

The Room Next Door: terror, intimacy, and State processes amidst an Agrarian conflict

DOI
<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/1678-9857.ra.2022.218724ing>



Roberto Efrem Filho

Universidade Federal da Paraíba | Santa Rita, PB, Brasil
robertoefremfilho@yahoo.com.br |
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9438-0080>

ABSTRACT

In this work, I analyze an agrarian conflict in which an episode of sexual violence took place. Thus, I pursue State processes and intimate relationships in which terror is articulated along the course of the conflict. In close dialogue with Michael Taussig and Veena Das's arguments, I discuss: a) the terror's incommensurability produced in the midst of police and judicial practices; and b) the silence that allows life to go on after the traumatic event. To do so, I make use of notes and memories of what I experienced during the two years of monitoring the case, an in-depth interview with a squatters' community leader, and court records about both the agrarian conflict and the episode of sexual violence.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian conflict;
terror; State
processes;
intimacy; silence.

O quarto ao lado: terror, intimidade e processos de Estado em meio a um conflito agrário

RESUMO Neste artigo, volto-me a um conflito agrário em que ocorreu um episódio de violência sexual. Persigo os processos de Estado e as relações de intimidade em que se articula o terror no transcurso desse conflito. Em estreito diálogo com os argumentos de Michael Taussig e Veena Das, discuto acerca: a) da incomensurabilidade do terror produzida em meio a práticas policiais e judiciais; e b) do silêncio que permite a vida após o evento traumático. Para tanto, valho-me das anotações e memórias do que vivi durante os dois anos de acompanhamento do caso, de uma entrevista em profundidade junto a uma liderança da comunidade de posseiros e da análise dos autos judiciais em torno do conflito agrário e do episódio de violência sexual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Conflito agrário, terror;
processos de Estado;
intimidade; silêncio.

In this work, I pursue State processes and intimate relationships in which terror is articulated amidst an Agrarian conflict also marked by an episode of sexual violence¹. Such conflict involved *Fazenda Alfenim*², a large rural estate, of almost 900 hectares, in Paraíba's semi-arid region, close to Campina Grande. In this ranch, back in the 1990s, a few dozens of squatters' families were submitted to regimes of "foro" and "cambão". In order to keep living, growing, and farming animals in small lots, these rural workers paid an annual fee called "foro" to their landlord. Besides that, they would work a few days a week for free, not receiving any kind of wages – work referred to as "cambão" – in this landlord's cattle farming and crops³. By the end of the 1990s, however, the relationship established with *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT) and, thus, leftist groups and social movements, catalyzed mobilizations aiming at destining *Fazenda Alfenim* lands to Agrarian Reform's national policies. In 1997, agents from the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) conducted an inspection that concluded unproductivity in the lands, allowing their expropriation, exponentially increasing pre-existing conflicts between *Arlindo Falcão* (the landowner) and a significant number of squatters' families.

Amongst the numerous accounts by these rural workers⁴, the years between 1997 and 2011, when INCRA finally acquired definitive possession of the lands, were marked by feelings and experiences of violence and humiliation, criminalization, as well as a great deal of fear. I first had access to these stories and how they understood such experiences when, in 2010, I started to coordinate, as a Professor at Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB), a group of students linked to NEP, Popular Extension Nucleus Flor de Mandacaru, and the CRDH, Research Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. These students and I began to follow court hearings and lawsuits regarding the conflict, which frequently resulted in workers being taken to police stations and courthouses, charged for taking down trees, torn fences or allowing cattle to escape. On the other hand, these students and I also became aware of public hearings and even police investigations and lawsuits regarding cases of torture and threats, physical violence, one missing person, and sexual violence, in which squatters were the victims. Quite often, these complaints identified landowners and their employees – known as "capangas" (henchmen), "jagunços" (henchmen), or "vaqueiros" (cowboys) – as perpetrators, as well as civilian police officer *Saulo Aguiar*. This agent worked as *Fazenda Alfenim*'s "overseer" for years, illegally serving as a private security guard for landowners, being identified as a prominent member of a "death squad" in Paraíba at the Final Report for the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Northeastern Extermination Groups, conducted by the Brazilian National Congress in 2005.

As soon as I started to hear *Fazenda Alfenim*'s workers and go through the documents regarding the conflicts, I also began to investigate the fear felt by the community, which they sometimes were able to speak of and which was part of their

¹ | A previous and shorter version of this text was first presented in October 2021, in a round-table called "Terror and Intimacy: ethnographic perspectives and conceptual challenges" at the 45th Annual Meeting of Anpocs. The round table included works by Adriana Vianna and Ângela Facundo, mediated by Gabriel Feltran. I would like to thank Adriana, Ângela and Gabriel for their careful considerations and for this partnership that has taught me so much. I owe special thanks to Adriana and Ângela for their tenacity in the central issue that mobilized the reflections developed here; in other words: the possible articulations between terror and intimacy. I would also like to thank Heloísa Buarque de Almeida because, while attending the event, she supported us in the development of a dossier in which this text is published at USP's *Revista de Antropologia*.

² | In this text, I fictionalized and kept some proper names in italics, aiming to preserve my interlocutors' identities, as well as the other people involved in the conflict. On the other hand, I have left in quotation marks emic categories and expressions under erasure – such as "extermination groups" – and direct quotations to authors and excerpts from speeches, documents and the in-depth interview I conducted with Marcos, a leader of the squatter community.

³ | While reporting *Fazenda Alfenim*'s conflict, rural workers commonly referred to foro and cambão as unfair practices that motivated the disputes for the lands. However, decades before, in the 1950s, foro and cambão were already present in struggles for rights and mobilized by Ligas Camponesas na Paraíba (Paraíba's Peasant Leagues), which were exterminated by the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil (Lemos, 1996; Targino et al, 2011).

⁴ | Note 4 on p. 3.

daily lives. A fear that incited mistrust in public authorities, such as the police and judges, impacted the relationship with squatters who were not engaged in the fight for lands, or who kept supporting *Velho Arlindo*, while also infiltrated, in the life of the community and within families, an overall feeling that I soon recognized analytically as a scenario of terror. Such terror is constitutive of this Agrarian conflict and is managed both in State processes⁵ and in intimate familial and interpersonal relations. This paper deals specifically with said terror. In order to do so, I go back to field notes and memories of what I experienced during two years following the case, a thorough interview conducted in 2015⁶ with *Marcos*, a community leader, and the analysis of legal documents around the agrarian conflict, as well as the episode of sexual violence. Part of this research material was collected during my doctorate, developed between 2012 and 2017 at Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), under the supervision of Regina Facchini, receiving a first analytical discussion in my dissertation (Efreim Filho, 2017a). Another part of the data stems from the activities developed with NEP and CRDH.

This article is divided into three narrative excerpts and two discussion notes. The first excerpt is related to the public records of a squatters' family home invasion, when the aforementioned sexual violence occurred, as well as what the workers report in relation to the episode's previous context. The second excerpt alludes to a meeting between NEP and Human Rights attorney Valdênia Paulino, who had assisted the family with the necessary measures to file complaints and manage the lawsuits on the episodes of violence. The third excerpt describes some dimensions of the legal proceedings for the home invasion, focusing mainly on court records about the case. On the other hand, the first discussion notes deal, through careful dialogue with Michael Taussig's (1991) arguments in "Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man", with the incommensurability of terror and its implications in certain State processes. At last, the second discussion notes investigate – this time primarily in conversation with Veena Das' (2007) analyses in "Life and Words" – the intimate management of such terror and the power relations that are embedded in it.

Before proceeding, however, I need to underscore the existence of two theoretical-methodological challenges throughout the research behind this text: a) its relationship with the normativity inherent in the State processes it describes, and b) the analytical treatment of violence.

As explained before, my initial contact with "*Fazenda Alfenim's case*" took place due to activities conducted with NEP and CRDH. These activities involved "university popular legal aid" concerning struggles for the land and were, consequently, committed to the legal language and juridical dimensions of State processes. Such commitments derive from the fact that the social movements' political agenda, claims, and forms of organization take place in strict correlation to such State processes (Cardoso, 1987; Aguião, 2018; Zanolí, 2015). Nevertheless, one can say that legal aid

4 | In the narratives around the conflict, "rural workers", "squatters" and "members of the community" refer to the same subjects, but are used in different contexts. The first one is more frequently used in the social movement's political forums while the other two come up more frequently in legal documents, records, and by state agents in instances in which a "subject of rights" needs to be defined. On another occasion (Efreim Filho, 2017a), I observed that these oscillations respond to gender performances that are deeply implicated in notions such as domesticity, home, housing, possession and ownership.

5 | The expression "State processes", widely used in the field of State's Anthropology and, therefore, in the literature I mobilize in this discussion, aims to distance the comprehension of the State as an "entity", capable of exercising actions alongside a "society" that is located outside of it. Thus, the expression alludes to the State's different modes of production, present in practices, conflicts, subjects and their ordinary actions, including the effort to create its margins, borders, logics and ideations. For discussions on this, see Mitchell, 2009; Vianna, 2014a and Aguião, 2018.

6 | This in-depth interview with Marcos took place on the afternoon of August, 12th, 2015, in his home's living room. At the time he signed a free and informed consent form. Ana Lia Almeida, another coordinator of NEP accompanied me in solidarity. At the time, I was recovering from an injury in my left arm and it was extremely difficult to drive for extended hours. I would like to thank Ana Lia hereby and in my whole life.

practices end up strengthening such correlation, once it assumes specific skills and resources in the legal realm, the ability to navigate in restricted bureaucratic apparatuses, dealing with internal codes and qualified access to State agents and entities. Because of that, even if we are critical to the Justice System, its mechanisms and idiosyncrasies, such actions end up ratifying what Pierre Bourdieu (2007) called “the force of law”, in which structural power to classify, normalize and operationalize take place through that which “must-be”. So much so that analyses developed in these activities require, as noted by Gabriel Feltran (2010), that the normative be methodologically understood as another representation or discourse to be investigated, and not as a locus where analytical categories are formulated. The theoretical-methodological challenge consists, thus, in the ethnography of normativity in the context of its production and disputes, which on their turn the ethnographer himself is also deeply engaged with.

The challenge is intensified when violence is at stake. As an essential category for the formation of the State, violence is narratively mobilized in struggles for rights, working, for instance, to expose injustices and the gravity of certain conflicts, as it happened in the cases hereby analyzed. Such claims on experienced violence do not necessarily imply recognition. As noted by Igor Rolemberg and Paula Lacerda (2021, pp. 91-92), what interlocutors classify as violence not always coincides with administrative-legal categories related to it. Besides, complaints around the experience of violence often inaugurate an array of disputes concerning its statute, the interpretation of the facts, and moral suitability of the subjects linked to it, especially victim and perpetrator (Vianna, 2014a; Lacerda, 2012; Farias, 2014; Ayoub, 2014; Efrem Filho, 2017a). Therefore, although there is an expectation for the complaint of violence to have an effect on governmental and public practices, the unravelling of said disputes matters substantially for the recognition of violence and, then, the legitimacy of its victims and their agenda. Depending on what ensues, it is possible for the mobilization of the narrative of violence, even in extreme cases of wide repercussion, not to reach the desired results (Rolemberg e Lacerda, 2021, p. 101).

While approaching experienced and denounced forms of violence, research work including the one that has originated this paper take part in such disputes. To some extent, it ratifies the gravity of the conflict and its stature as an issue deserving public attention and awareness. It endows the reality of violence and its inadmissibility. That being said, they share with social movement and State agents dedicated to safeguarding Human Rights, the risks typically experienced by those working to expose violence, trying to showcase it within struggles for rights. Amongst these risks there is what Maria Filomena Gregori (1993) called “victimism”, referring to the characterization of the victim as always passive and subjected, excessively incapable of exercising their will and desires. A “victimist” approach both negates the victim a status as subject and loses sight of their flesh and blood, their conditions of

possibilities, contradictions, ambiguities – everything that may distance them from the ideal “victim”, in deep connection to moral, gender, and sexuality codes (Corrêa, 1983; Gregori, 1993; Sarti, 2011; Efrem Filho, 2017b). Thus, the theoretical-methodological challenge at stake here lies on ensuring the vocalization of the narrative of violence as well as the recognition of the victim, taking analytically into account their options and decision-making processes amidst power relations that constrain, but also push them to action.

This challenge is part of a broader overview of the dilemmas that are peculiar to writing about violence. In an interview recently given to Carolina Parreiras (2020), Michael Taussig talks about the inherent perils of such form of writing, which even though proposes itself as against violence, may end up stimulating it in those who write and read: “a certain degree of stimulus like this I believe to be necessary to think about violence in a combative fashion, but it is a force that will probably turn out to be self-destructive” (Taussig; Parreiras, 2020, p. 7). According to Taussig, this force keeps the potential to supersede criticism as it instigates the production of the word. Narratives of violence incite more narratives of violence. Within them, says Taussig, “sentences become what they describe”; in other words, violence becomes an animated object confronting the subject who is writing about it. Violence mixes up the words with what they mean. In a way, writing about violence is engendering it. And yet, it is still necessary to write about violence, even in contexts in which the profusion of narratives of violence is contrasted with the silence of its victims, as it happened in the sexual violence episode in the “case of *Fazenda Alfenim*”.

I am convinced, however, that ethnography can offer valuable ways of dealing with such theoretical-methodological challenge when it comes to violence. As Adriana Vianna points out, “one development of densely constituted ethnographical work is the possibility to undo and redefine the most usual forms of understanding events of large political repercussions” (2020, p. 8). Once it is common for such repercussions to derive from the narratives of violence concerning the event, I believe ethnographical subtlety is also capable of undoing and redefining the grasp of the experienced violence that is claimed in the struggles for rights and the daily management of violence, either in words or silences, or combinations between both, as I intend to demonstrate in the following pages. Moreover, close analytical attention to these excerpts prevents us from getting lost in the grand narratives of violence, in the logic of State to which they respond, and in the gender relations that, as suggested by Mónica Fernanda Figurelli (2021), structure these narratives through an alleged male legitimacy of access to public discourse.

“RAPE ‘ER”: THE FIRST NARRATIVE EXCERPT

[Sunday night, December 9, 2007]. *Márcia* and *José Antônio* were sleeping when a group of armed men invaded the lot where their home is located. It was almost midnight and Sunday was reaching its end by the time their door was broken down. Out of the approximately 10 men who arrived at the place in a pick-up truck, six walked in, and two were wearing masks. They got the couple of rural workers and their three children present there: *Júlio*, a fifteen-year-old teenager, *Priscila*, a ten-year-old girl, and *Patrícia*, a four-year-old kid. The men kept yelling “this is a robbery” while looking for money and valuable objects and tearing down pieces of furniture and electronic appliances. Tied up, *Tonho* – as *José Antônio* is known – and *Priscila* were kept in the small living room of their two-room little house. He was beaten up several times. Also tied up, *Dona Marcinha* was taken, together with *Patrícia*, to the bedroom next door. In the middle of the screams and crying, an unknown voice is heard: “rape ‘er”, talking about *Dona Marcinha*. The woman said she was on her period, to which one of the men responded “I’d have to see that then”. They tore up her clothes and underwear. The minute they saw the blood, they gave up on the idea, but inserted a rough and cylindrical object inside her, causing great pain and, subsequently, poured down an unknown liquid in the same place. *Patrícia* watched the whole scene while *Júlio* was beaten and moved around the house with a gun to his head. At the same time, the men kept telling *Tonho* they were going to rape his daughter *Patrícia*. The men took off in the same vehicle they arrived, also taking a motorcycle that belonged *José Antônio*. Apart from the motorcycle, they also took a CD player, a DVD player, and approximately seven hundred *reais*.

I heard and read about the account of *Tonho* and *Dona Marcinha*’s home invasion several times. With small variations in certain details, it is present in many complaints filed by social movements and Human Rights organizations, official reports, newspaper articles, lawsuits, motions, and public proceedings. It is also present in the discourses and silences of the family, as well as other workers at *Fazenda Alfenim* – *Velho Arlindo*’s former lands where the squatters’ family still resides. According to most of these complaints, the home invasion took place 15 days after another episode of violence had happened in the community: *Jaime*’s house demolition. *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho*’s oldest son, *Jaime*, had decided to get married and was building himself a home in *Fazenda Alfenim*’s lands, next to his parents’, uncles’, and aunts’ houses. To do so, he agreed with other squatters on a collective effort to build the place on November 24 and 25, 2007 (Saturday and Sunday, respectively).

Nevertheless, the squatters were aware that the construction of new houses violated the legal agreement set in May 2001, between squatters and landowners. Responsible for the mitigation of the conflict for a few years, this agreement strongly restricted the extent to which workers could work and produce, which not only kept them from building new houses, but also from increasing their livestock and from using the water reservoir for any purposes other than their immediate survival. On the other hand, the agreement should have also demanded that *Velho Arlindo*, then, landowner, replaced civilian police officer *Saulo Aguiar* – explicitly cited in the documents – in his role as overseer of the ranch, which until that moment had not occurred. So, *Arlindo* would be personally held accountable for any administrative measure or action. Early in the afternoon of November 25, 2007, eight armed men, among them *Saulo*, the police officer, *Claudio*, one of *Arlindo*'s grandchildren, and *Joca*, the ranch's administrator, raided the rural workers building *Jaime*'s house, took down the walls that were already up to one's shoulders, destroyed 15 bags of concrete that were left and broke down all the bricks they had. Once they no longer had anything else to break, they got back on their pick-up truck and took off. According to what *Marcos*, *Tonho*'s brother, would tell me eight years later, over our interview “boy, that was a hell of a day. Especially for *Jaime*, who had invested all the money he had saved up during the whole year...”. During the interview, *Marcos* also mentioned that two weeks after the episode, in the evening before the sexual assault and home invasion, *Dona Marcinha* had received an anonymous call. “15 days after [the house's demolition], *Márcia* comes over and says: ‘man, I'm so anguished. I don't know what's gonna happen. I got a call telling me to get a black dress. I should consider myself a widow’”. *Dona Marcinha* did not become a widow. But “*Márcia* and *José Antônio* were sleeping when a group of armed men invaded the lot where their home is located”.

TONHO'S AND PATRÍCIA'S SILENCES: THE SECOND NARRATIVE EXCERPT

[Friday afternoon. May 28, 2010]. At one of the rooms at the Center of Legal Sciences at UFPB, three undergraduate students at the Law School and I had a meeting with Valdênia Paulino. Attorney, Human Rights advocate with a long trajectory in the outskirts of São Paulo's east side, Valdênia had been living for less than a year in João Pessoa, where she had migrated due to threats against her life posed mainly by police officers⁷. In Paraíba, she started to collaborate with Cedhor (Center for Human Rights Defense Dom Oscar Romero) and soon became a reference in legal aid involving violations of Human Rights in the state, including Agrarian conflicts. At the time, I had recently accepted my position as professor at UFPB and was just starting to work with NEP and CRDH. Amongst our duties, there were two cases of violence in the countryside: an occupation of landless workers, which took place in

7 | Valdênia Paulino is a relevant interlocutor and character in Gabriel Feltran's doctoral research (2011), which discusses her political work in the outskirts of São Paulo as well as the retaliations she suffered because of it.

2009, including body injuries and torture inflicted both by police officers without their badge and uniform, as well as *jagunços* (henchmen). The other one at *Fazenda Alfenim*, in which *Tonho* and *Dona Marcinha*'s home invasion stood out. In May, 2010 I could not have imagined, but the conflicts around *Fazenda Alfenim*'s lands would end up becoming a substantial part of my doctoral research. That conversation with Valdênia, suggested by members of MST (Landless Workers' Movement) and CPT, would be my first contact with the "case". Over our conversation, Valdênia was mostly cautious about dealing with the violence suffered by *Tonho*, *Dona Marcinha*, and their children. The records I have kept of that initial meeting highlight the subtlety of those tragic event's memories, surrounded by feelings of humiliation, shame, fear, and silence. According to Valdênia's words over that meeting – something we would confirm during years working with that squatters' community –, not a word was said about sexual violence against *Dona Marcinha*⁸. At least not over the meetings and activities in which we engaged. Such silence was greatly contrasted with an intense profusion of public filings and complaints regarding what had happened on the night of December 9, 2007, present in several documents, even in the court records of the estate's expropriation. Such silence would match, however, with the many months, perhaps more than a year, when *Tonho* did not speak to his wife, *Dona Marcinha*. The couple and their children all kept living under the roof of that same small house in *Fazenda Alfenim*'s lands, but he would not speak to her. According to Valdênia's account, (and even *Dona Marcinha* eventually admitted it to NEP students at one point), *Tonho* did not accept what had happened, questioned what had really happened while he was being tortured next door, in front of his daughter and son, when they all heard that indelible command "rape 'er". Notwithstanding, the silence on the sexual violence also coincided with *Patrícia*, their four-year-old girl's muteness. After the home invasion, *Tonho* and *Marcinha*'s youngest daughter simply stopped talking. She was completely silent for many months.

WHAT TONHO HAD TO REPORT: THE THIRD NARRATIVE EXCERPT

In the bureaucratic turmoil of the lawsuit regarding *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho*'s home, the sexual violence against *Dona Marcinha* has been questioned. It oscillates throughout the legal records. However, it has gravely vanished somehow from a document in which, from the very beginning, it should not have disappeared: the medical examiner's official report. In the records, there is only a report on trauma, with the ME mentioning "purplish bruises on the arms and back". In the lawsuit, one cannot find the rape kit usually used in cases of sexual violence. There is no gynecologist report included in the records at all. Nevertheless, before the judge, during an instruction hearing in which *Dona Marcinha* was classified as declarant⁹, in March 10,

8 | In December 2007, at the time of the home invasion, the Brazilian Penal Code still differentiated between rape crime, in art. 213 and violent indecent assault, in art. 214, which defines: to constrain someone, by violence or serious threat, to perform or allow to be performed with them a libidinous act other than carnal intercourse". The kind of sexual violence suffered by *Dona Marcinha* was, thus, at the time, understood as a violent indecent assault. Such legal differentiation became extinct under Law 12.015 from 2009, which included, as a crime of rape, any other differentiated form of libidinous act other than carnal intercourse.

9 | *Dona Marcinha*, *Tonho*, *Júlio* and *Priscila* – one of the couple's daughters – could not be legally classified as "witnesses", but "declarants" given their position as victims and due to their being, therefore, directly involved in the case.

2009, she was directly questioned about the inexistence of information concerning the perpetrated sexual violence. She then explained that, at the time, she was in her “menstrual cycle” and, thus, the rape kit could not be conducted despite the ME having “looked” and stated that “whoever did it was a pro”. After such explanations, nothing else was asked from *Dona Marcinha* on the matter. In contrast, all the men who served as declarants and prosecution witnesses were repeatedly questioned about the sexual violence scene. *Tonho*, for instance, had to inform not having seen anyone introducing an object in his wife because he was tied up in the room next door while *Dona Marcinha* was kept in her bedroom, but he did hear when one of the men said: “rape ‘er”. Asked whether he had seen “the rough object penetrated inside wife”, he replied “no”. Repeatedly asked whether his wife had talked to the ME about the sexual violence, he said “no, because he was not with her during the medical examination”. He did report, however, that the ME himself recommended no sexual intercourse for 15 days. The absence of a rape kit report on the sexual violence validates different legal interpretations on the “facts” and different materializations of the facts throughout the legal process. In February 20, 2008, a judge ordered the remand of *Saulo Aguiar*, *Joca*, *Cláudio Francisco* and *Zé Cabeça*, the four men who had been recognized by *Tonho* and *Dona Marcinha*. In the ruling, the judge concluded three separate criminal charges: multiple aggravated robbery, violent indecent assault, and illegal possession of a weapon. In May 5, 2008, three defendants filed a *Habeas Corpus* with the Paraíba Court of Justice against the remand. While analyzing the same documents, the magistrate judge saw, in the “facts”, only the presence of the crime of a minor bodily injury. Aside from not understanding the occurrence of robbery, the judge suggested that, in this case, the crime should be considered a mere “criminal transaction”, given that it was an infraction of lesser offensive potential¹⁰. Then, in May 7, 2008, the prosecutor pressed charges against the four accused only for crimes committed against property, removing both the sexual violence and bodily harm from the lawsuit altogether, despite recognizing, in the documents, that *Dona Marcinha* had her clothes ripped apart.

THE INCOMMENSURABILITY OF TERROR: FIRST DISCUSSION NOTES

Terror is located in dense zones of incomprehension and incommensurability. It defies, thus, the assumption that we are all capable of understanding, measuring, predict or translate it. Especially because the horrors and doubts incited by terror call into question the distinctive boundaries between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’. Michael Taussig (1991) argues that every society exists through fictions that are understood as real. According to his analytical perspective, the separation between fact and fiction is constantly under scrutiny. However, for Taussig, the “culture of terror” (which

¹⁰ | According to Law 9.099/1995, which covers Special Civil and Criminal Courts, “offenses of lesser offensive potential” are misdemeanors and crimes with a maximum sentence of no more than two years. On the other hand, according to the same law, “criminal transaction” consists of an agreement between Public Ministry officials and the accused of committing said “offense of lesser offensive potential”. With such transaction, the accused is legally offered a restrictive sentence or fine, but no jail time. Furthermore, the sanction resulting from the transaction does not appear on the accused’s criminal record.

he observed in the organization of labor during the Putumayo's rubber boom, in Colombia) is capable of creating "an uncertain reality out of fiction, giving shape and voice to the formless form of the reality in which an unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a phantasmic social force" (Taussig, 1991, p. 121). So, for Taussig, issues that would be primarily Philosophical or Epistemological, such as those regarding representation, the distinction between fact and illusion, certainty and doubt all go beyond the fields of Philosophy, Ontology, and Epistemology towards something bigger and much deeper to those who have to live with them: these issues become forms of domination and exercising power.

Anonymous calls with death threats, masked and armed men breaking into a family's home or taking down one's construction site, numerous visits to the police station and courtrooms due to mortgages, taken down trees, broken fences, police officers, henchmen, and hitmen, extermination groups: everything converges into terror and, in a way, creates the scary, phantasmatic, fantastic thread that surrounds the stories told by *Fazenda Alfenim's* squatters about the Agrarian conflict. During our interview in his living room, *Marcos* narrated these stories, some of which I had already read in documents or heard from workers' accounts over meetings and activities we conducted. These stories encompass older quarrels that, in the end of the 1970s, led *Marcos* and *Tonho's* father to be prohibited from growing anything in the ranch's lands, leading him to run away to São Paulo, out of fear of imprisonment. These stories deal with *Arlindo's* reaction when, over the 1980s, he heard that *Marcos* and other squatters had participated in *Pastoral Rural's* meetings. Certain that workers were organizing themselves, *Velho Arlindo* gathered six to eight armed henchmen and went over to *Marcos* and *Tonho's* mother's house. Under threat of being beaten up and killed, *Marcos* spent almost one year away from *Fazenda Alfenim*, living under barracks of an MST settlement in Paraíba.

These stories also deal with the news on the murder of a worker who had gotten into a conflict with *Arlindo* in another one of his properties. These stories reach the late afternoon on March 2, 2001, when *Tonho*, getting back from the lands he cultivated outside *Fazenda Alfenim* (during a time *Velho Arlindo* prohibited squatters from growing anything in response to his land's expropriation lawsuit) was approached by a group of henchmen who, pointing a gun to his head, prevented him from getting back home and expelled him from the ranch. According to *Marcos*, *Tonho* had only been able to get back to the house where he lived with *Dona Marcinha* in the following evening. Finally, as a last example, these stories include an episode of physical assault and torture against some rural workers and *Fabrcio Gusmão*, a professor at Universidade Federal da Paraíba. It was March 13, 2001, the workers and *Fabrcio* were leaving a Catholic mass, which had been organized in protest of threats suffered by *Tonho* a few days before, when they were surrounded and detained by civilian police officer *Saulo Aguiar* and some other henchmen. *Fabrcio* and the other

workers were kept hostage, beaten up and threatened to be taken to the police station, charged with squatting¹¹.

Brought to the community's daily life, these stories' scary thread engenders fears, doubts, suspicions and, thus, produce the aforementioned dense zones of incommensurability and incomprehensibility. After all, to what extent would *Velho Arlindo*, his family, and *Saulo Aguiar* keep managing violence? What would they be capable of? The day *Tonho* is surrounded and threatened might consist in the anticipation of a much worse event, such as the one lived by Professor *Fabricio*, but above all, it represents the certainty of awaiting for something worse; the anguish of its very possibility. Terror inhabits fear, suspicion and doubt around what is to come – and not only what has happened already –, taking over people's day-to-day lives. It is not limited to the horror of violent acts. It exceeds and escapes one's comprehension, once it marks the thought of violence and its expectation in the present moment. It fills daily lives and their relationships. In these contexts, as suggested by Taussig (1991), torture and terror are a "form of life", a "means of production". But this form of life (which contains "forms of death" within, as Veena Das (2020, p.201) would argue) only reproduces itself because the zones of incomprehension and incommensurability managed by terror are intertwined with State's practices, agents, and sectors. It is nourished by them. And, thus, it ends up creating barriers for complaints around episodes of violence within the State's formal entities or mechanisms, such as lawsuits.

As observed by Veena Das (2007), illegibility is the State's key dimension. It is a way of ruling. The difficulty and impossibility of understanding the reasoning behind certain State practices compose, therefore, this way of governing. In such a way that, whenever it is confronted, "the bureaucratic rationality of the state can always evoke the very facts of its illegibility to the poor as the major form of its defense" (Das, 2007, p. 178). Amidst an agrarian conflict such as *Fazenda Alfenim's*, dense zones of incomprehensibility comprise, for instance, the legal reasons why a once classified unproductive land, according to INCRA, can be declared productive afterwards by a forensic analysis¹². If squatters knew the only relevant production in the ranch's lands was the one in their own lots, how could they understand that such "productivity" is what prevents the lands' expropriation from happening and works in favor of landowner interests? Such zones of incomprehensibility that are innate to state practices' illegibility also allow the existence of henchmen, hitmen, and other asailants to move around with relative comfort in the conflict's intricacies.

Henchmen, goons, guards, overseers, private security, and hitmen are common characters in stories about agrarian conflicts (Barreira, 1999; Figurelli, 2011; Ayoub, 2015). Naming them implies, as noted by Dibe Ayoub (2021), triggering moral ideas and criteria for approaching or distancing oneself from these agents. In the narratives about *Fazenda Alfenim's* conflict, "*jagunços*" (henchmen) and "*capangas*"

11 | The crime of squatting is set out in item II of the first paragraph of article 161 in the Brazilian Penal Code. According to the text of the section, anyone who "invades another person's land or building with violence or a serious threat, or with the help of more than two people, for the purpose of squatting, incurs a sentence of one to six months and a fine".

12 | After INCRA's attorneys had filed the expropriation action for the purposes of agrarian reform, *Arlindo Falcão's* lawyers filed a motion declaring the land's productivity, aiming at characterizing said "productivity" and thus preventing the expropriation. According to Article 185 of the Federal Constitution, productive property cannot be expropriated for the purposes of land reform.

(goons) were usually members of the community, relatives of squatters who remained loyal to *Velho Arlindo*. However, “*pistoleiros*” (hitmen) could either be these same men (now armed), but were typically unknown men, outsiders to the ranch’s daily life, or police officers hired to interfere in the conflict, such as *Saulo Aguiar*. These men offered illegal services of private security and, thus, squatters and members of CPT have filed complaints against them multiple times, characterizing them as “private militia” or “extermination groups”. However, neither these men, *Velho Arlindo*, nor his family members were ever legally challenged about these complaints. A strong evidence of such naturalization is present in the May, 2001 agreement clause, concerning the violence against professor *Fabrcio Gusmão*, including *Saulo Aguiar*’s dismissal from his role as *Fazenda Alfenim*’s “overseer”. Even though the responsible judge was fully aware of what it meant for *Saulo Aguiar* to be an “overseer”, resulting in the need for his dismissal, there was no request to further investigate this Civilian Police officer and his work duties. The Federal Public Ministry representative did not ask for further investigation either.

In fact, in the lawsuit records regarding *Fazenda Alfenim*’s conflict, the character of police officer *Saulo Aguiar* maneuvers, with special dexterity, terror’s dense zones of incomprehensibility and incommensurability. The phenomenon can be seen, for example, in the pages of the lawsuit on the house destruction in November 25, 2007. *Saulo* was one of the accused by the rural workers in that Sunday afternoon, a few days before *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho*’s home invasion took place. His name was explicitly listed in the police report investigating the case. In the course of the investigation, nevertheless, *Saulo Aguiar* would have argued, against the word of several squatters who confirmed he was there at *Fazenda Alfenim*, that on that date he was out of town at a rodeo event. The charges, pressed by the public prosecutor only in March, 2010, over two years after the house’s destruction, simply ignored the existence of *Saulo* in the police investigation. The prosecutor did not even justify why he had not included the Civilian Police officer amongst the defendants.

Something similar took place when remand against four defendants was ordered regarding December 9, 2007 crimes. At the time, *Saulo Aguiar* had an arrest warrant decreed by the judge alongside the other accused men. In the arrest warrant, dated February 20, 2008, the judge ruled, without question, the need for the police officer’s arrest. He stated that *Saulo Aguiar* was a Civilian Police officer, a “person who, given his position working for the State, must keep order and people’s safety”, but who “according to the records” was the leader of the criminal act. A little over a month after this ruling, however, on March 24, 2008, the same judge issued a new order, this time granting *Saulo*’s lawyer’s motion to revoke remand. Justifying his decision, the judge stated that, as Civilian Police officer, or a civil servant, he was “a primary defendant, with a good record, ties to the community and a permanent address and, therefore, has the subjective right to remain free during the investi-

gation of the case". According to the legal narrative, thus, *Saulo* goes from "leader of the criminal act" to a person with "a good record" – transformation that distances himself from the list of other lawsuits in which *Saulo* had been involved or responded to in the past. Not to mention the several public complaints regarding his ties to "extermination groups" and "private militia".

Legal processes concerning *Fazenda Alfenim's* case weave the fabric of terror. They expand its dense zones of incomprehensibility and incommensurability. Ethnographic studies alongside documents have underscored the productivity of such papers, its ability to produce and materialize reality and even subjects in disputes as well as government and management policies. (Vianna, 2014b; Lowenkron e Ferreira, 2014; Freire, 2016; Nadai, 2018; Efrem Filho, 2021). However, when these documents clash with *Fazenda Alfenim's* conflicts, in which practices of terror are unraveled, such capability of producing and materializing reality brings about uncertain realities, of formless forms, instigating "the phantasmatic social force" that Taussig talks about (1991, p. 121). Even more complexly, these documents incite terror with the legitimacy of a State practice. They are, after all, lawsuits. They carry the weight of authority, its ability to define "the law" and its correlated illegibility. With them, terror hinders the materialization of the crime, its causality nexus and sufficient evidence that are fundamental to legal rationality. A confirmation of that lies in the unescapable fact that all the men charged in the lawsuits regarding both *Jaime's* house's destruction and *Tonho* and *Dona Marcinha's* home invasion have been acquitted. Likewise, nobody has been convicted by the violent acts suffered by the university professor and rural workers after that Catholic mass.

Visualizing the cruel reciprocity between practices of terror and State practices allows us to put into perspective deep processes of State formation, forms that explain what we now understand as the State in action and on its fringes. As highlighted by Veena Das (2007, p. 183), "because the state project is always an unfinished project, it is best observed at the margins, but these margins are not simply peripheral places – they run into the body of the polity rivers run through a territory". The State comes to life, therefore, in the efforts to produce a distinction between what is and what is not the State, as suggested by Timothy Mitchell (1999).

However, and this is especially relevant to my point here, the State also comes to life in efforts of producing indistinction, when legalities and illegalities are intertwined – or else, more bluntly, when State violence (said "legitimate") providing the conditions of possibility for efforts of distinction are not contained, showing itself ruthlessly against racialized bodies, as pointed out by an increasingly relevant literature (Farias, 2014; Silva, 2017; Rocha, 2020).

Such efforts of (in)distinction, nonetheless, do not take place only far from bureaucratic-administrative centers, such as inside a Paraíba's ranch in the semi-arid region. They take place in the intricacies of state apparatuses, such as police stations,

courtrooms or within a judicial process. The implication of *Saulo Aguiar's* character in these documents and thus, in State processes, is overwhelmingly symptomatic of these efforts. The legal management of the Civilian Police officer as a hitman, including the silences and erasures I have discussed here demonstrates that *Saulo* embodies such efforts of (in)distinction. He is both the hitman who imprisons and tortures a university professor and rural workers, as well as the police officer who takes the same professor and workers to jail for squatting in private property. In order to do so, *Saulo Aguiar* can count on State agents and mechanisms that accommodate his needs, in their ambiguities, without further questioning or opposition. This is because, while it is true that the illegibility of certain state processes feeds back into the dense zones of incomprehension and incommensurability that are typical of terror, it is also true that certain subjects move more deftly and easily in these zones, even participating in their production, depending on the positions they occupy in contexts of inequality and domination.

SILENCE: SECOND DISCUSSION NOTES

As soon as I read “Life and Words” (2007) by Veena Das, *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho* came to mind, in terms of what was not said in the squatters’ community about that evening of December 9, 2007. As it happens, the same way Das (2007) observed how women dealt in the present with their memories of the Partition in India, I also needed to articulate a layer of silences concerning the home invasion and, above all, whatever took place in the room next door to where *Tonho* had been tortured. If such traumatic episode of violence resulted in a “silencing” effect, capable of making *Patricia* give up on speaking for months, there was also a “poisonous knowledge”, symptomatic that “being-with-others was brutally damaged” (Das, 2007, p. 76). In these contexts, knowing or making it known that a given event happened requires the responsibility to manage a past that threatens to tear down, aggressively and caustically, the very fabric of interpersonal relations. These relationships involve different squatters’ families that live in *Fazenda Alfenim's* lands – after all, part of the men who invaded the home belonged to those families, had lived side-by-side with *Dona Marcinha*, *Tonho*, and their kids for many years. Moreover, they reach intrafamily affections, subtle tensions that caused *Tonho* to refuse to talk to his wife.

As Valdênia had explained it during our meeting at the Law School – and as we ourselves heard about the event at other times –, whenever the subject was brought up, and soon avoided by everyone in the community, it showed *Tonho* did not “accept” what had happened and, thus, stopped talking to his spouse. In these narratives, this non-acceptance of the event was intimately diverse in meaning. It could be that *Tonho* would not conform to the events or to his inability to stop them from

happening. However, it could equally be that *Tonho* could not live with the reality of the sexual violence, including his own wife's account, who had now become a sexual victim by men who they possibly were familiar with for a long time, even if she was not able (or could not have been able) to identify them. Besides, *Tonho's* non-acceptance might have alluded to what had been included in the official documents about what had happened in the room next door. In her own way, perhaps *Dona Marcinha* could have also been silencing, or dealing with language as a resource, in the words of Veena Das (2007, p. 54), in a way that turned her body into a repository of poisonous knowledge. Such polysemy of "non-acceptance" and hypothesis for *Dona Marcinha's* silence integrated dense zones of incomprehensibility and incommensurability that formed the agrarian conflict's terror.

While facing, during the process of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the urgency of testimony and the refusal of certain women to testify to their own experiences of violence, especially sexual violence, Fiona Ross (2006, p. 59) noticed that "there is still today a normative assumption that silence is intrinsically 'damaging' while speaking up is 'healing'". The assumption, argues Ross (2006), does not recognize the complexity of silence, the cost of revealing certain personal experiences, the dangers that testifiers will have to live with, the risks regarding the victim's public exposure, putting their lives and actions under a moral scrutiny that, quite often, ends up backfiring against them. In some contexts, therefore, silence consists in a form of protection, silence itself becoming "an act of bravery, not cowardice, or a lack of ability to face the experience" (Ross, 2006, p. 60). Furthermore, in these contexts, silence ends up denouncing the limits of certain discursive forms to represent an experience. It demonstrates the subject's denial to express themselves in a way that, according to Fiona Ross (2006, p. 60), would not result in justice for the one speaking.

Valdênia's first warning regarding that silence pervaded in *Fazenda Alfenim's* lands was an underlying aspect of our legal aid for the Agrarian conflict throughout the years. We needed to be cautious, especially in the transition between the profusion of narratives around the episode and the ways in which the event had been managed, filled with discretion and reserve, at the heart of the rural workers' community. Nowadays I realize that the act of silencing December 9, 2007 events was productive. The silence, just as discussed by Nadai, Cesar and Veiga (2019, p. 843) "is itself the condition of possibility for elaborating an experience that, given its intensity, explodes the limits of what was experienced". While silencing, the squatters were organizing themselves, planning new actions, establishing new alliances, gathering with Law students and professors, attending court hearings and promoting a fair fight that would lead to the transformation of *Fazenda Alfenim* into an Agrarian reform settlement. Meanwhile, they were living their lives, even if amidst of terror. In this sense, living is challenging, defying. If such life is filled of silences, these silenc-

es are, as discussed by Dibe Ayoub (2014, p. 123) “part of a repertoire of practices and conceptions that exist about actions and reactions in instances of aggression”. Interwined in the dense zones of incomprehensibility and incommensurability that are innate to terror, such silences contradictorily take up a form of defying terror itself.

Along the conflict, one cannot deny that practices of terror have been victorious in different occasions. One of the most emblematic ones being documented in the court hearing of March 10, 2009, when *Dona Marcinha* saw herself forced to narrate, in a room full of men¹³, the sexual violence to which she had been subjected. She reaffirmed, for a predominantly white-collar male audience, what she had already told the police after the incident. When asked about it, she justified the lack of a rape kit due to her menstrual cycle. In front of those men, *Tonho* also saw himself cornered to repeat – numerous times, I believe – what he had silenced for so long. The same happened to *Júlio*, the couple’s son. The men at the court hearing, following their duty, dedicated a considerable amount of time to scrutinizing the sexual violence. They even demanded, especially from those who were both witnesses and declarants, information on what was said and what was known about the events inside that bedroom. They were committed to reaching the poisonous knowledge that, according to Veena Das (2007, p. 80), women have to drink while men make it with their words, ratifying the importance of keeping control over women’s (or feminized) bodies and sexualities to establish the State’s or nation’s order and rationality.

When I first examined the court records for this hearing, I could not stop myself from imagining the legal rites preceding it, with State practices that are saturated in hierarchies and demotions, legitimizing authority and constraint, with a fetishizing aspect (Anne McClintock, 1993) combining power, pleasure, and pain¹⁴. This time around, however, as I write about this case, I am struck by the way in which this imperative to speak up – which sharply contrasts with the silence in everyday family and community life after the traumatic event – seems to be bureaucratically and procedurally justified. The imperative of speaking up is due to the formal need to produce evidence, especially in the absence of a rape kit and medical report in the case file. It so happens that such a report is central to a legal case involving an accusation of sexual violence, as it is the document that would make it possible to prove the materiality of a crime of indecent assault. Therefore, it has probative value.

As pointed out by Larissa Nadai (2018), in direct dialogue with Riles (2001), such reports respond to a “formulaic-form”, once they follow a “standardized pattern or matrix”, “in forms of writing that limit, constraint, and stimulate certain ways of filling up the gaps” (Nadai, 2018, p. 111). This formulaic-form leads and shapes the legal authority’s gaze and work on the body, being activated only amidst what Nadai (2018) calls “chains of determination”, linking rape kits to police investigations and lawsuits. The medical examiner conducts a specific exam, filling in a specific form, based on prior request from the police station, only in terms of such requisition¹⁵.

13 | The judge, the prosecutor, the defense lawyers and the lawyers who acted as assistant prosecutors were all men.

14 | In Brazilian Anthropology, an increasing number of researchers have dedicated themselves to analyzing this combination, considering practices of debasement and humiliation in different ethnographic contexts. In this regard, I suggest reading the works of Facchini (2008), Gregori (2016) and Díaz-Benítez (2021), which are fundamental to my view of the issue.

15 | Professor Silvana Aranha Trigueiro, a forensic medical examiner at the Paraíba Institute of Forensic Medicine and my colleague at UFPA, explained to me, in response to some of my questions, that traumatology reports (on bodily injuries, for example) and sexology reports (on cases of sexual violence) are different and that the expert only carries out the examinations at the express request of the police chief.

Bureaucratic requirements are fulfilled, aiming at reinforcing a probative value, under legal, scientific (or medical-legal) parameters in their alleged objectivity.

Ever since I started to follow *Fazenda Alfenim's* case, I have asked myself multiple times the reasons behind the absence of a medical report, reasons for the ME who examined *Dona Marcinha* not to have filled in the form for sexual crimes. From the very beginning, I have asked myself whether the police officer that opened the case, with *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho* at the station, knowing about the sexual violence, did indeed request a rape kit. I have asked myself if the menstrual cycle would really interfere in the process of performing the exam¹⁶. And, once it was confirmed that it was not possible, I have asked myself why such impossibility had not been properly included in the records. The legal records do not offer answers to such questions. Nor was I able to ask the squatters about it, given the silence that clouds the events of the night of December 9, 2007. Terror once again infiltrates the scene, contaminating it and I am left with no explanations, just like in the dense zones of incomprehension and incommensurability that surround it. Uncomfortably incapable of understanding, measuring, foreseeing or translating, I found myself entangled in that fantastic, ghostly and frightening plot that permeates squatters' stories and everything else they keep quiet.

Such position does not give me, however, the liberty to do away methodologically with the power relations that constitute terror and the traces of the State's process' illegibility that favor it. The necessity to analytically explore these power dynamics remains urgent, not because knowing them explains terror or reveals its causes and consequences. Terror persists in those dense zones. But because the limits of incomprehensibility, even if one knows for sure it cannot be understood, need to be shaken up in order to dismantle the power relations that have to be analytically and politically challenged. That is the pedagogical lesson left by those who struggle. While telling or silencing their stories, they fear today's threats will become real, or that their unspeakable past cannot be kept in the depth of their memories. Such terror, anguished and afflicted, does not inescapably obliterate these struggles. As discussed in *Fazenda Alfermin's* conflict, there is life challenging terror, facing the power relations that hinder and make the very same life vulnerable.

These relations take place in racial and class contradictions that oppose landowners and rural workers subjected to uncompensated labor and lack of rights, masked by the availability of their bodies to patronal violence. At the same time, extremely unequal gender and sexual relations operate in the agrarian conflict, more explicitly in the episode of sexual violence. Gender and sexuality, therefore, ratify the embodiment of women as frontier spaces for regulation, as noted by Anne McClintock (1993) while unveiling European colonial metaphors around the invasion of "virgin" and "unknown" territories. Moreover, they connect *Fazenda Alfenim* to uncountable territorial conflicts (and wars) in which sexual violence becomes central

16 | Professor Silvana also explained that, depending on its intensity, menstrual cycles can actually make gynecological examinations difficult or even impossible.

(Rial, 2007; Das, 2020a; Peres, 2011; Giraldo-Aguirre, 2020; Efrem Filho, 2017b).

Nevertheless, beyond the episode of sexual violence, gender and sexuality take part in the conflict's very conditions of possibility, making up its language. Gender and sexuality are present when men wield their guns and when white-collar workers gather in courtrooms to rule over lawsuits. Gender and sexuality are in the patriarch's imposition of unpaid work to a rural workers' community and, once again, in the open and public subjection of their bodies to violence. Gender and sexuality are amongst those efforts to produce (in)distinction, ensuring the invisibility that characterizes the conflict. An example of that is present in the implacable homology between the intimacy of the room next door and the large rural estate. After all, besides the victims, who can see a group of rural workers and a college professor being subjected to torture after a Catholic mass? Who can see a man, held at gunpoint, being prevented from going back home after working all day? Who can see a pick-up truck parking in front of a *squatters'* family home? Nobody, aside from the victims and perpetrators themselves, hears cries for help, or interpellations such as "this is a robbery" or "rape 'er". Nobody recognizes masked men. Who is, then, capable of making it visible what no one else has seen?

HEALING: AN EPILOGUE

Over the past fifteen years I have dedicated myself to research and legal aid activities alongside social movements, I have witnessed uncountable moments in which members of these groups struggled to "make seen" – to borrow from Butler's (2010) lexicon – make apprehended, understood and recognized that which nobody else had seen, apprehended, understood, or recognized. These are instances in which, through the cracks of struggles for justice, violence is reclaimed and "images of brutality" are activated towards legitimizing the victim, articulated in the public use of the body's intimacy, pain, and suffering. Facing these moments analytically demanded a closer contact with a series of indispensable previous Brazilian works that offered me initial tools for their comprehension (Birman & Leite, 2004; Araújo, 2007; Vianna & Farias, 2011; Vianna, 2014a; Lacerda, 2012; Farias, 2014). A comprehension which, on its turn, can never be fully grasped or completed once terror does not allow it.

Faced with these moments in which violence is reclaimed to fight terror, I believe I bore witness to something very similar to what Michael Taussig (1991) called "healing" while discussing rites of struggle against the evil, disease, and misery he had analyzed. According to him, there is a space of death that is transformative: "through the experience of coming close to death there will be a more vivid sense of life; through fear there can come not only a growth in self-consciousness

but also fragmentation, then loss of self-conforming to authority” (Taussig, 1987, p. 7). Thus, the power from those who heal comes “through the struggle with evil”, results in a “dialectical relationship between disease and misfortune” (idem, pp. 157-158). Likewise, the same seems to happen when rural workers and social movement members engage in activating narratives of violence, dealing with the self-destructive force of violence against terror, bringing about such healing power.

Analyzing *Fazenda Alfenim*'s case, I could see such power unravelling and surfacing in some of those instances reclaiming violence and struggles, if not exactly against “evil”, against latifundium and oppression – another one of its various names. The court hearings between 2010 and 2011, regarding the lawsuit that would lead to the expropriation of the lands, are amongst the most vivid memories I have on the matter. The judge and Federal Public Ministry official were seated, alongside *Arlindo Falcão*'s attorneys and family members, and squatters' and CPT's attorneys. Around the table, professors, undergraduate students, and CPT members tagged along dozens of rural workers who crowded the courtroom in Campina Grande. Side by side with State agents and an interested audience, landowners and workers mobilized the conflict occupying very different positions in relation to what they had been accustomed. In one of these hearings, I witnessed when one of *Velho Arlindo*'s relatives had to lower his voice to say to someone next to him that “back in the day things were better, couldn't it be like in the old days?” while some workers reported memories of “slavery” that crossed their lives. In that afternoon, a landowner had to lower his voice and speak discreetly, fearing to be heard while speaking his mind, because a rural worker was denouncing violence, making himself seen and heard.

Fazenda Alfenim's conflict has equally taught me, however, that healing is not restricted to reclaiming violence. On the contrary, healing also takes place in its intimate and silent articulation. In these cases, as Veena Das noticed, there is the work of Time, because “time is not something purely represented but is an agent that ‘works’ on relationships” (2007, p. 87). Everything that was not said in the community's daily life concerning the traumatic event helped to enable the continuation of life itself. Silence steeped the days so that time could do its work; so that feelings and meanings could be reaccommodated; so that the “non-acceptance” could find new possibilities of existence or even disappearance. Life had to go on. And that, in itself, defied terror.

Nevertheless, that silence also steeped the struggles for the land. Through what was unsaid or only brought up with cautious reserve, time operated so that political mobilization could exist; so that the expropriation lawsuit could move on; so that CPT's attorneys and INCRA agents could work; and so that violence in the conflict could be denounced. The silence in the squatters' daily life regarding the traumatic event shaped what was intensely said in the State's hearings and the occasions in which reclaiming violence took place. The struggle would have to be lived,

after all. And the struggle was so important that it fueled life even if it does not circumscribe it. Listening to *Fazenda Alfenim's* rural workers speak about their life stories throughout the years following the conflict is a glimpse of how life and struggles are both intertwined and feed each other.

As I said, in August 2011, INCRA finally acquired the definitive possession of the lands, putting an end to a conflict that crossed generations. I will never forget the party those rural workers threw that day, leaving the courtroom. Cars took over Campina Grande's avenues and the highways to *Fazenda Alfenim's* nearby town, where most of the investigations and proceedings I discussed in this paper had taken place. Right there, on the streets, workers gathered, were assembled, delivered speeches from a sound system in a car, and could not control their joy. Everyone needed to know about their victory. After that, in the ranch that would become a settlement for Agrarian reform, celebrations increased and were multiplied. The night held the warmth of a long awaited future.

In 2015, when I last visited *Marcos'* house, he was happy. He had finished his undergraduate degree through Pronera¹⁷, and was thinking about pursuing a graduate degree in Human Rights in João Pessoa, at UFPB. His lands were thriving in that August afternoon as he so proudly showed them to me. His wife, his kids and himself had left the small house where they lived because, with public funding, they were able to build a new, spacious, beautiful brick house. *Dona Marcinha* and *Tonho* did the same. Pointing in the distance, *Marcos* showed me his brother and sister-in-law's new house. Looking at the construction, I was reminded that the room next door no longer existed. And neither did the large rural estate.

17 | The National Program for Education in Agrarian Reform (Pronera) was a public policy created by Decree No. 7.351, November 4, 2010, by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration (Workers' Party) and aimed above all at young people and adults belonging to families assisted by INCRA's settlement projects. Among the Program's measures was the opening of specific classes in higher education at public universities.

Roberto Efrem Filho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Legal Sciences at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and Professor in the Graduate Program in Anthropology at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). He completed his doctorate in Social Sciences at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) and his master's and undergraduate degrees at the Recife Law School of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE).

CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORSHIP: does not apply.

FUNDING: The research that provided grounds for this article was mainly the result of a doctoral research without scholarship, undertaken between 2012 and 2017 at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), while the author, who was already a full-time professor at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), was working regularly and receiving his salary.

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Received on November 12th, 2023. Accepted on February 16th, 2024.



This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001