10ª Batalhão da Polícia Militar*), Georgino Jorge de Souza, against *posseiros* in Cachoeirinha³⁰. There are also situations where the use of police force is used to support land grabbers through illegal actions, violence, and intimidation against peasants and their defenders so that they abandon the land and their cause. Plantations, fences, and houses were destroyed. The aggressors beat and illegally detained the *posseiros*. Illegal, violent, and warrantless actions were directed against individuals considered obstacles. Police officers omitted to act and agreed with what happened by not registering police reports or investigating complaints from the perpetrators.

According to *Amnesty International*³¹ (*Anistia Internacional*), human rights violations are common in land dispute situations. While peasants are subjected to repeated and arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, and threats of execution by police and gunmen, those who are supposed to be responsible for enforcing the law do not respond to formal requests against the actions of gunmen, nor do they investigate the deaths of peasants involved in disputes. As previously mentioned, supporters of the *posseiros* also suffered persecution. Among them were trade unionists and people who provided legal, educational, or labor union advice.

Labor union movements were monitored and suppressed by the authoritarian military dictatorship. The agencies of the *Ministry of Labor* (*Ministério do Trabalho*) and the security and intelligence agencies acted together. These rural workers have a history of exploitation and political subordination to large landowners, being constantly excluded from basic political and social rights, and having difficulties preserving their social memory³². The inherited impression of the rural individual ends up being something constructed by the winners in the historical process, seeking to induce people to think that the rural worker was passive, submissive, cordial, and incapable of creating and fighting for his interests.

³⁰ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

³¹ ANISTIA INTERNACIONAL. *Brasil: violência autorizada nas áreas rurais*. Londres: Índice, 1988.

³² MEDEIROS, Leonilde Sérvolo de. *História dos movimentos sociais no campo*. Rio de Janeiro: FASE, 1989.

Changes in northern Minas Gerais

Agrarian conflicts, in general, can arise due to state territorial planning actions³³. In Brazil in the 1970s, there was a renewal of livestock forces due to the issues of subsidized credit and the opening of bank branches in the countryside, facilitating and encouraging transactions. The expansion of credit and the banking system coincided with records of conflicts between *posseiros* and large farmers, involving common lands and places that *posseiros* passed on to their descendants, despite documentation problems.³⁴

According to Ferraro Júnior and Bursztyn³⁵, *posseiro* communities were pressured in that decade due to: a. environmental pressure, with the degradation of the caatinga; b. political pressure, with the creation of municipal laws that forced the fencing of areas with the laws of the four wires; c. land pressure, generated by land grabbing; d. economic pressure, with the appreciation of land; e. technical pressure, due to proposals for the modernization of agriculture and the expansion of livestock farming.

Given these factors, conflicts intensified even more in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to the formation of pastoral communities, the formulation of their category, and an increase in the number of unions working to fight and defend the interests of *posseiros*. The case of the north of Minas Gerais has a specific singularity in the context of territorial conflicts: the *Superintendence for the Development of the Northeast* (*Superintendência do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste*) (SUDENE), which, through government programs, sent resources to the area known as the *Drought Polygon* (*Polígono das Secas*), of which the north of Minas Gerais is a part. Capitalist relations influence the countryside more intensely, and there is a movement to occupy the Brazilian *cerrado*.³⁶

³³ ALCÂNTARA, Denilson Moreira de; GERMANI, Guiomar Inez. A produção do espaço a partir da resistência. In: VI CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE GEÓGRAFOS, 2004, Goiânia. *Setenta anos da AGB: as transformações do espaço e a geografia no século XXI*, 2004; RAZAC, Olivier. *Barbed wire: a political history*. New York: The New, 2002; CARVALHO, Horácio Martins de. *O campesinato no século XXI: possibilidades e condicionantes do desenvolvimento do campesinato no Brasil*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2005; DARDOT, Pierre; LAVAL, Christian. *Common: on revolution in the 21st century*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019; ANDRADE, Manuel Correia de. *Lutas camponesas no Nordeste*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1989; GALIZONI, Flávia Maria. *A terra construída*. Dissertação (Mestrado em Antropologia Social). Universidade de São Paulo, 2000.

³⁴ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

³⁵ FERRARO JÚNIOR, Luiz Antonio Ferraro; BURSZTYN, Marcel. Das sesmarias à resistência ao cercamento: razões históricas dos fundos de pasto. *Caderno CRH*, v. 23, n. 59, p. 395, 2010.

³⁶ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território)

The military worldview at the time was to occupy places deemed empty of economy and people, such as the Amazon and the *cerrado*. The latter's soils were considered barren but with an ideal topography for mechanizing the countryside. The regime directs technological investments to make these places productive, providing products for the Brazilian export agenda, such as grains, coffee, and sugarcane. Under this developmentalist spirit, the people of the *cerrado*, such as those in the north of Minas Gerais, were judged by the dominant power as poor, illiterate, and full of diseases and worms.³⁷

This development model did not consider the diversity of places and populations, such as peasants, indigenous people, quilombolas, fishermen, gatherers, and others who had lived there for centuries³⁸. Favoring groups deemed likely to make a greater contribution to the military's purposes, such as the industrial and agro-industrial sectors, the modernization of the region, public investments, and subsidized financing were put into practice. Among those benefiting from the model adopted were projects such as livestock, irrigation, monoculture reforestation, stimulating cotton monoculture, and those that disseminated agricultural practices considered advanced at the time.³⁹

Until the 1970s, the productive base in the north of Minas Gerais was strongly based on extensive livestock farming, practiced on land that was more fertile and with *caatinga* hills. The economy was also known for its trade and subsistence agriculture, which produced corn, beans, sugarcane, manioc, and rice. Production was linked to the use of small animals to supply the region. The exclusionary developmentalist policies penalized local people. Elites propagated the narrative that the region was backward and suffered

– Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

³⁷ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza; ATHAYDE, André Luiz Mendes; Ribeiro, Eduardo Magalhães. Avanços e desafios da abordagem territorial de programas de desenvolvimento econômico e social. In: COUTO, Felipe Fróes (Org.); CRUZ, Júnio Matheus da Silva (Org.); FARIAS JÚNIOR, Teddy Marques (Org.); SILVA, Vitória Dreide Xavier Araújo. *Caminhos do desenvolvimento*. Montes Claros: Unimontes, 2024. v. 1; LUZ, Cláudia; DAYRELL, Carlos Alberto. (Org.). *Cerrado e desenvolvimento: tradição e atualidade*. Montes Claros: CAA, 2000.

³⁸ ALMEIDA, Alfredo Wagner Berno de. *Terras de quilombo, terras indígenas, "babaquais livres", "castanhais do povo", faxinais e fundos de pasto: terras tradicionalmente ocupadas*. 2. ed. Manaus: UFAM, 2006; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães (Org.). *História dos gerais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.

³⁹ RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães; GALIZONI, Flávia Maria; CALIXTO, Juliana Sena; ASSIS, Thiago de Paula; AYRES, Eduardo Barbosa; SILVESTRE, Luiz Henrique. Gestão, uso e conservação de recursos naturais em comunidades rurais do Alto Jequitinhonha. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais*, v. 7, n. 2, p. 77-99, 2005; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães (Org.). *História dos gerais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.

from poverty due to droughts. They argued that the development they led would solve problems linked to the region's economic isolation.⁴⁰

Unlike this, family farming suffers because of the effects of the implemented model. The social and economic gulfs have widened. Natural resources such as water, soil, and biodiversity have been damaged⁴¹. In addition to political marginalization, supposed innovations have come from cities that have altered peasant societies. In Latin America, technology-focused developmentalist programs have been based on modern agriculture as a matrix, without meeting the needs of local peasants or making the most of agricultural and ecological systems.⁴²

In this context, extensive livestock farming was a sector encouraged. Few landowners had access to subsidized credit for modernizing their farms and implementing improved pastures, building facilities and fences, and acquiring and improving herds. Farmers who used such subsidized financing have fenced off properties and removed people who lived there before⁴³, such as aggregates or *posseiros*⁴⁴. As a result, there is a rupture in the vertical solidarity between large landowners, aggregates, and *posseiros*.

The landowners opted for a relationship between their equals⁴⁵. The eviction of peasants from rural areas contributed to the emptying of the countryside and the demographic growth of cities in the north of Minas Gerais, of which Montes Claros is an example. This question reflects the context of urban and social change, immigration, and poverty. From the 1960s onwards,

⁴⁰ LUZ, Cláudia; DAYRELL, Carlos Alberto. (Org.). *Cerrado e desenvolvimento: tradição e atualidade*. Montes Claros: CAA, 2000; PEREIRA, Laurindo Mekie. Comunidade versus “desenvolvimento”: ensaio sobre a história do norte de Minas. In: ESTIVIL, J.; Balsa, C. (Org.). *Economia local, comunitária e solidária: o desenvolvimento visto de baixo*. Famação: Húmus, 2022.

⁴¹ CORREIA, Antônio Inácio; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães; AYRES, Eduardo Charles Barbosa. *História da peleja do sindicato de trabalhadores rurais de Januária contra os grileiros e as grandes empresas*. Minas Gerais: Projeto de Revitalização do Rio dos Cochos, 2010. Cartilha; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães (Org.). *História dos gerais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.

⁴² DIEGUES, Antonio Carlos. *O mito moderno da natureza intocada*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1996.

⁴³ For an overview since colonial Brazil of these *posseiros* and where they came from, read the following article: FERRARO JÚNIOR, Luiz Antonio Ferraro; BURSZTYN, Marcel. Das sesmarias à resistência ao cercamento: razões históricas dos fundos de pasto. *Caderno CRH*, v. 23, n. 59, p. 385-400, 2010.

⁴⁴ FERRARO JÚNIOR, Luiz Antonio Ferraro; BURSZTYN, Marcel. Das sesmarias à resistência ao cercamento: razões históricas dos fundos de pasto. *Caderno CRH*, v. 23, n. 59, p. 385-400, 2010.

⁴⁵ COSTA, João Batista de Almeida. Cultura sertaneja: a conjugação de lógicas diferenciadas. In: SANTOS, Gilmar Ribeiro (Org.). *Trabalho, cultura e sociedade no norte/nordeste de Minas: considerações a partir das Ciências Sociais*. Montes Claros: Best Comunicação e Marketing, 1997

thanks to financial resources, tax breaks, and free access to land, reforestation companies were established in that region of the state.⁴⁶

At first, with the arrival of the companies, there was euphoria. Local politicians, technicians from public institutions, and bank managers spoke of a great future, that the region would be more productive, that jobs and income would be generated, and that development would be present. The propaganda was that everyone would be a winner⁴⁷. At the time, access to the land also took place via the purchase of *posseiros*' rights. Due to the imprecise boundaries of the areas occupied by *posseiros* and the extent and discontinuity of the appropriation, companies took advantage of the situation to fence off large areas without worrying about the families living there.⁴⁸

At the federal and state levels, the government distributed its generosity to large enterprises, while it was ruthless toward small farmers. The 1985 IBGE census shows that municipal land was more concentrated than in the previous decade⁴⁹. The modernization of agriculture, with eucalyptus monoculture and extensive livestock farming, further marginalized peasant agriculture. RURALMINAS, in the process of regularizing *posseiros*' possessions, has only recognized closed territories of backyards and gardens as possessions, without including the communal and discontinuous occupation of grazing land, managed for centuries by peasants.

Talking about violations in rural Minas Gerais during the military dictatorship involves considering the developmentalist actions of a centralizing state. These state actions and the interests of farmers and large companies led to land concentration. The government supported and practiced the expulsion of *posseiros* from the land where they lived, and they were increasingly pushed to urban centers or placed under precarious working conditions on farms. Actions by land grabbers against *posseiros* and conflicts arising from attempts to evict them are widespread issues in the state.

⁴⁶ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. "*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*": coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

⁴⁷ OLIVEIRA, Marcos Fábio Martins de; RODRIGUES, Luciene; CARDOSO, José Maria Alves; BOTELHO, Tarcísio Rodrigues (Org.). *Formação social e econômica do norte de Minas*. Montes Claros: Unimontes, 2000.

⁴⁸ CORREIA, Antônio Inácio; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães; AYRES, Eduardo Charles Barbosa. *História da peleja do sindicato de trabalhadores rurais de Januária contra os grileiros e as grandes empresas*. Minas Gerais: Projeto de Revitalização do Rio dos Cochos, 2010. Cartilha; RIBEIRO, Eduardo Magalhães (Org.). *História dos gerais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.

⁴⁹ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. "*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*": coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

Despite these issues, the organization of workers against these processes increased, which occurred through the formation of leagues, associations, and unions in parts of Minas Gerais. The persecution soon extended to unions, peasant leaders, public labor demonstrations, and demands for land reform. The modernizing model and the mechanization of rural production, associating it with capitalist development models, alliances with agricultural companies and the opening of enterprises with the help of foreign investment damaged the lives of *posseiros*.⁵⁰

In the dictatorship crosshairs

During Brazil’s military dictatorship, one of the best-known stories of violence, arbitrariness, and evictions in rural areas against *posseiros* in the north of Minas Gerais was the one that took place in Cachoeirinha. The public agent best known for acting in this case was Colonel Georgino. A municipality of Varzelândia, at the time of the dictatorship, Cachoeirinha was considered a place infested by communists. Efforts were made to instill a fear of communism, even though ordinary people did not know what it was all about. The solidarity and unity between the *posseiros* were taken as a sign that they were communists.⁵¹

The situation harmed *posseiros* and favored ruralists who supported the military coup. While the latter saw themselves as victors in the fight against communism, the peasants were considered communists and subversives. In the case of Cachoeirinha, Georgino Jorge, also known for having been commander of the *10th Military Police Battalion of Montes Claros*, defended his personal interests and those of other land grabbers⁵². In compliance with an eviction order that, unusually, was carried out quickly, issued by a justice of the peace known as Juquinha da Ponte, from the town of São João da Ponte, *posseiros*, most of whom were black⁵³, suffered violence from the colonel, who was also black.

⁵⁰ COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais: relatório final*. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

⁵¹ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98-107, 2006.

⁵² ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza; ATHAYDE, André Luiz Mendes. Retratos e recortes montesclarenses: histórias da cidade no período da ditadura militar. *Revista Hydra*, v. 7, n. 13, 2023.

⁵³ The fact that he was black and acted violently towards his own people of color does not go unnoticed. The name of the town in which he was raised, Caetité, for which he shows so much love and nostalgia, is also curious, since the farm he built on the land of the *posseiros* he expelled bears the same name (SOUZA, Georgino Jorge de. *Reminiscências de um soldado de polícia*. Montes Claros: Silveira, 1996. see p. 64-65).

In 1967, under the command of the *Minas Gerais Military Police*, corporate jeeps were mobilized to destroy the shacks, which were then burned down along with the peasants' possessions. In Cachoeirinha, the evictees began to live on the other side of the *Rio Verde (Green River)*, camped out under trees, wearing nothing but their own clothes. The land where they lived before was passed on to farmers in the region, one of whom, Georgino, also acted as a lawyer and executor of the eviction order. In the municipality of Varzelândia, there is also a story of an individual called Salustiano Gomes Ferreira, better known as Saluzinho.

In an interview with Luiz Antônio Chaves, the peasant⁵⁴ said that one early morning in October 1967, at around five in the morning, he was getting up when he heard an animal noise and someone calling from outside the house. Saluzinho says he opened the door a little and looked. They were men on horseback, and the one in front asked if he was Saluzinho, to whom he replied that he was. The peasant says he only heard the noise and immediately jumped back. The shots shattered the door.

He grabbed his small rifled pistol (*garrucha*) from behind the door, used for emergencies, and fired, hitting two individuals with one shot each. As the revolver of an attacker fell near him, he took the opportunity to use it to drive the men away. The men Saluzinho shot were João Brejeiro, a gunman and farmer's employee, and Corporal Barral, a military policeman. After this, having had the opportunity to leave, Salustiano stayed in a nearby cave to defend himself against another attack, on the advice of other *posseiros*.

Less than 24 hours later, says Chaves⁵⁵, the group returned to the house, wearing military police uniforms and more armed. The police arrested the *posseiros*, claiming they were subversives. Some were beaten for not having information about Salustiano's whereabouts. Sixteen peasants were taken to the *10th Battalion of Montes Claros*. Saluzinho's wife and children were at a neighbor's house when they were found. In the presence of the children and *posseiros*, with the aim of extracting information about the missing man, individuals stripped Saluzinho's wife naked and hung her upside down on an *umbuzeiro* tree (*spondias tuberosa*), flogging her with a stick of pigeon pea (*cajanus cajan*) until she bled, while the young children were forced to eat earth mixed with beans.

⁵⁴ SALUZINHO *apud* CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

⁵⁵ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

Since they could not get any information, they burned the woman's nipples with a cigarette and shoved a stick up her anus⁵⁶. A *posseiro*, unable to bear the sight, told them where the man was. It was November 17, 1967, when the goons of landowner Oswaldo Alves Antunes, linked to the Montes Claros elites, and the police went, without a court order, to expel Saluzinho from the territory. Antunes was also a lawyer and owner of *The Montes Claros Newspaper* (*O Jornal de Montes Claros*). To achieve his interests, he used this press vehicle, spreading a discourse that communism was advancing in the region⁵⁷. Now, returning to the peasant, when he went to the cave, he carried with him the small rifled pistol, a 38 revolver, and two shotguns.⁵⁸

When they got there, the police shot at him, and he fired back. With one soldier wounded, the police put gasoline inside the cave and set it on fire, which did not have the desired effect of making the *posseiro* leave. With police reinforcements from Montes Claros, sticks of dynamite were used to blow up the cave, leaving the *posseiro* with a high level of deafness for the rest of his life. Despite the explosives, he did not leave the cave⁵⁹. Then, the *Department of Political and Social Order* (*Departamento de Ordem Política e Social*) (DOPS) sent forty men to arrest the old peasant.

This story, because of its size, reached São Paulo. A publication in the newspaper *The State of São Paulo* (*O Estado de São Paulo*) gives a different account. This brings up the historical discussion about different narratives and historical disputes. Different narratives emphasize different perspectives. Humans can create, remove, add, omit, increase, decrease, and lie about something⁶⁰. The intention here is not to postulate which narrative should be followed but to reflect on both, showing that different sides point to different questions about the same situation.

The first report in the newspaper, from November 22, 1967, has bold letters in the headline, saying that a “**Land invader is surrounded by the**

⁵⁶ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza; ATHAYDE, André Luiz Mendes. Retratos e recortes montesclarenses: histórias da cidade no período da ditadura militar. *Revista Hydra*, v. 7, n. 13, 2023.

⁵⁷ DAYRELL, Carlos Alberto; CESAR, Fabiano Cordeiro; FERNANDES, Cristina Rodrigues; SANTOS, Lilian Maria. O sertão rebelde: impactos socioambientais da ditadura civil-militar no norte de Minas Gerais. In: VI CONGRESSO EM DESENVOLVIMENTO SOCIAL, 2018.

⁵⁸ ZANGELMI, Arnaldo José; QUELER, Jefferson José. “O latifúndio é o Diabo”: apontamentos sobre a inusitada trajetória de Saluzinho. *Tempo*, v. 27, n. 3, p. 606-628, 2021.

⁵⁹ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

⁶⁰ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. *O começo do começo: cosmogonias do Antigo Oriente Próximo*. 2022. Monografia (Graduação em História) – Universidade Estadual de Montes Claros, Montes Claros, 2022.

police,” and three subheadings in capital letters, which read: “INVASION OF LAND; BULLET IN THE HEAD; SUBVERSION.”⁶¹ Saluzinho is portrayed as an invader armed with three rifles, a pistol, a revolver, and several knives, resisting the siege by fifteen soldiers from the Minas Gerais Military Police for three days. The report states that the peasant was hiding in a cave near the *Blue Mountain Chain (Serra Azul)*, two hundred kilometers from Montes Claros, after leading a land invasion in the region and wounding four police officers who tried to arrest him.

The police also claim that Saluzinho is dangerous and obeys orders from Pedro Laurentino, a professional agitator who used to be part of SUPRA. According to the police report, it all started when, on the 13th, Saluzinho and four other men, all armed, invaded Osvaldo Antunes’ farm, took control of it, and forced the foreman to leave. The farm owner notified the police, and the delegate from Montes Claros sent three men to investigate the case. When they arrived at the farm, they were met with gunfire. Then, the commander of the *10th Battalion* sent 15 soldiers. Knowing this, Saluzinho gathered fourteen more men, preparing a trap for the soldiers. There was no shooting because many men abandoned the peasant, who hid in the farmhouse with a henchman.

When the lieutenant, Petrônio, tried to break into the house on his own, he was “[...] hit on the head twice [...] [remaining] in a serious condition in the Military Hospital.”⁶² The injury to the commander of the operation would have bewildered other soldiers, making it possible for the two peasants to flee to a cave situated on the farm. As a result, the command was taken over by José dos Santos, a captain who ordered the cave to be surrounded, forcing the henchman to surrender. In addition, it is said that Saluzinho had already committed several murders in Paraná and was willing to resist, even if it cost him his life. At the time, individuals who had helped the peasant in the land invasion were arrested in Montes Claros, with the following names being listed: Pedro Neri de Novais, José Fonseca Neri, José Ângelo Sobrinho, Carlos Fonseca Neri, João Antônio de Oliveira, and Manoel Marques.

The delegate from Montes Claros, according to the report, believes that land invasions are a serious issue in that region, where the means of communication are precarious, favoring the actions of agitators. Every day, *posseiros* tear down fences built by farmers in the region and vice versa, which worsens the conflict between the two parties. The report concludes

⁶¹ SUCURSAIS BH/POA. Invasor de terras é cercado pela polícia. *O Estado de São Paulo*, p. 5, 22 nov. 1967.

⁶² SUCURSAIS BH/POA. Invasor de terras é cercado pela polícia. *O Estado de São Paulo*, p. 5, 22 nov. 1967.

by stating that according to the delegate, Saluzinho’s arrest would prevent new outbreaks of subversion. Two days after the previous publication, *The State of São Paulo*, in another edition, reported that the Montes Claros police authorities were surprised by the gunman’s physical resistance, as he had endured the gases from bombs thrown into the cave for three days.

“Interrogated last night, Saluzinho said that he did not give himself up before because he thought the goons were chasing him.”⁶³ After surrendering, he was put into a truck, which was driven around Montes Claros. Then, in the *10th Battalion*, the *posseiro* sat on a chair and told his story. He remained in a battalion cell for approximately four months and was considered a subversive⁶⁴. Afterwards, he was imprisoned in Belo Horizonte. There, a request for *habeas corpus* in his favor was denied by a judge named Laire Santos, who had been a law judge in Montes Claros and a friend of the landowner Oswaldo Antunes.⁶⁵

The police intended to show off the most dangerous criminal in the north of Minas Gerais that they had arrested⁶⁶, communicating a discourse typical of the military dictatorship in the fight against communism⁶⁷. After leaving prison, Saluzinho went into hiding, despite being cleared of all charges⁶⁸. His wife, Dulce Gonçalves Pereira, or Dúlcia Gonçalves de Araújo, depending on the documentation, died at the age of 42, months after her husband’s release, due to the after-effects of the torture she was subjected to.⁶⁹

Creating justifications to legitimize practices

In military formation, there are principles that can influence the way of being of those who experience it. Based on the violent treatment received during the military academy, a police officer, for example, can reproduce a

⁶³ SUCURSAL BH. Resistência de invasor surpreende. *O Estado de São Paulo*, p. 5, 24 Nov. 1967.

⁶⁴ ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza. “*Posseiro bom é posseiro morto*”: coronel Georgino e o conflito agrário de Cachoeirinha no norte de Minas Gerais. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociedade, Ambiente e Território) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, 2024.

⁶⁵ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

⁶⁶ COVEMG. *Comissão da Verdade em Minas Gerais*: relatório final. Belo Horizonte: COVEMG, 2017. v. 2.

⁶⁷ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

⁶⁸ MIRANDA, Bernardo. Saluzinho, o herói assustador que resistiu ao cerco militar. *O Tempo*, 18 dez. 2017. Available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/politica/saluzinho-o-heroi-assusta-dor-que-resistiu-ao-cerco-militar-1.1554577>. Access on: 25 mar. 2022.

⁶⁹ CHAVES, Luiz Antônio. Saluzinho e a luta pela terra no norte de Minas. *Revista Verde Grande: geografia e interdisciplinaridade*, v. 1, n. 3, p. 98, 2006.

similar type of behavior toward subordinates and civilians. The rationality of violence in military life involves controlling behavior, submission, hierarchy, rules, order, discipline, and command⁷⁰. In Colonel Georgino's case, besides having a military education, he also had a strict and demanding military father, who certainly played a role in his life. The military considers a certain type of violence virtuous, as shown in his autobiography.⁷¹

Police officers are generally more exposed to violence and dangerous situations⁷², points that can affect the psychological dimension⁷³, contributing to individuals acting in ways they do not feel guilty about⁷⁴. In every culture, some think that harming or killing others is legitimate and that violence against certain people is praiseworthy. Fiske and Rai⁷⁵ argue that to prevent and reduce violence, it is necessary to consider its moral roots since most of the violence is morally motivated.

For these authors, the word *moral* is used in the sense of what humans feel, think, and believe to be moral. It is their moral motivations, perceptions of obligations, and commitments. Those who practice violence consider it moral. It is therefore moral in a descriptive, not prescriptive, sense. Generally, the moral feelings of the perpetrators match the feelings and judgments of their cultural communities. In Georgino's case, moral judgment, personal judgment, and violence that he considers virtuous are clear issues when he says that he hates thieves and rapists. In his book, he indicates that his reputation among the people was as evil and truculent.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ MOTTA, Fernando Cláudio Prestes. O poder disciplinar das organizações formais. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, v. 21, n. 4, p. 33-41, 1981; RAMOS, Guerreiro. A sociologia de Max Weber: sua importância para a teoria e a prática da administração. *Revista do Serviço Público*, v. 57, n. 2, p. 267-282, 2006; TRAGTENBERG, Maurício. *Burocracia e ideologia*. São Paulo: Ática, 2006; LHUILIER, Dominique. Trabalho. *Psicologia & sociedade*, v. 25, n. 3, p. 483-492, 2013.

⁷¹ SOUZA, Georgino Jorge de. *Reminiscências de um soldado de polícia*. Montes Claros: Silveira, 1996.

⁷² JENKINS, Emily; ALLISON, Penelope; INNES, Kim; VIOLANTI, John; ANDREW, Michael. Depressive symptoms among police officers: associations with personality and psychosocial factors. *Journal of police and criminal psychology*, v. 34, n. 1, p. 66-77, 2018.

⁷³ DIAS, Cledinaldo Aparecido; SIQUEIRA, Marcos Vinicius Soares; FERREIRA, Leonardo Borges. Socio-clinical analysis of the work context and its relationship with the mental illness of military police officers in the Federal District. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, v. 21, n. 1, p. 1-13, 2023.

⁷⁴ OVEJERO BERNAL, Anastasio. *El aprendizaje cooperativo crítico: mucho más que una eficaz técnica pedagógica*. Madrid: Pirámide, 2018.

⁷⁵ FISKE, Alan Page; RAI, Tage Shakti. *Virtuous violence: hurting and killing to create, sustain, end, and honor social relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015.

⁷⁶ SOUZA, Georgino Jorge de. *Reminiscências de um soldado de polícia*. Montes Claros: Silveira, 1996.

The colonel believed that he was fighting for a worthy cause. In the concept of virtuous violence, those who practice it can end up being blind to their violence because they see it as something that is personally and morally right. In Brazil's military dictatorship, it was common for agents to perpetrate banal evil practices and violence that they considered virtuous and necessary. Part of the explanation for this is the fact that these soldiers had suffered and practiced violence during their time on the job, violence that they considered to be dignified, virtuous, and necessary for the fulfillment of their function.⁷⁷

There is a lack of responsibility in the military discourses of the period for violent modes of action. Colonel Georgino invokes vocation, duty, and patriotism as justifications for his actions. His objective was to clean the country of corruption. With his subordinates, he was willing to prevent communist bandits from turning Brazil into another Cuba⁷⁸. The way he acted, which was virtuous for him, is non-virtuous from the point of view of the *posseiros* since one of them says that he arrived violently with the police, threw everyone out, burned houses, and killed people⁷⁹. According to a peasant woman, he was the worst foreman to ever set foot in the region. He used to call the landless *dogs*, and if any of those *dogs* passed by his farm, the order was to kill them one by one.⁸⁰

The violence, considered virtuous for individuals like him, served to justify the practice of evil⁸¹. They use this bureaucratic perversity to remove personal responsibility⁸². Among the justifications for violence was anti-communism, as seen in the colonel's speech about Brazil's Cubanization. Fear of the communist threat or danger was used to justify a counter-offensive against what was regarded as part of the revolutionary project.

⁷⁷ CASTRO, Jeferson Martins de. “A violência virtuosa” e a construção do militar torturador no Brasil: um retrato sociológico. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia), Universidade de Brasília, 2022; ARENDT, Hannah. *Eichmman em Jerusalém: um relato sobre a banalidade do mal*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013.

⁷⁸ SOUZA, Georgino Jorge de *apud* ALVES, Luís Fernando de Souza; ATHAYDE, André Luiz Mendes; BICALHO, Lucas Matheus Araujo; COSTA, Daniely Santos Ramos. Dictatorship, Industry, and Colonel: Land Taking in the North of Minas Gerais, Brazil. In: I CONGRESSO INTERNACIONAL DE EDUCAÇÃO E INOVAÇÃO, 2023, Montes Claros. Anais. Montes Claros: Universidade Estadual de Montes Claros, 2023; SOUZA, G. J. *Reminiscências de um soldado de polícia*. Montes Claros: Silveira, 1996.

⁷⁹ BARBOSA, Adão Alves *apud* SANGULARD, Fernanda Nalon; CAMISASCA, Marina Mesquita. Os despejos de Cachoeirinha e a luta por terra no período da ditadura militar. *História Unisinos*, v. 24, n. 2, 2020.

⁸⁰ SILVA, Geralda Lopes da *apud* SANGULARD, Fernanda Nalon; CAMISASCA, Marina Mesquita. Os despejos de Cachoeirinha e a luta por terra no período da ditadura militar. *História Unisinos*, v. 24, n. 2, p. 330, 2020.

⁸¹ CASTRO, Jeferson Martins de. “A violência virtuosa” e a construção do militar torturador no Brasil: um retrato sociológico. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia), Universidade de Brasília, 2022.

⁸² ARENDT, Hannah. *Eichmman em Jerusalém: um relato sobre a banalidade do mal*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013.

This anti-communist sentiment, says Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta⁸³, derives from fear, insecurity, and manifestations against communism. Commonly, it is a concern of some privileged group.

In the case of Georgino and other large landowners, anti-communism was instrumentalized and manipulated to achieve goals that went beyond fighting the communists, such as obtaining land, repressing popular peasant movements, and keeping the status quo unchanged. Even if they believed in a communist danger, there was an opportunistic element to take advantage of the situation through a discourse. They presented the communist threat as a real and imminent danger to society in a way that people were led to believe that communists had a strength that made them fearsome enemies. Anti-communist motivation therefore involves a mixture of instrumentalization or manipulation and transmitted conviction. Thus, anti-communism was an argument for justifying and acting in an authoritarian way.

For the practice of violence, there was an attempt to treat *posseiros* as nobody, not humans, deprived of rights. The perpetrators of violence redefined them, like Jews in the Holocaust⁸⁴, framed in a category of non-being, to legitimize practices against them. According to Giorgio Agamben⁸⁵, this is life unworthy of being lived, the politicization of life, i.e., the decision of the limit beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant and is only sacred life, which can be eliminated with impunity. Every society sets this limit and decides which beings are its sacred humans.

Roman law introduces the concept of *homo sacer* (sacred human) to refer to an individual who can be killed but not sacrificed. Therefore, it is negatively sacred, it is a cursed life that can be murdered by anyone without any penalty from the law or the gods. Normally, this *homo sacer* is a defendant isolated from the community because he has committed something considered a crime against a member of the community. According to Zygmunt Bauman⁸⁶, society sees them as refuse, i.e., they are unrecognized and not allowed to stay in any environment. Modernization causes them, as an effect of the so-called construction of order, where parts of the population are labeled as displaced, unfit, or undesirable.

⁸³ MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá. *Em guarda contra o perigo vermelho: o anticomunismo no Brasil (1917 – 1964)*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002.

⁸⁴ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. Are we in a war? Do we have an enemy? *London Review of Books*, v. 24, n. 10, 2002.

⁸⁵ AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: o poder soberano e a vida nua*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2002.

⁸⁶ BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Vidas desperdiçadas*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2005. p. 12. Ênfase do autor.

This way of thinking and acting is also a consequence of supposed economic progress, which values certain lives while degrading and devaluing others. For these reasons, the life of a *homo sacer* has no value; it is worthy to kill someone who is categorized as such because their existence is useless and a burden on society. Killing a human considered sacred is not a crime; it is not sacrilege, but keeping them alive is. Society neither defines the *homo sacer* by a set of positive laws nor grants them human rights, so they permit everything against them.⁸⁷

Considerations

With the military coup, the government established a new model and a new mentality in Brazil. They perpetrated purposeful violence against groups of Brazilians under the discourse and pretext of advancement. These actions occurred at the federal, state, and local levels, affecting different individuals in society in different ways. Some benefited from the model, while others suffered and were harmed. The economic model that focused on development affected both the countryside and the city, reaching out with its tentacles to weaken those who stood in its way.

In the Brazilian countryside in the north of Minas Gerais, there is a political and social process of making peasant struggles invisible. The state, which promotes the so-called modernization, has violated the rights of this group through omission, collusion, and cover-up. State and private agents have jointly violated the human rights of the peasants and their supporters. There were disappearances, torture, concealment of corpses, deaths, evictions, arrests, violence, exile, threats, and destruction of peasant property, which suffered at the hands of private militias, goons, gunmen, and others.

Years later, the country has taken timid action regarding reparations and the prosecution of crimes. It is undeniable that public policies impacted the rural population of the period. Dealing with these issues must imply accountability for people who have violated other people's rights. Bringing this dark period of Brazilian history to light should generate reflections and accusations that the country's history, including the present, is based on people who were murdered, tortured, and persecuted. It is a discussion related to respect for human dignity to raise awareness today about a future path

⁸⁷ BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Vidas desperdiçadas*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2005.

that cannot give up reconciliation with the past and the strengthening of democracy without human rights violations.

Among the modes of action for which the Brazilian state was responsible during the military dictatorship and which deserve to be investigated by future research are: a. tax incentives, subsidies, concessions, and projects to privatize land, benefiting the few and excluding peasants and traditional populations; b. incentives via SUDENE; c. resources that favored privatization and land grabbing, which led to violence against rural workers; d. the notarial regime of privatization of authority, which defined whether a land was private or public and who owned it; e. public policies and programs for the expansion of agricultural frontiers which have led to violence based on the struggle for possession of and access to land.

It is possible to see that in the north of Minas Gerais, the violence considered virtuous, practiced by the military, large farmers, and goons, was received and seen by rural people as crude violence, which took the lives of loved ones and affected the being and living rooted in the territory called *home*. Returning to the phrase that appears in part of the title of this article, uttered by an interviewee whose uncle worked as a battalion chief during the military dictatorship, among those considered vagabonds that the regime caught were those *posseiros*, who were considered obstacles to dictatorial purposes and to individuals who benefited from the spirit of the times that reigned.

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