
BABASU BREAKER WOMEN: “FREE¹ BABASSU” AND EXTRACTIVE RESERVES

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ABSTRACT

Since its establishment in the early 1990s, the Babassu Breaker Women Movement (MIQCB) has been discussing measures to end the process of devastation of babaçuaias, as well as ensuring free access and common use of palm trees. In the discussions on the guarantees of free access to the babassu palm trees prevailed the proposals of the laws of “free babassu” and extractive reserves. While the first is the result of the demands of the movement itself, the second one stems from the struggle of the rubber tappers of Acre, incorporated into the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC). Thus, this article aims to reflect on the struggle to guarantee access and common use of natural resources based on the experience of the “free babassu” laws and extractive reserves. In order to fulfill the proposed objective, the methodology used was based on techniques of direct observation and semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the Babassu Breaker Women Movement. Although the movement has achieved several laws, which guarantee the rights to free access, these have been disregarded.

Keywords: “new social movements”; babassu breaker women; common use; “palm free”; extractive reserves.

¹ Research suggested by the Brazilian Actionaid and MIQCB. This was later transformed into a leaflet in Brazil entitled “Acesso à terra, território e recursos naturais: a luta das quebradeiras de coco babaçu”.

QUEBRADEIRAS DE COCO: "BABAÇU LIVRE" E RESERVAS EXTRATIVISTAS

RESUMO

Desde a sua constituição, no início da década de 1990, o Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB) vem discutindo medidas para pôr fim ao processo de devastação dos babaçuais, bem como garantir o livre acesso e uso comum das palmeiras. Nas discussões sobre as garantias do livre acesso as palmeiras de babaçu prevaleceram as propostas das leis do "babaçu livre" e das reservas extrativistas. Enquanto a primeira proposta é fruto das reivindicações do próprio movimento, a segunda decorre da luta dos seringueiros do Acre, incorporada ao Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação (SNUC). Assim, este artigo objetiva refletir sobre a luta pela garantia de acesso e uso comum dos recursos naturais a partir da experiência das leis do "babaçu livre" e das reservas extrativistas. Para cumprir o objetivo proposto, a metodologia utilizada se baseou em técnicas de observação direta e entrevistas semiestruturadas junto às lideranças do movimento das quebradeiras. Embora o movimento ter logrado várias leis, que asseguram os direitos ao livre acesso, tais vêm sendo desrespeitadas.

Palavras chave: "novos movimentos sociais"; quebradeiras de coco; uso comum; "babaçu livre"; reservas extrativistas.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its existence, the coordinations of the Intersectoral Movement of the Babassu Coco Breakers (MIQCB) have always endeavored to understand the processes in which they were inserted, as well as the structures created by law (in particular, environmental and agrarian law) to propose actions, measures and legal instruments capable of promoting the preservation of natural resources and ensuring free access and common use of areas of occurrence of babassu. In the State of Maranhão, for example, Agrarian Policy has contributed in a legal and illegal way with the process of expropriation of coconut breakers and their families from their traditionally occupied lands. The effects of the so-called Sarney Land Law (Law No. 2,979, July 1969), which made the state's vacant lands occupied by coconut breakers and their families available to agricultural and livestock enterprises (ALMEIDA & MOURÃO, 1979), This facilitated the process of "grilagem" as well as the concentration of land.

At the beginning of the organization of the movement, in a coordination activity, the different economic situations involving the families of coconut breakers became evident. For the most part, coconut breakers are in the condition of "landless", that is, they do not have direct access to land, residing in the so-called "street ends" of towns and villages or at "roadsides", between the strip of the highways and the fences of the farms. At the beginning of the organization of the movement, in a coordination activity, the different economic situations involving the families of coconut breakers became evident. For the most part, coconut breakers are in the condition of "landless", that is, they do not have direct access to land, residing in the so-called "street ends" of towns and villages or at "roadsides", between the strip Of the highways and the fences of the farms.

The Coconut breakers with guaranteed access to land, "with land", represent a minority in the context of the movement. These are situations of areas expropriated by INCRA, areas regularized by the State Land Institutes or even acquired. The possessions consolidated for years, shared lands of inheritance, also fit in this situation. However, it is emphasized that coconut breakers "with land" do not always have babassu palms in their lands, which causes them to enter other areas to collect babassu.

Given the condition in which the breakers were submitted, the MIQCB incorporated two central problems in its agenda of struggle, which

are related to the guarantees of physical and cultural reproduction, that is: to stop the cutting (felling) of palm trees and guarantee free access and common use of the babassu areas, a pre-existing condition to the appropriation and enclosure of lands traditionally occupied. For coconut breakers: "free access is the one that the gate does not have a padlock, the bracket does not have a padlock, this is free access for us." (Graft of Maria Alaídes interview, Lago de Rodrigues, May 2015).

Thus, this article aims to reflect on the struggle for the guarantee of free access and common use of natural resources from the experience of the laws of the "free babaçu" and the extractive reserve. While the idea of "free babassu" has originated in the context of the movement, the extractive reserve, although idealized by the rubber collectors of the Amazon, especially Acre, was incorporated into the struggle after being created by the federal government, which in 1992 decreed the creation of 4 extractive reserves in the region.

1 THE EMERGENCE OF THE BABASSU COCONUT BREAKERS' MOVEMENT

Brazil has been experiencing an interesting process in the recent decades, related to the emergence of "new social movements" and with the legal recognition of diverse groups designed by the legal provisions of traditional people and communities. They are the indigenous people and the quilombolas people, communities of rubber tappers, chestnut trees, assai trees, pickers of mangaba collectors, and many other groups...

The constitutional text of 1988² and the promulgation of the OIT Convention n. 169 (Decree n. 5.051, of 19 April 2004) make evident the Power of these movements, which till then were "invisible" to the policies of universal pretension. The OIT Convention n.169 of 1989, set as fundamental identification criterion the self-definition; thus the individual itself inform of him/herself, related to the group to which it belongs. Such criterion allowed reinforcing the logic of the movements guided by the ethnic and collective criteria. It is worth to emphasize that the majority of the groups were subordinated to the category of "extractive workers"³,
2 According to the jurist José Afonso da Silva: "*The Constitution opts, then, for the pluralist society that respects the human person and its freedom, instead of monist society that mutilates and engenders the oppressive orthodoxy. The pluralism is a reality, as the society is composed of a plurality of social categories, of classes, of social, economic, cultural and religious groups.*" (SILVA, 2007, p.143, grifos nossos).

3 In the dozens of legal provisions edited after the 1988 Federal Constitution, identify-se various

whose activities were disciplined by the so called Statute of the Earth (Law n.4.504, of 30 November 1964).

It is in a context of intense political mobilization against the private and exclusive appropriation of the territories, with widespread deforestation of natural resources, that emerges the Intersectoral Movement of the Babaçu Coco Breakers (MIQCB).

The extractive activity of babassu is carried out predominantly by women, although it has men's participation at certain moments. It is an activity considered secondary, whose crop coincides with the off-season of the so-called farm. The activity of babassu, which is fully utilized by families, is not restricted to the collection, breaking and sale of almonds. Dona Dó's speech transcribed below, well expressed the importance of babassu for the economy of families:

Then, he's (the babaçu) a great importance, because from him *the people gets the sustainability*. I remember that my mother, we lived in a house made of straw, of babaçu, above and below, all was closed and the door was a babaçu matt. Then for me she has such a great utility she serves us everything, she gives life to those who has not, you know, she give us life because from the babaçu comes the almond to make the oil, to season the food, the milk also to season the meal, the house, the coal to cook, the straw to make the "pacará" to cut the rice, catch the beans, to keep inside, you know, it is everything. And the palm tree, when the lightning strikes and the palm tree fall down and she dies in the ground, in no time she turns into fertilizer, people puts in a onion, it's life, the palm gives life. An a palm tree for me, *I compare she as a mother of family*. (interview with Diocina Lopes, dona Dió, Lago dos Rodrigues, May de 2015 – ours the stress).

Still very small, the smaller children of the coconut breakers, boys and girls, go together with their mothers for the "coconut hunting": "When I understood it I was already walking in the woods with her. It was in the field breaking the coconut". (exerpt of the interview of Diocina Lopes, dona Dió, Lago dos Rodrigues, May 2015). They learn early the meanings of the babassu in their lives, as well as the adverse conditions of guarantee of their practice, ironically, in the "land of the palm trees". The children see how their mothers "enter" the woods sometimes crossing barbed wire fences, hidden, to gather and break the coconut, exposed to

terms or expressions are identified, used tom refer to these social groups called trditional people and communities (SHIRAISHI NETO, 2010).

every kind of violence.

The hard work day is rewarded with the income that allow the women to buy the basic products (as sugar, coffee, sardine...) to supply the most immediate needs.. Sometimes the results are intended for the payment of contingencies, such as health problems in the family, or even in the purchase of small goods such as children's clothing.

For the coconut breakers, having their income from the collection and breaking of the coconut guarantees them greater autonomy, because with this resource they can better define the way to spend it, being less subject of their own mates. Regardless of the social, economical and cultural contexts in which they are inserted, the proposals that involve the right to have their own resources have a huge value for the women. Even in a society such as the Norwegian – of a strong welfare State, draws attention in the feminist legal theory, the discussions around the “women's right to money”. The right to have an income is one of the first conditions so that women can enjoy the life with freedom (DAHAL, 1993).

The babassu importance to these women make them have special care and feeling regarding the palm trees, that the coconut breakers call “mother tree”⁴, as they ensure the survival of the whole community. As a mother, the palm teed distributes equally its fruits, regardless of the children's conditions.

Such understanding of the nature, linked to the preservation, breaks the hegemonic models based on the control of people over the resources for the sake of the processes of capital accumulation. The ecofeminist theories (MIES; SHIVA, 1993) help us to better understand this intense relation between the coconut breakers and the palm trees. To these theories, which articulate the reflections of gender and environment, the capitalist system flourished “colonizing” the women, the land and the nature. In the diverse contexts studied by the mentioned authors, it remained correct that the women are the most affected by the impact of the development/growth projects, moreover when these projects cause the nature destruction. Therefore, women are the first to get organized and protest against the destruction of the natural resources.

In their own way, the reports highlight the role of women in the fight against the palm trees felling. In their own way, the coconut breakers

⁴ The recent Constitution of Ecuador, of 2008 build a particular protection system for the environment, taking nature to the condition of “subject of rights”. This conception, associated to the “buen vivir” (*Sumak Kawsay*, in *kichwa*) is related to the ways of life and to the indigenous people cosmovision. About the nature rights in Ecuador, recommended: PACARI (2009) and GUDYNAS (2009). Bolivia, which also have a new Constitution (2009), attributed rights to the nature.

made the first “draws” in the late 1980s, as did the rubber tappers’ fight against the overthrow of rubber plantations in Acre. In “mutirões”, women, with other women and children come together to prevent the overthrow of babassu palm trees. Dona Maria Alaídes so described what she called “*mutirão*”:

We joined in a joint effort, articulated the time without anyone knowing, our joint was not public...

We would say between ourselves: let’s go there we will need and if we let them end we have nowhere to go, and here still does not have a source of income where it supports us people other than babassu.

We asked. Sometimes he had a huge tractor, we would take the hand one of the others and would go ahead and ask them not to do that, that we lived on that, we showed how much of son he had to create and that we had no another source of income. And they started to say: why you let them get you pregnant, you do not want to buy television, no!?! To go to watch to stop getting pregnant, from so much boy to put in the world not to have how to create. Here I am fulfilling orders, I will not do the will of you not. (Interview with Maria Alaídes, Lake Rodrigues, May 2015 - ours stress)

From these concrete situations involving the struggle against the palm trees felling, the coconut breakers get organized to face the located issues related to the devastation of the *babaçuais*, which threatened their physical and cultural reproduction. In several places they received different support, it is worth to mention the pastoral ones linked to the catholic church, as well as the non-governmental organizations. In the context of the organization process, the coconut breakers started to claim the political space, usually occupied by men.

The participation in political spaces, and the level of awareness achieved in the struggles caused the coconut breakers to become preoccupied with articulating with other groups of women, who also lived situations similar to those faced in the *babaçuais*. By triggering gender and ecological criteria, coupled with a legal practice that disciplines the access to and the common use of natural resources, coconut breakers are becoming a social identity group⁵.

⁵ About the processo of identity making of the breaker women, is suggested: ALMEIDA (1995) e SHIRAISHI NETO (2006)

The environmentalization of the struggle (LOPES, 2004) of the breakers potentialized their discourse as a social group, when they ceased to be stereotyped to move to the political center of debates, that is, they became protagonists because of their ecological awareness and struggle. In the beginning of the 1990 decade, the process of the women organization started, constituting in the Interstate Movement of Babaçu Coco Breakers / Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB).

The MIQCB contributed with the organization of the struggle agenda of the coconut breakers, which since its emergence has prioritized the issues linked to the devastation of the natural resources and the guarantees of free access and common use of the babassu palm trees. In the process of the organization and struggle of the movement, the laws of the "free babassu" / "babaçu livre" gained force, occupying the MIQCB political agenda.

2 THE LAWS OF "FREE BABAÇU"

Since its constitution the MIQCB has been discussing ways to guarantee the access and the common use of natural resources. The debates around this need evolved in the direction of the discussion, formulation and proposal of a Bill of Law to the Chamber of Deputies, presented by parliamentarians close to the movement.

The Draft Law n. 1428, of 1996, was regularly processed by the Chamber when it was closed by a procedural force. The same Project was resubmitted three more times not achieving its approval. The enormous difficulties involved in approving the Project led the movement to adopt another strategy, with the presentation of the same Project that was re-presented other three times⁶ with no approval. The enormous difficulties around the Project approval led the movement to adopt another strategy, with the presentation of the proposal to the Municipal Chambers, later to the Legislative Assemblies⁷. Such strategy of promoting the "localized legal struggle" (SHIRAIISHI NETO, 2011) is a particularity of several social

⁶ The Project of Law n. 747/2003 was submitted to the professor Luiz Edson Fachin, taht at the time, gave an opinion (Parecer) about the Project constitutionality, which was published (FACHIN; PIANOVSKI, 2006). In 2007, the Project of Law was re-presented (PL n.231/2007), but despite being approved by a Special Committee it was filed again

⁷ In the State of Tocantins, the movement approved the Law n. 1.059, of 14 August 2008, which "provides about the prohibition of the burning, clearing and predatory use of coconut palms of babassu and adopts other measures". In 2011, the Law n 9.428, of 2 August, was approved in Maranhão, which besides creating the Day of the Coconut Breakers in Maranhão, recognized the self attribution as valid criterion to the recognition of the coconut breakers.

movements in Brazil. It is distinguished from then other contexts, which have privileged more comprehensive forms of claim, such as Ecuador and Bolivia, which promulgated new constitutions recognizing broad rights to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples..

The first Municipal Law approved by the movement was the Law n. 005/1997, in the county Lago do Junco. The Law “authorizes the Head of the Municipality Executive Branch / *Chefe do Poder Executivo Municipal* turn the *babassu* extrative activity a free activity in the county and give other providences.” (ours the stress). This law, as the others that were also proposed and approved in the MIQCB sphere of action, reflect the level, of the organization of the women, in the counties, and their political power.

The laws formalized the social practices already existing in the county. Where the *babassu* was free it was kept on free with the Law approval. While some laws ensure the free access and common use of the palm trees, others condition the access and use to the authorization of the land owners, as the Law n.001/2003, in the county Paia Norte.

For the Law discussion and presentation, the coconut breakers mobilize using varied strategies ranging from the choice of the councilor (member of the Municipal Chamber) that will present the proposal, to the political pressure on the day of the voting of the Law. The reports describe the intense participation of the women in the Day of voting the Project: they descend from the truck cram, crowding the City Councils with banners, baskets, shafts, clubs and axes. However, these actions are not always valid; sometimes the women are forced to get back and wait for a new opportunity for the Project presentation. In several occasions, the Project is rewritten to meet the several interests in the game.

It is worth to highlight that the Law of the “*babaçu* free” represents much more than a simple rule of law. Its content expresses a particular manner of relating to the nature and the people, thus constituting a “new proposal” of co-existing: “*to só assuntando a voz da natureza.*” “I am just listening to the voice of the nature” (excerpt from the interview of Diocina Lopes, dona Dió, Lago dos Rodrigues, May 2015). It is noted that the ideals of the “sustained development” – proposal of development that dominate the discussions in the 1990 decade, are materially present in the laws of the “*babaçu* free”⁸.

⁸ In contrast to the hegemonic development models, the Andean countries, specifically Bolivia (2009) and Ecuador (2008) presented the concept of “*Vivir Bien*” or “*Buen Vivir*”, which are linked to the “worldview of indigenous peoples”. The “free *babassu*”, as a social practice, approaches “to live well” or “*buen vivir*”, because it contains a wisdom, that is product of the experience of life of the coconut breakers. With regard to “living well”, we suggest reading: HUANACUMI (2010). About “*buen vivir*”:

The profound awareness of the nature and its cycles enable the coconut breakers to fight for the preservation of the natural resources. Along the years they gave demonstration of the practical action of this awareness and knowledge that reflect in the promotion of the biodiversity and the cultural practices. Their fight for a healthy environment is linked to the need to consume healthy products and guarantee their food security.

Tem laws of the "babaçu free" bring in their contents the ideals of equality solidarity exercised in the practice by the coconut breakers. When they leave for "coconut hunting", they respect the various customs, such as never to cut the whole bunch of coconut, because if they do, only a single family wins; on the other hand, letting the coconut drop naturally, respecting its life cycle, anyone can do it. When on the ground, coconuts can be crammed and so are not taken by other women. Such a practice is consistent with the perception of the need and ability of each woman to collect enough for her production. Knowing that each breaker collects according to its needs, there are no disputes between women for the resource, which is used in an open and common way by the several families that depend on it. The coconut is equally and with solidarity distributed among the coconut breakers and their families, since, as "mother tree", it must provide to all, indistinctly. Here, a second element of the idea of sustainability.

Preservation practices, associated with common usage, are linked to an understanding of justice. "Mother nature" has life in its most varied forms, so that coconut breakers organize to guarantee a fair and solidary distribution of resources. Such practices and conceptions are related to other ideas of food security and sovereignty.

Although the laws of the "babaçu free" contain many positive attributes, they are the object of contestation, mainly because of the ignorance or even ignorance of landowners and federal and state governments, who insist on adopting development strategies that are extremely predatory and that endanger the various social groups in the region. The women are fully aware that the Law effectiveness depend on the practical actions. They know that only the Law is not enough:

"Nois" can not leave it on paper. Nois can not slacken, because you have to stay talking and talking and talking, because if not, it's over, because there it stays on paper, there's not a lot of law in the National Congress that does not even call it, and

ACOSTA (2012).

says it's law, Law as if it's there only on paper it will not be worth it. So the law of the babassu, the access to the babassu, if we slouch to leave alone in the paper is not going to be worth, the proof is there, the plow is over. (Interview with Diocina Lopes, Dona Dió, Lago dos Rodrigues, May 2015 - oura italics).

It is not only the law itself in the role it guarantees because we have to enforce this law. To enforce the law is like this: because you cannot cross your arms because you have an approved law, because if you do it again the palm trees will go all the way because the farmer will not value this law of us, right? So, you need people telling you that you cannot bring them down, you need to be handing over a copy of this law to the farmer for them, also to be aware that he cannot be knocked down, he cannot be burned, he cannot be poisoning here in the county. (Interview with Sebastiana Ferreira Costa Silva, Mrs. Moça, Lago dos Rodrigues, May 2015 - our italics)

Such understanding from the coconut breakers about the Law and the Right are revealing of the awareness and the knowledge acquired by these women in their daily struggles. Far from a naïve or even idealized reading of the law, common to law students, they understand that the result, that is, the effectiveness of the Law, is conditioned to a field of disputes involving the “right to speak the law” (BOURDIEU, 1989). To do this, they spread the existence of the Law, interpreting it in its own way, which expresses a new coexistence between people and people and nature.

In this context of discussion of ways to guarantee the free access and common use of babassu palm trees, the newly created MIQCB was surprised in 1992 by the creation of 4 extractive reserves within the scope of the movement, which are still in process. With the exception of the Quilombo do Frechal extractive reserve because it is a quilombola remnant community.

3 THE BABASSU EXTRACTIVE RESERVES

The proposal of the Extractive Reserve / Reserva Extrativista (RESEX), incorporated to National System of Conservation Units / Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação (SNUC – Law n. 9.985, of 18 July 2000), is the result of the strategies developed by the Amazonia rubber tappers (seringueiros), particularly the “seringueiros” of the state of Acre, in the fight against the deforestation and for the guarantee of the possession

of the seringa⁹ trees traditionally used. Against the huge deforestations, the rubber tappers (seringueiros) organized the “*empates*” (NT: *obstrução*):

The ‘*empates*’ are made through “*mutirões*” of the rubber tappers. As rubber tappers become aware that they have comrades threatened by deforestation, that an area is threatened by farmers deforestation by, several communities, especially the affected community, congregate in the middle of the bush, and leaders, groups of resistance that will be placed in front of the scythes and chainsaws in a peaceful but organized way. They try to convince the peons, who are at the farmers service, to withdraw from the area. (GRZYBOWSKI, 1989, p.38 - our emphasis)

The RESEXs are proposed in a context of the *seringueiros* fights. The extractive reserve represented an alternative of economic preservation of the Amazon rainforest¹⁰; in this sense, it is close to the coconut breakers’ fight for the “free babaçu”. This proposal was articulated to a larger set of other policies, turned to the guarantee the rubber price in the national market and to the improvement of the conditions of production and commercialization of products derived from rubber extraction.

In the beginning of 1992, moments prior to the World Environment Conference / Conferência Mundial do Meio Ambiente, in Rio de Janeiro (Eco 92), the then president Fernando Collor de Mello, in a true strategy of “ecologic marketing” to promote the country in the world arena, creates in the region of the MIQCB action, 4 extractive reserves of prevalence of babaçu extractivism, namely:

9 On the situations experienced by the rubber tappers of Acre, which involves a specific system of possession, it is recommended to read: FACHIN (1990).

10 *Revista Globo Rural* (2015) published a report on extractive reserves under the title: “Cattle threat to Chico Mendes’ dream: created 25 years ago, extractive reserves live contradiction between preservation and pasture advance”; Attribute the advance of livestock to the irresponsibility of the residents themselves, who are disobeying the laws that regulate the use of protected areas. For a non-sensationalist or impressionistic discussion of the cattle in the extractive reserves, it is suggested: PANTOJA, COSTA e POSTIGO (2009).

Table 01: Babassu Extrative Reserves

n. of Order	Reservation Name	Municipality -UF	Extension (Há)	Estimated Population	Decree
01	Mata Grande	Imperatriz, Davinópolis and João Lisboa - MA	10.450	1.500	532, of 20/5/92
02	Ciriaco	Cidelândia - MA	7.050	1.150	534. of 20/5/92

Source: SHIRAISHI NETO, Joaquim. Babaçu Livre: conflito entre a legislação extrativista e práticas camponesas: In: ALMEIDA, Alfredo Wagner Berno de, et. All (orgs.). *Economia do Babaçu: levantamento preliminar de dados*. São Luís: MIQCB e Balaios Typographia, 2001. p.61

Although originated from the *seringueiros* (rubber tappers) struggles process, the extractive reserves of babassu prevalence created by the federal government present specific characteristics related to the ways of access and use that are worth to highlight. While in the *seringa* reserves the area is a common appropriation and its use is private by family, as each *seringueiro*/rubber tapper owns a road (what is called “placement”) to the *seringa*, in the babassu reserves the appropriation and use are common to the families, that use the palm trees according to their needs and capacities.

The babassu extractive reserves also present a particularity that deserves to be highlighted: coconut breakers and their families did not live in the defined area, object of the Decree. However, the fact that they did not live did not imply that they were not carrying out the extractive activity of babassu because, as already mentioned, most coconut breakers are in the condition of “landless”. In small villages, around the estates / reserves, the women lived with their families, which generated, at the beginning, a great tension and conflict with the government technicians, who did not admit an extractive reserve without a fixed population living in the area. Faced with such a finding (say: carried out after the creation of reserves), the process was temporarily suspended until further technical studies and surveys were carried out.

With the exception of the Quilombo do Frechal Extractive Reserve - which is a remnant quilombo community area, the other areas created by the Decrees have not yet been consolidated, leaving their administrative processes unfinished. While the extractive reserve of the Ciriaco was

partially expropriated, the reserves of Mata Grande and the Far North still continue to be submitted to new and new surveys.

The delay by the federal government in completing the processes allowed landowners to organize and begin to use strategies, with the objective of trying to prevent the consolidation of the reserves created. Residents close to the areas reveal that the big landowners began to fractionate their properties in order to make expropriation actions more difficult. Currently, the Mata Grande reserve area consists of a portion of smallholders, very different from the moment of its creation. The residents also report that after the Decrees issue, there was an intensification of the firing of babassu palm trees, without any action being taken. In fact, the small number of palm trees was one of the main arguments used by the federal government itself to propose a Bill to Congress requesting the extinction of the decrees that created the Mata Grande (MA) and Far North (OT) extractive reserve, Which, fortunately, did not thrive.

In early 1992, coconut breakers and union leaders learned that the government had created extractive reserves in the region. In some places, a visit preceded its creation, government technicians flying over the region have defined the location and boundaries of the areas. The portions of land considered with greater density of palm trees were those chosen for the implantation of the conservation units, and it is worth to highlight that these were not in the list of the areas claimed by the struggle of the trade union movement, which were surrounded by other priorities.

During this period, the region was still known for the intense and violent land conflicts. Although the reserve areas were not on the struggles agenda, the local organizations and the MIQCB took over and began to mobilize for their effective implementation until they were dropped from the discussions. Those organizations that were at any time opposed to the so-called "partnerships" proposed by ICMBio were gradually excluded and no longer participated in the political definitions involving extractive reserves.

However, it is important to emphasize that the current context, which involves a number of factors, has certainly posed a real obstacle to preventing the consolidation of protection conservation units. In addition to the difficulties of the federal government technicians in understanding what the babassu extractive activity is, the local ICMBio itself has been leading in a reckless way the organizational processes, which tend to make unfeasible the extractive reserves created in 1992.

The expansion of iron ore production, with the denunciations of slave labor in the charcoal industries, caused industries to become interested in the production of coconut coal from babassu. ICMBio, through its technician, led and encouraged the production of coconut coal in the area of the extractive reserve of Ciriaco. As the industries are many, and the production of coal must accompany these needs, this led to the indiscriminate collection of coconuts, even if the coal producers claimed otherwise, that they were producing the coal from the ripe and rotten coconuts.

The non-selective collection of coconut for the production of charcoal, with no care about the guarantees of reproduction of the palm trees, has contributed to the process of devastation of the *babaçuais* in the region. Despite the complaints and claims, the production of coconut coal has prospered and lasts within the Ciriaco¹¹ reserve.

In addition, ICMBio has also been insisting that the Ciriaco and Mata Grande reserves associations establish “partnerships” with the Suzano Pulp and Paper Industry, notwithstanding all the negative impacts generated to the coconut breaker’s livelihoods. Several breakers were forced to move to the “street ends” of towns or city outskirts, as the areas traditionally used became huge eucalyptus forests. In the Ciriaco reserve, as well as in several villages, the women who used to engage in the extractive activity of the babassu had to become employees of the outsourced companies, which render services to the industry, since they have extinguished the babassu. In seasonal periods, they are contracted to perform small services, such as: cleaning the areas, planting and caring for eucalyptus seedlings...

According to information and reports, these actions carried out by the industry have been used to disrupt the lives of hundreds of coconut, peasants, riparians and settlers in the region. In order to try to “erase” these serious problems, the industry adopts an aggressive policy of co-opting government technicians, organizations and social movement leaders. In order to achieve its objectives, it strategically contracted for the so-called “partnerships” a technique, a lady which was very close to coconut breakers leaders at the time when she was indicated to direct IBAMA in Imperatriz (MA). Currently, this person uses the social capital to approach the organizations linked to the movements of coconut breakers, mediating

¹¹ In the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve there are still other problems: the biggest one is the increase of livestock raising in the reserve area. Currently the president of the Ciriaco Extractive Reserve Association, who was a “cowboy” of one of the landowners, runs the association and enforces its rules even stating that “the reserve will become a settlement”.

small projects and interests of the Suzano industry. In the Ciriaco reserve, the industry has committed to the installation of a factory for the processing of babassu oil. Along with the coconut breakers in the village Petrolina promoted two actions: advised the women in the creation of the Association of Coconut Breakers of Petrolina Village; and formalized a contract, which authorizes the coconut breakers of the village to carry out the collection of babassu coconut in an area of their own property. Such examples, although small, demonstrate well this political strategy devised by the industry in favor of its economic interests

Strangely, in spite of the enormous problems generated by the Suzano Pulp and Paper industry in the coconut breakers' ways of living, the women cannot understand such an attitude by the ICMBio. "If ICMBio's role was to work on the conservation of forest products, they are doing just the opposite, since they are running behind such a partnership." If the industry is not directly involved, by imposing obstacles to the consolidation of the reserves, their actions have contributed to this process. The wages of the coconut breakers and the forms of cooptation used divide and demobilize the struggles and achievements of the movement.

In the region of Imperatriz (MA), coconut breakers leaders are skeptically placed on the model of extractive reserve adopted, since the dozens of legal devices that discipline their creation, in the hands of some technicians, have served to true partners. The leaders remember that they bet on the proposal, along with other movements, although they did not participate in the definition criteria of the areas, created unilaterally and authoritatively by the federal government, in 1992.

Currently, the difficulties of consolidating reserves can be understood on the one hand by the ICMBio's total inability to coordinate the process autonomously, without the interference of the so-called "partners", who insist on being associated with the discourse and the ecologically sustainable practices of the coconut breakers - although it is hard to believe that iron and paper and cellulose industries can earn this designation, "partners." On the other hand, the ongoing federal public policies to encourage commodity exports, with the support of state and local governments, have gone through traditional practices, as well as contributed to the destruction of livelihoods of the coconut breakers.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of the interviews, a brief questioning about if the struggles were valid so far. All the women stated that, despite all the problems, there were many advances and gains in relation to the struggle for preservation and access to the babassu coconut. However, they emphasized that the struggle does not end and that they are now facing more powerful “enemies”, who seek to prevent the movement from winning its main banners, which relate to the prohibition of landfill and the guarantees of access and common use of palm trees.

In the beginning, the breakers remember, the antagonists were the great landowner and his “jagunços”; not now, actually they are facing the large producers and powerful industries, both connected to the international market. The sophistication of the strategies, which involves the co-optation of the movement’s leaders, as well as the intensity, speed and size of the devastation, are proportional to this demonstrated strength, implying in a new action and perhaps new laws that can be more comprehensive and actions controller.

In this process, it is observed that the identity criterion contributes in a greater capacity of the social groups to exert political mobilization to claim rights. The organization and mobilization around rights constitute an important instrument to face the local situations, which are evidenced in the processes of disputes by the territories. The proposal of extractive reserve, in turn, far from being a consensus, presents itself as something to be discussed by the movement. It is observed that in the face of the internal (related to ICMBio) and external (the regional conjuncture) problems, the movement does not have a definite posture about the extractive reserve, as a viable alternative to access the land and the natural resources.

However, in order to strengthen its struggle, the movement has sought to share experiences, especially those related to the proposal of legal instruments aimed at the preservation, access and use of the natural resources. Along with the “ mangaba pickers”, the movement became involved in contributing to the discussion and elaboration of the Bill, which resulted in State Law n. 7,082, dated December 16, 2010. It is also observed that the actions and strategies of the movement have served as inspiration to many movements, such as the Bill presented by the “pasture fund communities in the municipality of Antônio Gonçalves, In Bahia, that

“creates the law of the free licuri or law of the oricuri, its preservation, extractivism and commercialization” (Municipal Law n. 04/2005). In the context of the “new social movements”, the role of Coconut Breakers in discussing and proposing legal instruments for the preservation, access and use of natural resources is recognized by a wide range of social groups.

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