

The daily lives of rural workers post-salaried work in oil palm cultivation

O cotidiano de trabalhadores rurais no pós-trabalho assalariado na dendeicultura

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the trajectory of rural workers throughout their daily lives post-salaried work in oil palm farming. To this end, we focused on their interactions within their families and communities. The research was conducted through a case study in the rural village of Belenzinho in the municipality of Acará, in northeastern Pará, between 2021 and 2023. We focused on direct observation, recording informal conversations, and interviews using semi-structured questionnaires with 18 workers who were experiencing their post-salaried work in oil palm farming. We based our research on the concepts of daily life and rural work. The main conclusions show that the moments lived in the community and family are intensified after they have worked as wage laborers in oil palm farming. The workers assume and resume their work as family farmers and combine the knowledge acquired in oil palm farming as a way to remain in their place of origin and earn potential financial returns.

Keywords: rural work; palm oil; northeastern Pará

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Resumo

Este artigo visa analisar a trajetória de trabalhadores rurais no decorrer dos seus cotidianos no pós-trabalho assalariado na dendeicultura. Para isso, focamos nas suas interações nos âmbitos família e comunidade. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio de um estudo de caso na vila rural de Belenzinho, município do Acará, nordeste paraense, entre os anos de 2021 e 2023. Privilegiamos a observação direta, o registro de conversas informais e entrevistas por meio de questionários semiestruturados com 18 trabalhadores que vivenciavam o pós-trabalho assalariado. Nos apoiamos nos conceitos de cotidiano e trabalho rural. As principais conclusões demonstram que os momentos vividos em comunidade e em família se intensificam no pós-trabalho assalariado na dendeicultura. Os trabalhadores assumem e reassumem o seu trabalho como agricultor familiar e aliam os conhecimentos adquiridos na dendeicultura como forma de permanecer em seu local de origem e arrecadar possíveis retornos financeiros.

Palavras-chave: trabalho rural; dendê; nordeste paraense.

Introduction

Amazonia has historically been associated with the coexistence of extractivism, agriculture, and the expansion of large-scale projects, including the production of commodities such as oil palm. Castro¹ highlights that Amazonia has, for decades, been the target of national and international interests that directly contribute to the devastation of the forest for commodity production. That author points out the connections between the devastated territories, the global market, and the dominance of Brazilian movements focused on exporting raw materials, such as meat, grains, and minerals, with the aim of occupying public lands and those of local communities.

Oil palm cultivation has been part of the daily lives of hundreds of rural workers in Northeastern Pará since the 1970s. However, it has intensified since

¹ CASTRO, Edna Maria Ramos. Desmatamento na Amazônia, desregulação socioambiental e financeirização do mercado de terras e de commodities. *Novos Cadernos NAEA*, v. 25, n. 1, p. 11–36, 2022. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18542/ncn.v25i1.12189>

2004 through federal government incentives². According to Mota³, The state of Pará is Brazil's largest oil palm producer and is part of an international division of labor, in which Asia, Africa, and Latin America produce and export "palm oil," primarily to India, China, and the European Union.

Oil palm farming is highlighted by data from the General Registry of Employed and Unemployed Persons (CAGED) as one of the activities that generates the most jobs in rural Pará. However, it is one of the occupations with the lowest annual employment balances. In other words, despite its admitted nature, it also lays off many employees, leading to high worker turnover. Mota⁴ emphasizes that, in oral reports, a member of the Federation of Rural Workers of the State of Pará (FETERPA) indicated that approximately 20,000 formal jobs remain, with formal employment contracts.

Salaried rural workers in oil palm farming are predominantly from the Northeastern Pará (NEP) and rural areas of municipalities where oil palm farming is located. Therefore, they live close to their workplace. Thus, there is no migration, as observed in other countries where oil palm farming is a benchmark, such as in Asia⁵.

The high turnover observed among rural workers in oil palm farming is related to several factors, mainly temporary employment contracts, intensified after the labor reform (Law 13.467/17)⁶, and the extremely arduous work. For

² The first of such initiatives is known as PNPB (National Biodiesel Production Program), which aims to boost the production of certain oil crops such as sunflower, soybeans and oil palm, for biodiesel production. The second relevant policy for the expansion of oil palm farming is known as PPSOP (Oil Palm Sustainable Production Program) and was launched by the Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in 2010, in the municipality of Tomé-Açu/PA. The PPSOP aims to produce oil palm by means considered sustainable, including the integration of family farmers in the oil palm cultivation.

³ MOTA, Dalva Maria. Sociabilidades entrecortadas em vilas rurais sob o afluxo de migrantes para trabalhar na dendeicultura no Pará. *Raízes: Revista de Ciências Sociais e Econômicas*, v. 42, n. Especial, p. 489–506, 20 dez. 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37370/raizes.2022.v42.803>

⁴ MOTA, Dalva Maria da. Sociabilidades entrecortadas em vilas rurais sob o afluxo de migrantes para trabalhar na dendeicultura no Pará. *Raízes: Revista de Ciências Sociais e Econômicas*, v. 42, n. Especial, p. 489–506, 20 dez. 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37370/raizes.2022.v42.803>

⁵ BUDIDARSONO, Suseno; SUSANTI, Ari; ZOOMERS, Annelies. Oil Palm Plantations in Indonesia: The Implications for Migration, Settlement/Resettlement and Local Economic Development. In: FANG, Zen (ed.). *Biofuels - Economy, Environment and Sustainability*. In Tech, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5772/50478>. PEBRIAN, Darius El; YAHYA, Azmi; SIANG, Tan Chun. Workers' workload and productivity in oil palm cultivation in Malaysia. *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health*, v. 20, n. 4, p. 235–254, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13031/jash.20.10413>. PUDEK, Janina. Superexploitation in bio-based industries: the case of oil palm and labour migration in Malaysia. In: BACKHOUSE, Maria; LEHMANN, Rosa; LORENZEN, Kristina; LÜHMANN, Malte; PUDEK, Janina; RODRÍGUEZ, Fabricio; TITTOR, Anne. *Bioeconomy and Global Inequalities: Socio-Ecological Perspectives on Biomass Sourcing and Production*. Springer International Publishing, 2021, p. 195–215.

⁶ BRASIL. Lei Nº 13.467, de 13 de julho de 2017. Altera a Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (CLT), aprovada

this reason, it is relevant to understand the work trajectory, focusing on those workers' routine post-salaried work.

Martins highlights that daily life is a specific field of sociology, which is the sociology of everyday life, considering that "Not everything in society is visible and not everything that is visible accounts for what society is"⁷. Thus, everyday life cannot be confused with a minimalist sociology that reduces social processes to the components of social life. Conversely, sociology proposes to investigate the visible and apparent aspects of everyday social actions and relations by measuring the social structures and historical processes that give them meaning⁸.

In this study, post-salaried work in oil palm farming is the period in which the employment relationship is broken, whether by the worker's choice or not, and he or she begins to develop other activities. For Novaes⁹ and Froes¹⁰, who studied rural workers in sugarcane, coffee, and eucalyptus farming, this period of rural unemployment is a period of rest, essential for replenishing energy for another long work period. However, it is also a time dedicated to carrying out agricultural activities on their own farms. In contrast, the post-work period analyzed by Reis¹¹ is related to illnesses acquired throughout the work period, which lead to the end of employment relationships. This period is seen by these workers as a disposal of their work and a time to seek their rights. All these post-work periods are related to the high turnover of rural workers.

Taking that into account, the objective of this article is to analyze the trajectories of rural workers throughout their daily lives after salaried labor in oil palm cultivation. To this end, we focus on their interactions within the family and community.

pelo Decreto-Lei nº 5.452, de 1º de maio de 1943, e as Leis nº 6.019, de 3 de janeiro de 1974, 8.036, de 11 de maio de 1990, e 8.212, de 24 de julho de 1991, a fim de adequar a legislação às novas relações de trabalho. Brasília, DF: Diário Oficial da União, 2017.

⁷ MARTINS, José de Souza. *Uma sociologia da vida cotidiana: ensaios na perspectiva de Florestan Fernandes, de Wright Mills e de Henri Lefebvre*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2020, p. 224.

⁸ MARTINS, José de Souza. *Uma sociologia da vida cotidiana: ensaios na perspectiva de Florestan Fernandes, de Wright Mills e de Henri Lefebvre*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2020, p. 224.

⁹ NOVAES, José Roberto Pereira. Trabalho nos canaviais: os jovens entre a enxada e o facão. *RURIS*, v. 3, n. 1, p. 105–127, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53000/rr.v3i1.685>

¹⁰ FROES, Livia Tavares Mendes. Tecendo caminhos, ocupações e percepções – a diversidade das experiências de trabalhadores rurais temporários do norte de minas gerais. *Raízes: Revista de Ciências Sociais e Econômicas*, n. 1, p. 15, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37370/raizes.2017.v37.49>

¹¹ REIS, Tainá. *Ceifando a cana... Tecendo a vida. Um estudo sobre o pós/trabalho nos canaviais*. 2018. (Doctorate Thesis). Universidade Federal de São Carlos, São Carlos, 2018.

The article is structured in two sections in addition to the introduction and concluding remarks. Next, we present the methodology used to conduct the research and analyze the data. Then, we analyze and discuss the findings, focusing on the daily lives of workers in the rural village of Belenzinho.

Methodology

The research was conducted in the rural village of Belenzinho, in the municipality of Acará, in the Tomé-Açu microregion, northeastern Pará. This microregion accounts for approximately 80% of palm oil production in Pará¹². The municipality of Acará is located approximately 200 km from the capital of Pará and has a predominantly rural population. Belenzinho, on the other hand, is located in the region known as the lower Acará, more precisely, in the Araxiteua Igarapé region¹³.

We decided to conduct a case study in the rural village of Belenzinho, which was developed between 2021 and 2023. According to Becker¹⁴, a case study conducts a detailed analysis of an individual case, that is, based on the intense exploration of a single case, aiming to comprehensively understand the entire studied group.

Over the course of 40 days in the village, we visited residents in general and rural workers who were experiencing post-salaried work in oil palm cultivation. We prioritized direct observation, recording informal conversations, and interviews with 18 workers experiencing post-salaried work. We sought to understand their daily lives during this specific period of their work trajectories.

The interview data were analyzed horizontally and vertically, interpreting each interviewee's statements in their entirety and then connecting them with the entirety of the interviews based on each theme¹⁵. Quantitative data were systematized using Microsoft Office Excel software to create graphs. The results were interpreted in light of the literature on daily life and post-salaried work experiences.

¹² IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. *Produção Agrícola Municipal 2023*. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2024

¹³ A stream in the forest.

¹⁴ BECKER, Howard. Observação social e estudos de caso sociais. In: BECKER, Howard. *Métodos de Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais*. São Paulo, Hucitec, 1994, p. 117-135.

¹⁵ MICHELAT, Guy. Sobre a utilização de entrevista não diretiva em sociologia. In: THIOLENT, Michel. *Crítica metodológica, investigação social e enquete operária*. São Paulo: Polis, 1987. p. 191-212.

Everyday Life Construction in the Rural Village of Belenzinho

Everyday life study is an issue that is in the forefront of the sociological debate¹⁶. In this sense, although everyday life imposes a standard of behavior on individuals, it is not the same for everyone, nor is it a reflection of our ideas. It is, rather, a particular world with uncertainties, joys, doubts, passions, dramas, and hopes, which is why it will never be one-dimensional¹⁷.

Certeau¹⁸, one of the leading authors on the topic of everyday life, highlights everyday practices as modes of action, that is, accomplishments made by the individual in the process of social interaction. He highlights meanings in everyday practices that might otherwise go unnoticed. Such practices are also called “ways of doing.” In his study, he privileges the common man or the ordinary man, or what he also calls the extras, who are simultaneously “nobody” and “everyone,” to show how ordinary subjects are also valuable¹⁹.

It is in the routine, or everyday practices, that numerous social practices are made concrete and constitute the essence of each individual who, even singular, is made up of pluralities²⁰. These are the practices we analyze as a specific moment in the trajectory of the participant rural workers.

Trajectories in this work comprise the temporal sequence of positions successively occupied by an individual in different fields of social space. The trajectory is not limited to subjective decisions related to the will of individuals or the family group, but also encompasses external factors, that is, the structures within which practices are woven²¹.

According to Martins²², the study of everyday life is “a sociological way of seeing, describing and interpreting from simple street occurrences to facts and social phenomena that are relevant and decisive”.

¹⁶ OUTHWAITE, William.; BOTTOMORE, Tom. *Dicionário do pensamento social do século XX*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1996.

¹⁷ OUTHWAITE, William.; BOTTOMORE, Tom. *Dicionário do pensamento social do século XX*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1996.

¹⁸ CERTEAU, Michel de. *A invenção do cotidiano I: as artes do fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998.

¹⁹ CERTEAU, Michel de. *A invenção do cotidiano I: as artes do fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998.

²⁰ CERTEAU, Michel de. *A invenção do cotidiano I: as artes do fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998.

²¹ SILVA, Maria Aparecida de Moraes; MELO, Beatriz Medeiros de. Partir e ficar. Dois mundos unidos pelas trajetórias de migrantes. *Revista Interdisciplinar de Mobilidade Humana*, Brasília, p. 129–151, dez. 2009.

²² MARTINS, José de Souza. *Uma sociologia da vida cotidiana: ensaios na perspectiva de Florestan Fernandes, de Wright Mills e de Henri Lefebvre*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2020, p. 11.

That author emphasizes that the focus and temporality of sociological observation have shifted to everyday life, to microsocial processes, and to what many consider irrelevant. His approach is to observe these overlooked social processes and seek the link between deep, dated, enduring, hidden, ordinary, and banal social structures and their expressions in everyday life.

The sociology of everyday life should not be confused with a simplistic or reductive sociology of the perceptible social processes of social life. On the contrary, the study of everyday life aims to investigate the visible and apparent aspects of everyday social actions and relations as they are mediated by social structures and the historical processes that make them meaningful²³.

Santos Júnior²⁴ studied the nuances of everyday life through resistance, which he called “small resistances”, because he understands it not only as something intentional or a phenomenon manifested through visible conflicts, but also as aspects of everyday life that constitute resistance. According to that author, observing everyday life is “the effort to find the man behind the system, who tried to live separately, rather than only survive”²⁵.

In rural contexts, Santos Júnior²⁶ and Menezes and Cover²⁷ report in their studies with sugarcane workers that it is possible to understand that not all forms of resistance alter the existing order, but there is an everyday resistance, which is supposedly spontaneous, and can be observed in actions exactly as they occur. The everyday life of rural workers is not only related to acceptance of that kind of precarious work, but also to forms of silent resistances that are not perceptible. The study of everyday life enables the observation of other possibilities and unveils what is not said or seen.

²³ MARTINS, José de Souza. *Uma sociologia da vida cotidiana: ensaios na perspectiva de Florestan Fernandes, de Wright Mills e de Henri Lefebvre*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2020.

²⁴ SANTOS JÚNIOR, Jaime. A dimensão esquecida: a questão da agência no trabalho do corte da cana de açúcar. *Caderno CRH*, v. 31, n. 83, p. 389–406, ago. 2018. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-49792018000200014>

²⁵ SANTOS JÚNIOR, Jaime. A dimensão esquecida: a questão da agência no trabalho do corte da cana de açúcar. *Caderno CRH*, v. 31, n. 83, p. 389–406, ago. 2018, p. 7. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-49792018000200014>

²⁶ SANTOS JÚNIOR, Jaime. Fissuras do cotidiano: nos meandros das estruturas de dominação. In: PALERMO, Hernán M.; CAPOGROSSI, Maria Lorena (orgs.). *Tratado latinoamericano de Antropología del Trabajo*. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO; CEIL; CONICET; Córdoba: Centro de Investigaciones sobre Sociedad y Cultura-CIECS, 2020. p. 705–732.

²⁷ MENEZES, Marilda Aparecida; COVER, Maciel. Trabalhadores migrantes em usinas de cana de açúcar em São Paulo, Brasil. In: PALERMO, Hernán M.; CAPOGROSSI, Maria Lorena (orgs.). *Tratado latinoamericano de Antropología del Trabajo*. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO; CEIL; CONICET; Córdoba: Centro de Investigaciones sobre Sociedad y Cultura-CIECS, 2020. p. 773–770.

Farmer, salaried worker, farmer

Coming from small-scale farming families, the rural workers interviewed were involved in agricultural activities from an early age, and farm work was an integral part of their daily family chores. Thus, their start in farm work was premature, usually beginning around the age of eight, and considered by all to be their introduction to rural work. All 18 interviewees own farmland and come from family farms. Thus, their first jobs were with their parents in agriculture.

Until they started their own families, agricultural work was seen as “helping parents.” It was also a time when knowledge was passed down from father to son. Work, in addition to providing material goods, allowed for the establishment of hierarchies and the formation of adulthood²⁸. Of the 18 interviewees, 89% (16) had always remained in the rural village of Belenzinho, developing agricultural activities since the time they used to work with their parents. Their main activity has always been related to the cultivation of annual crops, especially those known as “roça” (subsistence farming), namely cassava, rice, corn, and beans. The production of cassava flour has always been the main source of work and income for families in the region, and for some, the only one.

Until the arrival of oil palm cultivation near the village in mid-2010, those workers relied on agriculture as their main source of income. The Belenzinho residents interviewed had high expectations for the arrival of oil palm cultivation, especially with the possibility of having, for the first time, a formal employment contract, building a brick house, obtaining material goods, earning a steady salary, and obtaining structural improvements for the village. Some of these expectations were met, especially the purchase of material goods and the construction of brick houses.

Salaried work emerged as a financial alternative in the face of fluctuating agricultural prices, especially cassava, the region’s main crop, and diseases affecting this crop, such as cassava rot.

The age range of rural workers employed in oil palm cultivation was 18 to 45, and 89% (16) of the workers interviewed were between 18 and 37 years old. The data reveals the composition of a young workforce, with the

²⁸ GARCIA JUNIOR, Afrânio Raul. *O Sul: Caminho do Roçado - Estratégias de Reprodução Camponesa e Transformação Social*. 1983. Tese de Doutorado. Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 1983.

principle of utilizing the physical potential of these men, an essential aspect for ensuring the long hours of commuting from home to the actual work site, the weight of carrying oil palm bunches, clearing and pruning trees, among other activities involving oil palm and rural workers, which are classified by workers as extremely exhausting.

For the rural workers of Belenzinho, salaried work in oil palm farming lasted an average of four years, with 71% (12) workers remaining with the company for three to seven years, and 34% (6) workers remaining in the oil palm industry for three months to three years. While employed, 61% (11) rural workers remained in agriculture, at least to ensure “there was food on the family table,” as was commonly heard.

After their employment with oil palm companies ended, 94% (17) of those interviewed returned to agriculture. However, they chose to primarily grow fruit trees, such as açaí, cupuaçu, cocoa, and others to a lesser extent, without, however, ceasing to cultivate cassava for sale and family consumption.

Therefore, what we observe is a scenario in which farmers resort to pluriactivity to ensure the social reproduction of their families in the field, combining annual agricultural activities, perennial crops, and salaried work, among others. In this work, pluriactivity is the articulation of distinct agricultural and non-agricultural occupations, depending on the relationships between family units and the context in which they are inserted²⁹. Researchers reported a case study in Mojuí dos Campos (PA) in which associating the resource available to pluriactivity is related to greater or lesser availability of land, where families with less availability resort to non-agricultural occupations³⁰.

In this study, we observed that those with available land maintained their farms, even while employed. Upon returning, they resumed their activities on family farms and, based on the experiences they gained, introduced new forms of farming. For some, becoming employed represented opportunities to improve their living conditions while maintaining their status as family farmers³¹.

²⁹ SCHNEIDER, Sérgio. A pluriatividade como estratégia de reprodução social da agricultura familiar no sul do Brasil. *Revista Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 16, 2001.

³⁰ BORGES, Anderson Coelho; FOLHES, Ricardo Theophilo. Agricultura familiar camponesa: formas de existência em Mojuí dos Campos – PA. *Campo-Território: revista de geografia agrária*, v. 17, n. 44, 2022.

³¹ SEVERO, Patrícia Schneider; SACCO DOS ANJOS, Flávio. Clandestinos, invisibles e esenciales: zafreros rurales em el Brasil meridional. *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, v. 84, n. 3, 2022.

Everyday life in community

The daily lives of rural workers involve moments of interaction with other residents of the village of Belenzinho, mainly during leisure activities, such as football, religious events, and conversations in the late afternoon in front of their houses.

Melo and Alves Junior³² highlight leisure as cultural experiences, in its broadest sense, encompassing different human interests, diverse languages, and expressions, and can be enjoyed in time free from professional, family, domestic, and physical obligations. This is not to say that leisure time is devoid of obligations. In leisure, individuals can more easily choose what they want to do, at any time. People pursue leisure activities based on the pleasure they provide, although this is not always the case, and pleasure should not be understood as exclusive to leisure activities.

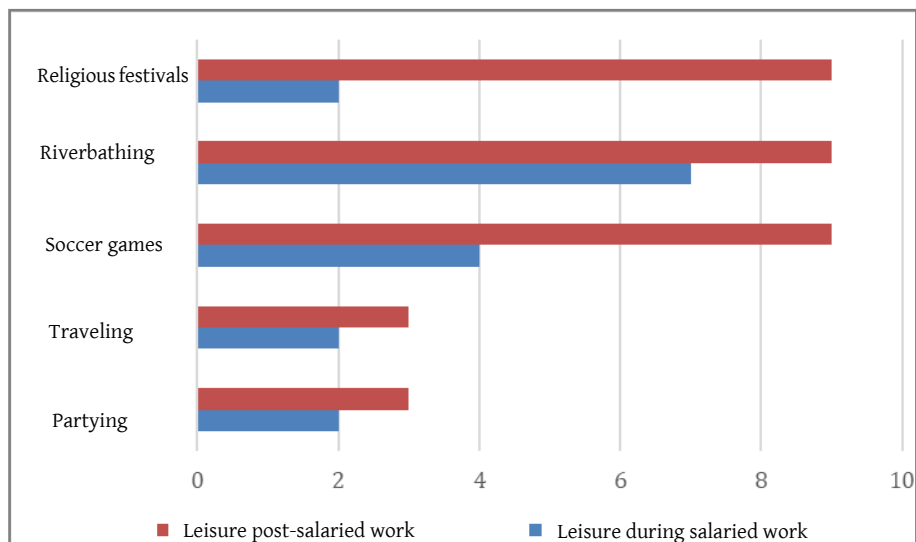
Froes³³ studied migrant rural workers in southern Minas Gerais and reported that community leisure activities generally intensify with the return of salaried workers from coffee and eucalyptus plantations. When they return, celebrations and saints' festivals intensify, with reunions among friends and potential flirting and dating.

In the rural village of Belenzinho, community leisure activities intensify when rural workers leave their jobs. Participation in religious events, river bathing, parties, and soccer games are more frequent during the post-salaried work period in oil palm cultivation (figure 1).

³² MELO, Victor Andrade; ALVES JÚNIOR, Edmundo D. *Introdução ao lazer*. Barueri: Manole, 2003.

³³ FROES, Livia Tavares Mendes. Tecendo caminhos, ocupações e percepções – a diversidade das experiências de trabalhadores rurais temporários do norte de minas gerais. *Raízes: Revista de Ciências Sociais e Econômicas*, n. 1, p. 15, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37370/raizes.2017.v37.49>

Figure 1: Daily leisure during and post-salaried work in oil palm farming



Source: Elaborated by the authors using field data - period: 2021-2023

The workload³⁴ during salaried work in palm oil farming was reported as one of the difficulties in taking part more often in the community daily activities. Some reports describe such difficulty, as follows:

About that, 100% because I had no time, there was a 4x4 there, in which we worked from Sunday to Sunday, we worked at Christmas, worked during the *Círio* (religious festival honoring Our Lady of Nazaré), this means that after she left... I left too, also because of that, you see? We had no time for leisure, we sometimes wanted to go to her (wife) mother's house, but couldn't, because it is in Belém, you know? Then, my shift would always be on weekends, and during the week, we couldn't go because the children had to go to school (D.C.C, 33 years old) When it was normal schedule, up to Friday, it was much better. After it changed, when we had to stay until 10 on Saturday, we knew there was no way, you see? On Saturday, we would have to work in the afternoon and then on Sunday, then after it changed,

³⁴ Two types of work hours were reported by the interviewees. The first was the 4x4 system, despite having four days off work, many workers criticized it, because those days were not necessarily on weekends, thus they were prevented from taking part in religious events, or soccer tournaments, which were held in the Belenzinho village or other nearby rural locations. They were always tired and had to relax their body and mind for another work day. The second work-hour scheme was from Monday to up to Saturday midday.

we work one month on Saturday and Sunday. A month not. Do you understand? There are months with events, there, but in other months there aren't. Then we would never know the day it would be (J.M.S, 26 years old).

When asked about changes in family or community life, the answers were always similar.

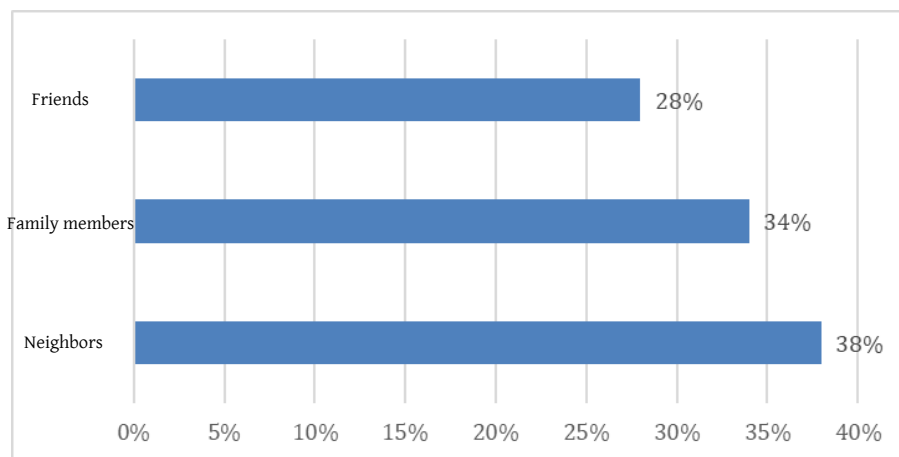
Ah... it did change. While I was working in oil palm farming, I had no time for my family, to do my activities, and other things. Because I had to be there every day, and sometimes I'd get home tired, and we wouldn't go anywhere. We lose our freedom after we make a commitment. Sometimes there's a religious service outside, and we couldn't go. (R.P.S, 41 years old).

I didn't have much time, I'd sometimes arrive tired, I had to make my commitments because of the schedule, that thing, that rush, I had to go, but I only went out of obligation, even though my physical body was no longer there, I was already exhausted, I was already at my limit. Today, a lot has changed for me since I left the palm oil industry. For me, it was like those people when they're locked up in jail, you know? I felt calm when I got out. Because I had to clock in every day at the company, and today I don't; today I'm the boss (C.R, 44 years old).

No, today I have more time. It was all the time, Sunday was the only day off. It was one break on Sunday. But not now, we work for ourselves, if we want to stop for one or two days, we do it (F.C.M.L, 36 years old)

In different interaction spaces, relationships are intensified among those who live the post-salaried work in oil palm farming and have bonds of kinship, neighborhood, or affinity (figure 2).

Figure 2: Leisure companions



Source: elaborated by the authors using field data - period: 2021-2023

We observed that 66% prefer friends and neighbors, while 34% turn to family members for leisure time. The emphasis on friends and neighbors is also related to the type of activity; in this case, the main forms of leisure were soccer and religious festivals.

a) Soccer games

Soccer is a leisure activity that takes up the late afternoons of Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Matches are part of the daily lives of residents, not only those who play soccer, but also family, friends, and neighbors who join them and enjoy watching them. The soccer field is located in the center of the village and, thus, becomes responsible for bringing together and providing leisure moments for the residents of Belenzinho. Of the 18 interviewees, 50% (9) participate frequently in soccer games and are part of the team. The others cited advanced age, lack of skill in the sport, or illnesses and health problems acquired while working in oil palm farming as reasons for not playing. The youngest players are introduced to the soccer team when they are 12 or 13, starting as trial players. If they demonstrate skill, they become part of the main team. According to Gastaldo³⁵, the symbolic universe of football can be considered an important element of contemporary

³⁵ GASTALDO, Édison. Futebol e sociabilidade: apontamentos sobre as relações jocosas futebolísticas. *Esporte e Sociedade*, v. 3, p. 1-16, 2006.

Brazilian culture. Despite the controversial intertwining of the organizations that regulate this sport (federations, clubs, sports courts, etc.) with the spheres of politics, the media, and the economy, there is ample scope for the appropriation of these social facts in everyday life. For Mota, teams, championships, and celebrations are organized into groups linked by bonds of kinship, neighborhood, and a history of interaction.

According to Barros³⁶, the practice of soccer playing in the Brazilian Amazonia must be understood within its sociocultural complexity, in which everyone, regardless of social class or age, is involved in some way. Thus, soccer cannot be analyzed solely as a sporting activity with pre-established rules and eleven players per team, but rather as a representative practice within the Amazonian context.

Sports activities in Amazonian communities are special moments beyond sport, which are shared social manifestations among neighboring communities. In these gatherings, participants discuss everyday problems, which include economic, political, social, or religious matters. It is a time of celebration and partying, with sport as a way to express their deepest feelings³⁷.

The men's soccer team in the village of Belenzinho is an organization that aims to entertain not only the players but also their families. This is because, when the team plays, there is leisure and interaction, with conversations between the players' wives and the others, who are there simply to watch. There is food and drink for sale and interaction with residents of other villages who are invited to play on the opposing team, or vice versa.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, we play here in the afternoons. The women also play when we're not playing on the field. The women play almost every day. The main leisure activity here is soccer. Sometimes we gather in front of our houses, buy a beer, and play with our friends. Sometimes we go to the stream, drink beer by the stream, and bring some music to the stream (R.P.S, 39 years old)

³⁶ BARROS, Rooney Augusto Vasconcelos. *O Futebol como espaço de manifestação sociocultural vivenciada em comunidades rurais no Baixo Amazonas*. Dissertation (Society and Culture in the Amazon Master's Program) – Federal University of Amazonas, Manaus, 2014.

³⁷ BARROS, Rooney Augusto Vasconcelos. *O Futebol como espaço de manifestação sociocultural vivenciada em comunidades rurais no Baixo Amazonas*. Dissertation (Society and Culture in the Amazon Master's Program) – Federal University of Amazonas, Manaus, 2014.

It is more soccer, isn't it? Before this time, it was partying, soccer, now it is more soccer, they go to church, they have religious service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays. It is about playing, telling stories, going to church. I don't, since I don't go to church, it's more sport really, as a leisure activity, you see? Before, it was partying, now it's sports (D.C.S, 33 years old).

On soccer days, it was difficult to have interviews because when it was close to 5 p.m., the workers became excited, wanting the interview to end quickly so they could participate in the games, whether playing or simply watching. While we interviewed them, others would pass by their houses, calling them to the soccer field.

b) Religious or mutual aid events

Religious events overlap with mutual aid events, such as the joint activities carried out by churches, especially evangelical ones, in the construction of houses for residents of the village or neighboring villages and for the maintenance of the church when necessary, with painting, renovations, and festival organization, among others.

This type of collective effort is highlighted by Schmitz, Mota and Sousa³⁸, which identify it as “common benefit effort” consists in mutual help in the construction of a school, for example, or the maintenance of a road or a festival organization. It is incentivized by organizations created based on reciprocity.

In the village of Belenzinho, there are three churches: two Evangelical and one Catholic. The Catholic church is open on Sundays, but it does not always have a priest present, and services may be conducted by ministers from the village itself. Evangelical churches, on the other hand, have a pastor residing in the village, which means they often hold some kind of event daily. The pastors of both Evangelical churches even worked as salaried workers in oil palm farming.

Of the 18 interviewees, 50% (9) stated that they participate in religious events held at churches—Evangelical and Catholic—and, whenever possible, they participate in community work. Although religious events generally take place in the evening, the workers emphasize that, when they were salaried

³⁸ SCHMITZ, Heriberto; MOTA, Dalva Maria da; SOUSA, Gláucia. M. Reciprocidade e ação coletiva entre agricultores familiares no Pará. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, v. 12, n. 1, p. 201-220, jan.-abr. 3 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000100012>

workers in oil palm farming, they had neither the pleasure nor the inclination to participate in church events, especially Evangelical ones. However, today, they participate and accompany their wives and children much more assiduously in services, festivals, and other events hosted by churches, both in the rural village of Belenzinho and in events held at churches in neighboring rural villages.

The reports below reveal periods dedicated to church

In the morning, I always leave for work, whether in the oil palm (leased) or in the fields, from about 7 a.m. to sometimes 11 a.m. or 3 p.m., depending on the work. In the afternoon, sometimes, we don't do anything at all; in the evening, we spend time at home, at church, and back and forth. When there's no service on Tuesdays, Thursdays, or Saturdays, I go to bed early, right? (J.M.S, 26 years old)

We gather here at church to talk about the word of God. When we have a sick friend who needs help, we get together to help, right? And we have other conversations. What I usually do is finish my work and visit my friends, go to church, that's what I usually do in the village, go to the city to solve some problem. (R.P.S, 39 years old)

Everyday life in the nuclear family

The nuclear family of rural workers consists of a couple and their children, living together in a single residence. The family's daily life is mainly characterized by interactions related to agricultural work and rest or leisure between the children and the wife. The choice of this relationship is justified because it is one of the main venues for post-salaried work interactions in oil palm farming.

Daily life in the nuclear family can be interpreted and understood in two periods: one in the morning, when the rural worker who lives the after-salaried work period and the family dedicate themselves to agricultural work, and the other in the afternoon and evening, when they carry out leisure activities, rest, watch TV programs and go to church.

Of the rural workers interviewed, 94% (17) were living with a family and were married – in a church, civil union, or stable union. Only one of the interviewees was single and childless. The families of rural workers consisted of an average of four members: the father (interviewee), his wife, and usually

two children. Among the married rural workers, 83% (15) had children living in the same residence, and the families were not large since 22% (4) had only one child, 56% (10) had two to three children, 17% (3) had no children living in the residence, and 7% (1) was single.

The children of the rural workers interviewed were of school age, so 50% (7), according to their parents, only studied, while 33% (5) helped their parents with farm work and studied, and 17% (2) studied and helped their mothers with household chores. The high percentage of children who only studied may also be related to the idea that farm work can be considered arduous for children and adolescents, but also to the illegality of child labor and the fact that the workers were questioned about it by a stranger (at the time of the interview).

Participants were often “suspicious” about sharing their family’s daily routine, especially when it came to admitting that their younger children participated in agricultural tasks, such as cleaning cassava fields, making flour, collecting açai bunches, and other child-related activities. However, we noticed that the children helped with farm and household chores, especially during the first visit, when the COVID-19 pandemic was underway and onsite classes had not yet returned in the village.

a) Agriculture work: family morning routine

Agricultural work is based on annual crops, and more recently, rural workers have been adapting their farming to long-cycle crops, especially fruit crops. This work is preferably done in the morning. The 18 interviewees emphasize that morning work is spent working the land, as they point out that in the afternoon “the sun is more punishing,” meaning they find agricultural work more uncomfortable. Exceptionally, when necessary, they also work in the afternoon. The afternoon was more common for those who leased oil palm plots from Brasil Bio Fuels (BBF)³⁹.

Work begins early, at five in the morning (sometimes earlier). Mothers start making breakfast, and those who are going to work in the fields are already getting up. Soon after breakfast, fathers, mothers, and sometimes

³⁹ A highlight of the project’s recent work is the oil palm plantation areas developed by a company on some land near Belenzinho. The area belonged to Biopalma, a company owned by the mining company Vale, which later sold it to Brasil BioFuels (BBF). However, during the transition period (2019-2020), according to the interviewees, the area was abandoned. Therefore, ten interviewees took over some blocks of this oil palm plantation. According to the interviewees, two families are responsible for a block, assuming the cultural practices required for oil palm monoculture and selling their bunches to the company BBF. The size of the blocks varies, according to the interviewees, with each block containing 1,500 to 2,000 oil palm trees.

children leave for a period of agricultural work. Starting at 10 a.m., rural workers begin to return from the “center,” as they often call the farmland⁴⁰.

In the morning, I always go to work either in oil palm farming or on our land, around 6am up to 11am or 3pm, depending on the work. In the afternoon, we sometimes do nothing, and at night, we stay at home, go to church, from home to church (J.M.S, 26 years old).

The wife of one of the rural workers who is in the post-salaried work in oil palm cultivation reported her work dynamics, demonstrating that women have a long working day, because in addition to domestic work, they also work effectively in the fields.

I prefer to work in the morning, the sun is not so hot, I do what I have to do, weed my cassava field, clean my açai trees, and when I get home I make the kids' lunch. In the afternoon I don't want to work in the fields, it's always raining, so I prefer to watch my shows, do some laundry, do the kids' homework, and so on.... (N. S. C, 28 years old).

Women are responsible for domestic chores. However, most of the time, they work with their husbands in the fields, dividing their time between housework and farmwork. Only 29% (5) reported working exclusively at home, while 71% (12) said they work both at home and on the farm, dividing their time equally between each activity. These women usually go to the fields with their husbands and children in the morning and return at the end of this first shift.

For women, the afternoon is dedicated to children (remote schoolwork), rest, leisure, and household chores. In one case, the wife took over the entire farm work because her husband was ill, a condition he claimed he acquired during salaried work in the oil palm industry, meaning he could no longer work in agriculture. In this case, the woman took over the main tasks on the farm and in the açai harvest.

However, most of the time, women took over positions considered as “help” in the husband’s “heavy” work in the field.

⁴⁰ Such dynamics also influenced my research times, I realized that I would not find rural workers in post-salaried work in oil palm farming on weekdays in the morning in their homes, exactly because they were working on their own land. Therefore, interviews were almost always carried out in the afternoon, the best time to find them at home.

To the field, I sometimes go, when he (husband) is planting, I sometimes sow, I cut cassava leaves, and while he makes the flour, I cut the cassava out of the plant, it's nothing so good, but we can survive, because we don't have anything else, he has no job, he is not in a formal employment relationship, and we depend on that to survive (J.M.S, 26 years old).

Paulilo⁴¹ emphasizes that, regardless of region or culture, there is a common distinction between “light” and “heavy” labor. The former is assigned to women and children, the latter to men. According to the same author, work is classified according to who performs it: “light” activities are those that can be performed by female and child labor. It is important to emphasize that this classification is associated with different remunerations: higher for “heavy” and lower for “light” work, even if both require the same number of hours or if the physical effort required by one is counterbalanced by the skill, patience, and speed required by the other. What determines the daily rate is, in short, the gender of the those being paid.

Children also participate in agricultural activities, such as cleaning cassava fields, and older children help by making flour or harvesting açai. When they arrive from the “center,” while lunch is still being served, the children play, mostly playing ball in the backyards. Despite waking up early to go to work in the fields, the children arrive full of energy and quickly take off their heavy farm clothes and put on simpler ones to play.

According to Santos Júnior⁴², children's labor is increasingly required to supplement family income. The age comparison does not appear to follow a chronological order that establishes a specific age as an indicator of work aptitude. Instead, what is observed is a demarcation that associates physical strength with knowledge of the activities required on the farm. It is, therefore, a symbolic representation of the moment considered appropriate for beginning work activities. Being “younger” or “older,” in this way of scaling time, means already being considered fit for work⁴³.

⁴¹ PAULILO, Maria Ignez S. O peso do trabalho leve. *Revista Ciência Hoje*, v. 28, 1987.

⁴² SANTOS JÚNIOR, Jaime. A dimensão esquecida: a questão da agência no trabalho do corte da cana de açúcar. *Caderno CRH*, v. 31, n. 83, p. 389–406, ago. 2018, p. 7. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-49792018000200014>

⁴³ SANTOS JÚNIOR, Jaime. A dimensão esquecida: a questão da agência no trabalho do corte da cana de açúcar. *Caderno CRH*, v. 31, n. 83, p. 389–406, ago. 2018, p. 7. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0103-49792018000200014>

During the research period, it was açaí harvest time and, therefore, it was part of the daily diet of rural workers' families, consumed at lunch, dinner, and sometimes even as a family snack. Açaí was the main food source during this period, accompanied by dried fish, mortadella, fried chicken, and other dishes. However, açaí was always the main food source and the most requested by children, and they often did not even wait for the fruit to be processed before eating it.

Families gather to pulp the açaí fruit, that is, process it to remove the pulp. In that phase, parents and older children are responsible for climbing the açaí trees⁴⁴ and collect the bunches. These açaí trees are usually planted in family backyards and are small, making harvesting easier. Women gather to blend the fruit. While one woman blanches and washes the fruit, the other blends the açaí in a special machine. Children are always nearby and eat the fruit before it is blended with flour. After this process, the açaí pulp is shared among close family members, and a good amount is stored in refrigerators and freezers.

b) Rest, stream bathing, remote lessons: The family routine in the afternoon and at night

The daily routine for rural workers living in post-salaried work in oil palm production and their relationship with their nuclear family intensifies in the afternoon and evening, as this is when family members talk more, rest and dedicate themselves to family leisure.

After lunch, men and women watch various television programs, sleep, and care for the small animals that roam freely in their backyards. Women, in addition to resting, are also responsible for managing their children's remote classes, teaching, reading, and making them do homework⁴⁵.

The afternoon is also a time for families to devote themselves to leisure and household chores. While women wash clothes, children play soccer, volleyball, or swim in the Araxiteua stream, which surrounds the village in several places. Although most households have running water, and some families even have washing machines or sinks, the women prefer to wash their clothes and even dishes in the stream. They say it is habit and the machine does not wash as well as their hands. At this time, men help their women, carrying basins or wheelbarrows with dirty clothes and/or dishes.

⁴⁴ There is certain preference for children climbing the açaí trees, since they are lighter they are less likely to harm the açaí tree.

⁴⁵ At that period, it was still the COVID-19 pandemic, for this reason, children were having remote lessons.

Going to the stream is a moment of interaction, specially for women. Girls are usually learning with their mothers, neighbors, or aunts the female daily practices like washing clothes, while boys prefer to play with their fathers.

Evenings are when workers and their families chat in front of their houses. The colorful plastic chairs gradually move out and take up space on the patio in front of the houses, and conversations arise on a variety of topics. These moments also provide opportunities for small street vendors, who approach the residents to sell snacks, household items, and school supplies. Houses are the preferred meeting points for men and women, regardless of the day of the week.

The early evening is also the time for the various games invented by the village children. While their parents chat, the children play blind man's buff, volleyball on their mother's clothesline, soccer on the children's field, bicycles, seesaws on a forgotten piece of wood, and more.

When it gets dark, residents try to call from the only spot in the village where there is a cell phone signal, under a mango tree. They call their spouses who are far away at work, or relatives in other parts of the state or Brazil. But it is also the time of day when many young people try to get an internet signal, under the same mango tree, to update their social media accounts, especially WhatsApp⁴⁶.

Conclusions

Based on the interviews, observations, and data analysis from the readings, we understand that rural workers' professional trajectories have always been linked to rural labor. Initially, they helped their parents with agricultural activities, especially in the fields. Later, when they married, they took over their own fields. Salaried work in oil palm farming emerged as an opportunity to obtain the benefits of a formal employment contract, acquire material goods, and other benefits. However, this type of work in oil palm farming proved extremely demanding and volatile, leading these workers to return to or continue working on family farms. This period of their trajectory is referred to as post-salaried work in oil palm cultivation.

⁴⁶ In the second field trip, this habit had changed due to the wireless service arrival in some households. Those who did not have internet service, would buy some time from the neighbor or just shared the password.

In the post-salaried work period, we identified that the relationship between those who experience post-salaried work in oil palm cultivation and the community intensifies, as they begin to organize their daily work according to family and agricultural needs, prioritizing more time for rest and leisure.

In the village of Belenzinho, rural workers who experience post-salaried work in oil palm farming had more leisure time compared to their time in salaried work, especially those spent with neighbors and friends, such as soccer games and religious events. In the family, daily life is marked by family organization to carry out agricultural activities in the morning and, occasionally, in the afternoon. However, this latter period was much more dedicated to family rest.

We also found that in the post-salaried work period, there was a prioritization of fruit tree cultivation, such as açaí, cocoa, and cupuaçu. The reasons that led rural workers to choose these crops are associated with the greater demand and appreciation of these crops in recent years, the less arduous work compared to cassava cultivation, and the availability of suitable land for cultivation.

The workers assume and resume their work as family farmers, combining the knowledge acquired in oil palm farming as a way to remain in their homeland and reap potential financial benefits.

Finally, we emphasize that the workers interviewed were those who were not expropriated from their lands but were multi-active. Therefore, they were able to return to their work as family farmers after being released from their salaried work in oil palm farming.

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