

HISTORY AND MEMORY(IES) OF EXODUS IN PAULICÉIA (SP)

HISTÓRIA E MOMÓRIA DO ÊXODO RURAL EM PAULICÉIA (SP)

HISTORIA Y MEMORIA(S) DEL ÉXODO RURAL EN PAULICÉIA (SP)

Victor Hugo Silva Souza

Master's student in Agribusiness and Development at Júlio Mesquita Filho State University (Unesp) Tupã campus. Bachelor's degree in history from the Adamantina University Center (FAI) and in Commercial Management from the Adamantina College of Technology (FATEC). Secretary-General of the Network of Researchers on Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities (RedeCT) and a member of the Rancho Y-Îara collective: agroecology, education, and culture.
vhs.souza@unesp.br



0000-0003-0373-8257

Nelson Russo de Moraes

Associate Professor at FAAC/UNESP. Habilitated Doctor in Environmental Management and Education (UNESP). PhD in Communication and Contemporary Culture (UFBA). Master's degree in social work (UNESP). Leader of the GEDGS Research Group (Study Group on Democracy and Social Management) and of the RedeCT (International Network of Researchers on Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities). Permanent faculty member of PGAD/UNESP Tupã and PPGCOM/UNESP Bauru
nelson.russo@unesp.br



0000-0003-0159-9433

Mailing address: São Paulo State University (UNESP). Faculty of Science and Engineering. Tupã Campus. ZIP Code: 17602-496, Brazil.

Received on: 05.08.2025.

Accepted on: 07.01.2025.

Published on: 07.17.2025.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to understand rural exodus in Paulicéia through the memories of the local population. For this purpose, the qualitative research adopts Oral History as its methodology. In April 2024, a pre-structured questionnaire was administered to various social actors in Paulicéia, especially Black men and women who worked in the rural areas of the municipality between the 1970s and 1980s.

The memories surrounding the exodus speak to the daily life of a population that had once already left its homeland—the Northeast—and sought to (re)build it in the lands of São Paulo. However, due to the expansion of pastures for cattle ranching, they were expelled from one small farm to another, from one municipality to the next, until they eventually left the rural environment altogether and moved toward large urban and industrial centers.

KEYWORDS: Paulicéia; Rural Exodus; Oral History.

Se a terra foi Deus quem fez,
Se é obra da criação,
Deve cada camponês
Ter uma faixa de chão".
(Patativa do Assaré)

Introduction

The far western region of São Paulo state was the last to be incorporated into the productive logic of capital. The advance of the coffee/railway binomial an ideal of progress between the 19th and 20th centuries followed a structure: clearing the virgin forest inhabited by Indigenous peoples, selling the timber from those areas, marketing rural lots through real estate speculation anticipating the arrival of the railway, forming small urban settlements, and cultivating coffee these activities marked the beginning of the colonization period. In Nova Alta Paulista, a region composed of thirty municipalities and located on the Peixe/Aguapeí watershed, this phenomenon began in the 1930s (Gil, 2007).

Among the municipalities in this region is Paulicéia, located on the border with Mato Grosso do Sul, along the Paraná River. Founded in 1947, the city was conceived as a real estate development that would host the final stop of the Companhia Paulista de Estradas de Ferro railway line, thereby intensifying the flow of goods particularly cattle between the Southeast and Center-West regions of Brazil. However, a deviation in the railway's path, established after Paulicéia's political-administrative emancipation, redirected the expected progress to its neighboring town, Panorama (SP).

Other historical, economic, and social particularities are also noteworthy. Initially marked by a diversified economy based on small-scale farming aimed at supplying the domestic market, Paulicéia underwent structural changes in the countryside, which triggered intense migratory flows from rural areas to urban and industrial centers. Ribeiro (2015) describes Brazilian rural exodus as a violent process, the result of a policy largely indifferent to fundamental societal issues such as hunger, chaotic urbanization, unemployment, crime, and others.

While the interior regions of Brazil once served as vast labor reserves for agriculture, the development of Brazilian industry, especially in the post-World War II period (1945–1949) created strong demand for labor, generating favorable conditions

for the exodus and attracting large flows of people to cities that were becoming major industrial centers (Versiani, Suzigan, 1990; Vicenconti, 1977).

In light of the above, this study aims to understand rural exodus in Paulicéia through the memories of the local population. To this end, the research draws on Oral History, a methodology widely adopted by historians in Brazil particularly since the second half of the 20th century, which allows groups whose narratives rarely appear in conventional historical records to share their versions and truths, thus becoming protagonists and enabling the telling of "history from below" (Alberti, 2004).

In April 2025, various social actors from this riverside municipality, especially retired rural workers were interviewed. These include former migrant laborers, sharecroppers, and ceramic factory workers, who recalled their experiences of rural exodus. Their memories are intertwined with the history of the city itself, without clear boundaries between individual recollection and collective history.

Although the initial focus of the research was to examine the period between the 1960s and 1970s when census data show a decline in the rural population and a sharp increase in urban residents the complexity of migratory processes, whose causes precede the events themselves, and the nature of memory as a source, which does not follow strict chronological divisions, meant that events from earlier and later decades also informed the study.

In this sense, the demographic composition of the municipality largely composed of migrants from Brazil's Northeast and the state of Minas Gerais and the everyday lives of workers in both rural and urban settings contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied. The research also supports the achievement of Goal 11.4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seeks to "Protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage."

1 Paulicéia: northeastern since its genesis

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in the 2010 census, the population of Paulicéia totaled 6,339 people, of whom 784 (12.3%) were born in the Northeast region 441 men and 343 women. The vast majority

originated from the state of Alagoas, reflecting profound changes in the local economy that took place during that decade. In 2005, following several negotiations led by Mayor Roney Ferreira with the sugar-alcohol group from Alagoas, Carlos Lyra, the Caeté Mill began operations in the municipality. This transformed pastures formerly used primarily for Nelore cattle farming into vast sugarcane fields and brought hundreds of Alagoan migrants into the region.

In the early years after their arrival, part of the local population began accusing the Alagoans of disturbing the peace, causing conflicts, or even linking them to rising crime in the municipality clear manifestations of local xenophobia toward Northeasterners. This phenomenon is particularly striking given the history of the municipality itself, as shown by information from Paulicéia's notarial records.

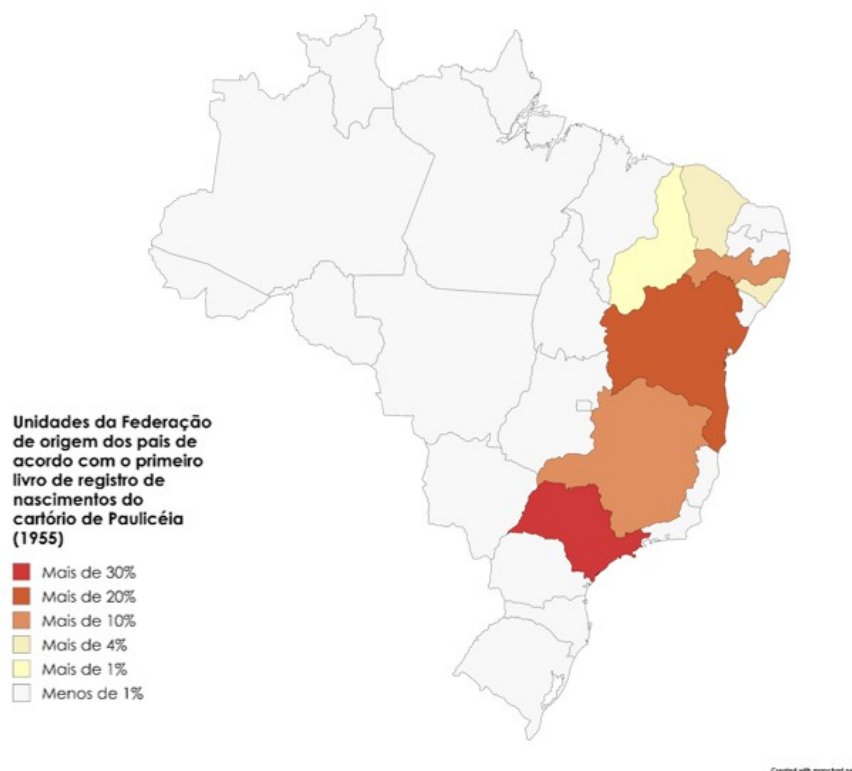
Civil records, especially birth certificates, offer significant insights into the demographic structure and formation of municipalities. Data such as race, sex, occupation, and the origin of the parents are often included in these documents, making it possible to interpret aspects of society at the time they were recorded. An analysis of over 360 birth records from Book A1 of the Paulicéia registry office, which was established in 1956 nine years after the city's founding reveals the origins of Paulicéia's population in the 1950s.

Although the information lacks the statistical rigor necessary to provide exact figures about Paulicéia's population considering that some individuals recorded were living on farms in neighboring municipalities or even on islands near the town, and that some parents registered more than one child on the same date, which affects the calculated percentages these records still offer the most accurate means of understanding the geographic and ethnic roots of the population of Paulicéia.

By summing the origins of parents from Northeastern states Alagoas (4.3%), Bahia (20.9%), Ceará (4.7%), Paraíba (0.3%), Pernambuco (11.7%), Piauí (1.3%), and Rio Grande do Norte (0.3%) it becomes clear that individuals from Brazil's Northeast already accounted for over 38% of all parents who registered children in 1956. This highlights the significant social, cultural, and economic influence of Northeasterners in the formation of Paulicéia. The figure below, based on data from the 1956 A-1 birth registry books, illustrates the Northeastern influence on the municipality at that time.

Figure 1

Origin of the Parents of Those Registered in Paulicéia (SP) in 1956



Source: Book A-1 Civil Registry Office of Paulicéia (SP), Authorial Organization (2024).

Minas Gerais (11.4%) also stands out due to the high number of parents born in that state. Data tabulation shows that most of these parents came from the northern and Jequitinhonha regions of Minas Gerais, near the southern part of Bahia, an area characterized by semi-arid climate. This suggests that prolonged droughts and widespread poverty in the region likely triggered this migratory flow toward the Southeast in the early decades of the 20th century.

Although the states of the Northeast and Minas Gerais together account for 49.4% of all parents recorded, São Paulo remains the federative unit with the largest share, representing 33% of those listed in the birth records. The presence of foreign-born migrants does not appear in statistically significant numbers in these documents, although among them, Japanese stand out at 1.9%, followed by Portuguese at 0.5%, and Italians at 0.25%.

In the case of migrants from Bahia, especially those from the southwestern and central-eastern parts of the state the vast majority lived in rural areas of small municipalities. These were large families with many children, reflecting high birth rates at the time. They worked in communal fields, practicing subsistence agriculture, growing crops such as cassava, corn, pumpkin, beans, and others.

Due to drought and scarcity, workers were drawn to the southern zones of the country, where the promise of work on São Paulo's coffee plantations served as the main driver of migration. Entire families left the Bahian countryside in adapted trucks known as *pau-de-arara* until reaching Montes Claros (MG). From there, they traveled by train to São Paulo's capital. Upon arrival, families were housed and fed in shelters. The state government of São Paulo provided the Northeastern migrants with tickets to leave the capital and move to the countryside, where agriculture was booming. Many Northeasterners eventually made their way to the far west of the state, sometimes reaching the border with what is now Mato Grosso do Sul.

Between the 1940s and 1950s, coffee cultivation dominated the region, but other crops like cotton and castor bean were also extremely important, especially in municipalities along the Paraná River. Many of the newly arrived families, having no ties to the land, wandered between various municipalities in the far western part of São Paulo, moving from region to region based on the availability of work on the farms.

It is important to highlight that during the peak of European immigration to Brazil, between the 19th and early 20th centuries, Paulicéia had not yet been founded — an important factor influencing the absence of European names in the records. Another key point is the social mobility of European migrants, who were almost always associated with coffee farming and urbanization. It is possible they registered their children in larger, more developed municipalities. Additionally, the relatively limited impact of coffee cultivation in Paulicéia likely made the city less attractive for these groups to settle in.

It is common for migrants, upon settling in a new place, to try to reproduce the cultural, linguistic, religious, political, economic, and social aspects of their place of origin. As such, Paulicéia was built upon a strong Northeastern and Mineiro (from Minas Gerais) foundation, which shaped how the local people relate to the land through agriculture, to the rivers through fishing, and to politics through a kind of local *coronelismo* — here transformed into the figure of the landowner or boss.

As more and more families settled on the farms, forming large rural communities, the demand for manufactured and industrialized goods also increased. This contributed to the growth of Paulicéia's urban center through the development of a local economy, including warehouses, bars, general stores, bakeries, and even a hotel together forming the urban space of the young municipality.

3 Urban sociability and labor dynamics in Paulicéia

In the 1950s, the municipal government established a laundry station—not modern by any means. It consisted of wooden structures near a well where laundresses could rest their washbasins and access water. It was in the city center, on Avenida das Indústrias. Women gathered daily to wash clothes on corrugated boards, also known as scrubbers, which helped remove dirt from farm labor or the sweat caused by the hot climate. This open-air laundry also served as a space for female socialization, where common needs were shared and a sense of sisterhood developed. A network of *comadres* (close female companions) emerged, supporting one another in various activities.

Food was typically sold in bulk or in 50-kg sacks at the dry goods stores. The white sacks used for packaging sugar, rice, salt, and other items were reused by the women of Paulicéia to make tablecloths, shorts, shirts, and more. Mothers and wives would boil water with *tintol*, a colored dye, and immerse white clothes in the solution to dye them, later drying them in the sun. This process brought a variety of colors to clothing and domestic fabrics.

Up until the 1960s, electricity was limited to a small portion of the municipality. Lighting came from kerosene or castor oil lamps, which occasionally caused accidents in homes. In 1966, the power grid was expanded using tree trunks from the cleared virgin forest as utility poles. Electricity was produced by diesel generators and available only until midnight; the entire town remained without electricity during the night.

That decade also saw the erosion of Brazil's democratic system following the 1964 military coup, which marked the beginning of the corporate-military dictatorship (1964–1985). The regime adopted a series of policies favoring agro-exports, weakening family farming and intensifying mechanized monoculture in some areas and extensive

cattle ranching in others. Within this context of political persecution, Paulicéia's mayor from 1957 to 1961, Kiro Sentaro, was arrested in Dracena (SP) by "revolutionary forces" on suspicion of communism. Other arrests took place in the town during this period, suggesting the presence of an organized social movement opposing the dictatorship, as indicated by a police report filed in Paulicéia in November 1972.

Pedro Alves Oliveira was arrested in flagrante delicto in the municipality of Paulicéia for inciting the population and promoting war during a rally held on the 5th. The offense was related to crimes against national security. The occurrence was reported to the command [illegible] in Lins for appropriate action (DOPS, 1972).

4 The expansion of cattle ranching and social and labor relations

From the 1960s onward, the landscape, initially marked by areas of virgin forest, followed by cotton and castor oil cultivation, began to be replaced by pastures, soon followed by Nelore cattle raised for the growing national market. This change led to alterations not only in the productive character of the municipality but also reduced the demand for labor on farms, which previously required a considerable workforce, especially during the harvest season.

In addition to the pastures, transformations in labor relations were also profound. The farms housed hundreds of families, and besides taking care of the cattle, in general, the farmhands had access to a portion of land granted to them for planting whatever crops they desired: pumpkins, corn, manioc, watermelons, okra, beans, and others for self-consumption, or even for sale in the local market, creating an alternative source of income. These crops were also used to feed the pigs, which were generally raised in pens made of wooden fences a few meters away from the house where the farmworker lived with their family. In the yards, there were also chickens and roosters that were allowed to roam freely, providing not only meat but also eggs for the workers' and their families' nutrition. While the focus of the farms was on cattle, workers were also allowed to raise dairy cows, which allowed for the sale of milk and its derivatives like cheese and curds.

These cows were almost treated like pets, given names, and would respond to their owners' calls. In the morning, around 6 a.m., the cows were guided to the corral with shouts like "Ou, ou, ou," followed by the cows' names, as they approached the

area where their calves were kept. Once the cows entered the corral, the gate was opened to allow the calves to join them. After allowing the animals to nurse for a few minutes, the farmhand would begin manual milking, with a wooden stool tied around their waist by a rope and a bucket in hand. Often, during this ritual, a battery-powered radio was left in a strategic spot so that the programming, especially country music, could accompany the milker. In the absence of the radio, music would come from whistles or songs hummed along.

Afterward, the cows and calves were kept in the corral to ensure the calves could feed properly. A few hours later, the calves were separated from the cows and led to small pastures, or paddocks, enclosed by fences, typically near the corral, to prevent contact with the mother.

The milk was then transported in a bucket to the worker's home, where it was strained through two clean white clothes reserved solely for this purpose. This filtration removed solid residues from the milk, such as grains of sand, small branches, and leaves that might have fallen into the bucket. Then, in a large pot or aluminum jug, the milk was placed on the wood-burning stove to ensure the heat from the fire killed any germs and bacteria. It was not uncommon for the milk to boil over during a moment of distraction, making the stove dirty and filling the air with a strong, pleasant smell of 'burnt milk.' As it cooled, a thick layer of cream would form on the milk, which was used in making homemade cookies. The milk would serve as the children's nutrition, as well as the base for the previously described dishes.

The wood stove emitted a dark smoke, which over time impregnated the house, especially in the morning, marking the walls and the ceilings with black stains from the accumulation of soot. Between June and August, when temperatures dropped due to winter, it was common for the family to gather around the stoves to keep warm, using the time for conversations, singing, and games.

Some small landowners whose properties were closer to the town center still worked as milkmen. After milking and filtering the milk, they would place it in bottles and deliver it around the town in carts, leaving the filled bottles on the walls of buyers' houses. These buyers paid a monthly fee and would leave a bottle of water on the wall

for the next delivery, ensuring that the milkmen always had containers, which fostered an economy based not only on community but also on recycling.

In addition to these secondary activities carried out by farm workers, they were responsible for feeding, taking care of, and controlling the herd. On horseback, the workers would go across the farm every week to count the cattle, using a notebook and pen. This activity helped them detect if any animals had been stolen, died, strayed into the forest, or had escaped, as well as to check the number of cows in heat or pregnant, and assess the health of the animals. It was also common for the cattle to break through the farm fences, invading neighboring lands.

By the 1970s, the use of tractors became common in Paulicéia, and besides the pastures, the supplementary feeding of the herds began to include mineral salt. The salt was bought at feed stores and kept in barns used as storage, gradually being made available in troughs, which were often made from tree trunks, placed under large trees in the pastures for the animals, especially during the dry season, between April and August. Some farms even began to prepare animal feed using sugarcane bagasse or crushed napier grass, sometimes adding corn bran to the mixture. However, the coexistence of cattle and crops still occurred, though in smaller proportions.

With the increase in pasture areas and the reduced need for labor on farms, workers were quickly expelled to urban areas, where they migrated to large urban centers, especially the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Campinas, Americana, and Rio Claro.

5 Ceramics, urbanization and exodus

During the 1970s, structural changes continued to affect the crops in Paulicéia. Across the region, coffee plantations, which were approaching 30 years of age, saw a year-over-year decline in productivity. Furthermore, several climatic adversities impacted the crops, especially during winters marked by long periods of drought.

The situation became even more severe due to the so-called “black frost” on July 18, 1975, when a strong frost destroyed all the plantations in the far western part of São Paulo, southern Mato Grosso, and northern Paraná. This unprecedented phenomenon ended the coffee cycle in the western part of the state, a cycle that had persisted despite unfavorable conditions for the cultivation of tropical crops since the 1929 New York Stock Exchange crash.

The Peixe/Aguapeí watershed, where Paulicéia is located, lost its largest and only reference in large-scale production. The scorched coffee plantations symbolized the rising costs of living and the grief that swept through the region, with the population decline sharply intensifying from that point on.

However, Paulicéia did not have an economy specialized in coffee cultivation. The local agriculture was based on what were called “white crops” – fast-growing crops, with a planting-to-harvest cycle rarely exceeding six months. These characteristics of the Paulicéia economy at that time allowed the damages resulting from the frost to be relatively minor. While coffee took about two and a half years to reach maturity, the species cultivated in the municipality took between 90 to 120 days to reach harvestable maturity.

With the decline of sharecropping agreements from the previous decade, the number of sharecroppers had drastically decreased. The plantations were now managed by large tenants like Lauro Sorita, Gilberto Garioto, and Antônio Costa, also known as Mocó, who rented the land from landowners to produce crops, employing a significant portion of the available local population in the role of daily laborers, with pay often made weekly.

Although large tenants represent a period in local history when most families no longer lived on the land they worked, they still employed much of the population that by this point had already concentrated in the urban area of the municipality or in small houses along the Paraná River. These workers often served as caretakers or overseers of properties, which were almost always owned by members of a regional pseudo-bourgeoisie. These landowners came from places like Dracena (SP), Adamantina (SP), and Marília (SP) and would occasionally spend some time fishing along the river.

At these riverside houses, caretakers and their families were responsible for the maintenance of rafts, fishing rods, hooks, and the cleaning of courtyards. Often, the caretaker’s wife was tasked with preparing meals for the groups of fishermen who would spend several days in the area, engaging in recreational activities near the border of the Center-West region. During the rainy season, from September to May, when the river swelled, the water would rise close to the houses, and even the

caretaker's children, using nets made from orange sacks, would fish in the backyard. At the time, the fish caught by hand were the main source of protein for the locals.

Castor oil, corn, beans, peanuts, watermelon, cotton, and tomatoes were the most commonly cultivated crops by the tenants. These products were sold in various municipalities in São Paulo and even in states in the South, such as Paraná and Santa Catarina. However, land speculation indicated the existence of much cheaper land for rent in southern Mato Grosso, attracting these entrepreneurs. In addition, many of the farms were rapidly converted into pastures for beef cattle fattening and, on a smaller scale, for dairy production, as was the case with the property of livestock farmer Paulo Tahara.

Another factor helping to explain the rapid growth of cattle farming in Paulicéia was the size of the rural plots, which were generally much larger than those in neighboring municipalities. This was likely a way to compensate for the low productivity of the sandy soil along the riverbanks, as suggested by the following citation:

In Panorama, Paulicéia, and Santa Mercedes, cattle ranching became the main source of composition for the Municipal GDP, due to the large territorial size of the rural establishments and the more sandy soils. However, in the first two, due to their location on the banks of the Paraná River, there was an interest in other activities, such as ceramics and brickworks... (Gil, p. 164, 2007).

As pastures expanded, the demand for labor in the fields decreased proportionally, forcing the population to seek jobs in the city. This was a reflection of the phenomenon happening across the country, pressuring rural workers to reshape their lives to urbanity, engaging in new activities in the economy and shifting their routines to the cities.

"My father started feeling sorry for us because we had to walk every day. So, he bought a plot, built a house, and told us to come live in the city. We spent more than an hour walking from work to get home" Oral Source 6.

The existence of clay deposits in Fazenda Buritis, explored since 1950 with the foundation of the Takayama ceramic factory, created favorable conditions for this

industry, primarily focused on brick production, to expand in the city. By the 1980s, there were more than twelve ceramics operating in the Paulicéia area, including factories that even used animal traction, particularly horses, for the production of adobe bricks. In addition to generating direct income, the ceramics supported a production chain involving the transportation of raw materials, helping to increase the fleet of trucks used to move clay from the pits to the factories.

The brickworks became the main generators of formal jobs in the municipality, employing especially former rural workers. The economy, once based on the primary sector, began to industrialize, following the national trend in the post-World War II context. The rural space also transformed: temporary crops, which were responsible for supplying the local area and other municipalities and states, gave way to a specialized economy, in this case, livestock farming.

At the ceramics, work followed a Taylorist logic, with the pace of the workers dictated by the machines. The person responsible for operating the main technology in the ceramic industry of Paulicéia in the 1970s/80s (as it still is today) was the "marombista," a professional who was in charge of managing the machine that performed everything from disintegrating clay clumps, controlling the hydration of the raw material to avoid excess or lack of water in the process, to identifying any residues that could affect the quality of the bricks until the final stage of shaping the bricks. Most of the bricks in the municipality were eight-holed bricks, mainly used in the construction industry.

Since the job did not require a high level of specialization, it was common for adolescents, newly out of childhood, starting from the age of 12 or 13, to work at the ceramics as "lanceadores" (brick handlers). Sometimes, parents working in this industry would bring even younger children, who also helped with tasks in these spaces. In addition to transporting and organizing the raw bricks, the lanceadores cleaned the pits, large mounds of clay next to the covered area of the ceramic factory, cleaned the kilns where the bricks dried, loaded the trucks that transported the product, and performed other duties, as suggested by the following excerpt.

"My father came home and told me and my brother that the next day we should go early to the ceramic factory because we were going to start working. I was about 13 years old. We had never worked in a ceramic factory; we lived in a shack, near the river. The salary I earned there, I never even saw, I just took it and handed it to my father. When it was time for me to settle and leave the ceramic factory, he was the one who did it, I only found out later" Oral Source 6.

One of the paradigms of the time was the existence of the "father-boss," the same person who had previously arranged for his children to work in the harvests of the fields, now seeking to employ them in the ceramic factories in order to increase the family income. Often, the adolescents and children didn't even receive their own salary, which was paid to the father, or when they did, the amount was immediately given to the father to cover the household's economic needs. The interpretation of the children was that they were labor power, and as such, should be used to generate profit, with the father-boss being the owner of this commodity.

Still regarding the "lanceadoras" (the workers who handled the raw bricks), it is worth mentioning that this category was predominantly composed of women, although men occasionally worked in this role as well. Although this was the group with the lowest wages in the ceramic factories, there was no wage disparity by gender in this particular job. This opens up room for other reflections about this work, which are beyond the scope of this study, such as whether the structuring of capital on the bodies of poor women was actually a form of inclusion into the economy, or a strategy to set the wages of the entire category as low as possible.

The next step was carried out by the "forneiros," who filled the kilns with the bricks and, after the burning process, emptied the chambers where the process took place. There were also the "queimadores," who lit and burned the bricks, controlling the amount of wood or sawdust, ensuring that the ceramic output was "just right," while also avoiding potential losses. These roles considered more technical/complex such as forneiro, queimador, and marombista were typically reserved for men.

In the early decades, the fuel for the kilns was exclusively wood from Mato Grosso do Sul, likely from areas where forests were being cleared to create farms. The material was transported by trucks. Later, the use of sawdust became more common. During this phase, the smoke from the chimneys of the ceramic factories created a typical landscape in the cities where this type of industry occurred.

Payment was made monthly, with overtime contributing to the workers' income. Additionally, at least once a month, workers were given "vouchers" or advances, partial payments on their salaries, which could create the illusion that their salary was higher than it actually was. Nevertheless, some of these workers understood that the vouchers also helped the local commerce, as the main buyers were the factory employees, who could buy products, including on the spot, more than once a month.

Many families left the city during this period. The low demand for labor in the fields and the inability of the ceramic factories to absorb all the labor force that had previously been trained forced hundreds of families to migrate to larger cities, particularly to the metropolitan regions of the state.

Rarely did migrant families take much with them, only suitcases with clothes and a few belongings. Since the municipality had been founded recently and much of the regional population was accustomed to working in various municipalities, providing services on farms throughout the year, then moving on to other farms, towns, or even regions, this movement within the interior was seen as a normal dynamic and not as a major transformation in the structure of Brazilian society, linked to urbanization and industrialization in the country, along with its most negative consequences: hunger, impoverishment, the intensification of the housing deficit, and crime.

"Many families would leave for São Paulo, Atibaia, Campinas, and other big cities. No one had much, most of the families were poor, and they hadn't lived here for long. It was always normal for people to come and go. Either you worked at the ceramic factory, or you had to find something else elsewhere!"
Oral Source 6.

With the end of the Empresarial-Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), the labor movement gained momentum throughout the country, and various strikes began to occur nationwide, demanding labor rights and better working conditions. Eventually, the issue resonated in the ceramic factories of Paulicéia, even though it initially caused some aversion.

"There was no day off. If the machine broke one day, would we take the next day off? Of course not! There wasn't anyone among us who understood that. At the time, we needed to work. We even started cursing Lula because of the strikes. He would say 'the boss should do this, that... why do we have to go out and curse the boss?' But later, over time, we understood that it was our right"

Oral Source 6.

Work accidents were common in the ceramics. Children, adolescents, and even adults often worked barefoot, without gloves or any other kind of protection. People lost hands, fingers, suffered burns, were hit by lumps of clay, and there was always the risk of logs sliding off during truck unloading. The structure of the ceramics did not have bathrooms or drinking fountains in conditions suitable for the workers' health, but with the struggles of the union movements, this reality started to change.

In the 1990s, there were many clay pits from which the raw material used in the ceramics was extracted. The São Paulo Energy Company (CESP) was completing the construction of the Sérgio Motta Dam in Rosana (SP), which would submerge a large area of the states of São Paulo and Mato Grosso do Sul. When the company announced this, many ceramics fired the majority of their workers, and most of the workers in the town found themselves unemployed overnight. The ceramic workers affected by the situation were all compensated, but to this day, the workers from the ceramics have not received any form of reparation from the company or the state.

In the 1980s, the start of the construction of the Sérgio Motta Hydroelectric Plant would bring about other changes in the dynamics of the riverside municipality. The realization that the damming would affect the ceramics' access to clay, the raw material that drove the local industry, created a feeling between the 1980s and 1990s that chaos would soon hit the Pauliceia economy.

Some of the ceramics even closed their doors, firing all employees, while others reduced the number of workers, causing panic among the locals. Landowners of flooded areas at the end of the 1990s were compensated, and rural workers living on farms along the river were resettled.

The economy, initially diversified and based on polyculture and temporary crops, was first replaced by cattle ranching and later by sugarcane, which spread over the São Paulo territory, creating jobs during harvest seasons and waves of mass unemployment during the off-season. This development model, based on a specialized

economy, remains a factor that hinders other activities from establishing themselves in the municipality.

Final Considerations

When evaluating the narratives from different actors, it is clear that rural exodus, a process that has marked many regions of the globe throughout their industrialization and urbanization processes, did not create specific memories of long lines at local bus stations or railway stations, trucks moving furniture, or families wandering, as represented in some crystallized perspectives on Northeastern migrants. The history of the city itself, with its different moments, phases, and processes, has always been marked by constant and intense flows of people arriving and leaving. The recent foundation of the municipality, at the end of the 1940s, contributed to the fact that migrants arriving in Paulicéia did not have strong ties or a sense of belonging to other places. The logic was one of transit, supply, and demand.

Where there was a demand for labor, whether to clear virgin forests, work on the crops, or "make pastures," workers and their numerous families would go. With conservative modernization, between the 1960s and 1970s, the significant change in this mobility was that there was no longer an inter-regional flow between rural municipalities. A new destination emerged, synonymous with progress—the big city, endowed with industries capable of absorbing labor, which once suffered from natural adversities, granting them the benefits of salaried workers when accompanied by luck, or the neglect and violence of the State, in the large urban peripheries.

References

- Alberti, V. (2004). *Ouvir contar: Textos em história oral*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- Gil, I. C. (2014). *Nova Alta Paulista (1930–2007): Do desenvolvimento contido ao projeto político regional* (2ª ed.). São Paulo: Scortecci.
- Ribeiro, D. (2015). *O povo brasileiro: A formação e o sentido do Brasil* (3ª ed.). São Paulo: Global.
- Versiani, F. R., & Suzigan, W. (1990). O processo brasileiro de industrialização: Uma visão geral. In *Congresso Internacional de História Econômica*.

Vicenconti, P. E. V. (1997). O processo de industrialização brasileira. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, Rio de Janeiro, 1977.

ABSTRACT	RESUMEN
<p>The objective of this research is to understand the rural exodus in Paulicéia through the memories of the local population. To this end, the study, which is qualitative in nature, employs Oral History as its methodology. In April 2024, a pre-structured questionnaire was administered to different social actors in Paulicéia, particularly Black men and women who worked in the rural areas of the municipality during the 1970s and 1980s. The memories surrounding the exodus recount the daily lives of a population that had already left its homeland — the Northeast of Brazil — and sought to (re)build it in the lands of São Paulo. However, due to the expansion of pastures for cattle ranching, they were expelled from farm to farm, municipality to municipality, until they eventually left the rural environment altogether and migrated to large urban and industrial centers.</p>	<p>El objetivo de esta investigación es comprender el éxodo rural en Paulicéia a través de las memorias de la población local. Con este fin, el estudio, de carácter cualitativo, recurre a la Historia Oral como metodología. En abril de 2024, se aplicó un cuestionario preestructurado a diferentes actores sociales de Paulicéia, en particular a trabajadores y trabajadoras negros(as) que actuaron en el medio rural del municipio entre las décadas de 1970 y 1980. Las memorias en torno al éxodo abordan el cotidiano de una población que ya había abandonado su tierra natal, el Nordeste de Brasil, y que buscaba (re)construirla en tierras paulistas. Sin embargo, debido a la expansión de los pastos para la cría de ganado bovino, fueron expulsados de chacra en chacra, de municipio en municipio, hasta que finalmente abandonaron el medio rural y se dirigieron a los grandes centros urbano-industriale.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS: Paulicéia; Rural Exodus; Oral History.</p>	<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: Paulicéia; Éxodus Rural; Historia Oral.</p>