

PROJETO QUERINO

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The podcast is produced by Rádio Novelo.

Episode 05: The Worst Bosses

Tiago Rogero: Before we start, a word of warning: this episode contains stories of harassment, sexual and otherwise.

I'm Tiago Rogero,
and this is the projeto Querino podcast,
produced by Rádio Novelo.

Episode Five: The Worst Bosses.

There was a soap opera that was a big hit in the '80s:
"Sinhá Moça".

It was set in a fictional town in rural São Paulo,
in the years just before abolition.

And the protagonists, of courses, as in any good Brazilian soap,
were white.

There was this character, the Brother of the Quilombo.
That was the character's name.

He was like a Zorro, a Batman,
this masked guy who'd go into the slave quarters and free the slaves.

Then at one point they finally reveal his identity,

and he was a white man.

But that's not even what made me think about that soap.
It's the final scene.

<<<<< TV flips on >>>>>

<<<<< people singing in Italian >>>>>

Abolition had been signed into law.

And this song was playing while they showed a huge group of people walking toward the plantation.

The men were wearing suits and hats, a few wearing caps.

And the women in linen shirts, long skirts, kerchiefs over their hair...

All of them white.

Voice 01: Oh my goodness! The Italians!

Tiago Rogero: The only Black character in the scene is Bá, played by the legendary Chica Xavier.

She was enslaved on the plantation, but she worked in the house, as a house slave.
During slavery, those women were also called *mucamas*.

And Bá had also been the wet nurse for the protagonist,
Sinhá Moça.

The only thing that her character says in the scene is this.
She's holding one of the family's white babies,
out on the veranda,
looking at the Italians who just arrived.

Chica Xavier: What are they saying?

Voice 01: I don't know, Bá.

Chica Xavier: What the devil kind of language is that?

Voice 01: It's Italian, Bá. Italian.

Chica Xavier: Hm... I don't like the look of them.

Tiago Rogero: Then she walks across the veranda, glaring at the Italians, and goes into the house.

And the master's daughter addresses the crowd of new arrivals.

Lucélia Santos: Tell them that they are welcome to Araruna Farm. That they will be housed as best we can manage for now, but we'll ensure that they can all build their own homes. Tell them that they may walk freely around the plantation. The children may play, but careful around the river. Tell them that after they've rested, I'll call them over one by one to get to know them better. We'll find a way to understand one another.

Tiago Rogero: She goes on for a while longer, then this music starts up, and the camera starts showing a bunch of feet

walking.

Bare feet.

Then the camera shifts to a backlit shot, seen from below.

All you can see are silhouettes.

But you can tell that the men aren't wearing hats,

or suits,

some not even shirts.

The camera finally shows the people's faces.

They're Black.

They're the plantation's former slaves.

The Italians got here,
and the Black folks are leaving.

<<<<< *TV flips off* >>>>>

What bothers me the most in this scene is this idea,

which is crystallized to this day in people's minds,

of this transition,
almost an automatic one,
from slave labor to free labor.

As if it had happened overnight.

As if it hadn't started far earlier. Because plenty of Black people had gained their freedom
and had been working on their own for a long while.

And as if Europeans had been brought over to finally overcome the ineptitude of Africans
and their descendants.

As if Black people were incompetent,
lazy,

as if the country could finally move forward,
not because they'd done away with the obscenity of slavery,

but because work
would finally be carried out by abler hands.

The magnificent European worker.

You know why they incentivized European immigration, right?

Since they couldn't exploit them anymore, the white elites and the authorities wanted to decimate the Black population. Whiten it.

And look, nothing against the Italians who came over, many of whom were poor. And it wasn't just Italians who came over; there were Spanish and Portuguese immigrants, too.

We know that many of them wound up being exploited by those fine rich folks. Working hard and making almost nothing.

But we also know that, in a country that was built thanks to over 300 years of slavery,

the mere fact of their being white, blue-eyed Europeans was a privilege and a huge differential on the job market, when competing with Black folks.

But what really matters for me

is that, despite what's crystallized in people's minds,

people didn't start working in Brazil when abolition was signed.

They didn't start when the Black workforce was substituted by Europeans, like in the soap opera.

If there's anybody in Brazil that's always worked,

it's Black folks.

Lucileide Mafra: I'm Lucileide Mafra. I was born in Cururupu, in rural Maranhão. It's about six hours from São Luís, the state capital. And my parents were peasants.

Tiago Rogero: And it's about doing away once and for all

with the idea of the ignorant slave,

devoid of knowledge,

an animal put there just to carry out orders.

The African peoples brought over from Brazil brought their technologies with them.

And that was the case from the very start, back in the 16th century:

they were peoples from societies with animal husbandry, for example, or complex agricultural systems.

On sugarcane plantations, many Africans were immediately made sugar masters, which was the most important post in refining sugar, transforming cane molasses into sugar itself.

The sugar master was a high-ranking position.

Or take the gold rush. At the start, people were basically just picking up nuggets here and there.

But a technique brought by the Africans changed everything.

They used sieves to filter out the gold carried along on the water.

And it was thanks to Africans that they began extracting gold from gravel, from the sides of hills.

Because they'd already been doing it back in their home countries in Africa, and they wound up bringing the technique here.

In Central Africa, modern-day Zimbabwe, the process of smelting iron ore had been discovered prior to 1500.

Lucileide Mafra: Until age 12, I worked in the fields with my parents. We never had Christmas, because we'd spend Christmas up to our necks in manioc, harvesting manioc to make flour. So we don't celebrate Christmas, I've never set up a

Christmas tree in my life. And at age 12, I came to Pará to live with my brother, as a nanny for my nephew.

Tiago Rogero: This German guy, the Baron of Eschwege,

founded the first steel mill in Brazil: Patriótica, in Minas Gerais, in 1812.

And the people working in it, of course, were enslaved.

And the baron appropriated a method brought over by the Africans: the crucible, which is a receptacle used to melt metals.

This German guy made a little adjustment to the crucible, which led to a huge boost in production capacity.

It was a technological revolution at the time.

Today, there's a bunch of books and engineering schools paying tribute to the baron,

who's known as the pioneer of the steel industry in Brazil.

As for the Africans who taught him,

we don't even know their names.

Lucileide Mafra: My brother was a sergeant, and he'd spend months at a time out in the jungle. And I lived with my sister-in-law and her mother, her family lived with her, in my brother's house. And so I had to wash the clothes for 15 people in that house.

Tiago Rogero: Historian Natália Garcia Pinto analyzed 244 ads for the purchase, sale, and rent of enslaved men published around 1850, in Rio Grande do Sul.

She found 44 different professions:

cook, painter, sailor, tailor, carpenter, blacksmith,
butcher, cooper – which I had to Google to find out what it is...

I mean: you can't say they weren't qualified, right?

And then there were the jobs that didn't require all that much training or specialized experience.

Because, after all, slaves had to do everything.
The masters couldn't lift a finger.

Lucileide Mafra: I had to clean the house. I couldn't eat their food. One day, the iron gave me a shock, and I threw it on the floor. It broke, and she kicked me out of the house.

Tiago Rogero: There are plenty of accounts by foreign travelers who were amazed by the extent to which slave labor was used in Brazil.

For example: there was no lack of beasts of burden, but the masters preferred to have enslaved people pulling carts.

And then there were the sedan chairs:
so that rich people wouldn't have to set foot on the street,
they'd be carried
from point A to point B.

An account by one traveler in particular is a perfect illustration of all this.
It's in a study by the historian Cláudio Honorato.

He says that this traveler, an Englishman, had spent a few days in Rio.
And one day, he was in a legal firm.
One of the partners picked up a little package and gave it to an 18-year-old, the son of a well-off family, who'd just started working there.
And the partner asked him to take the package to another firm nearby.

The traveler, who was watching this whole scene, wrote:

"He looked at [the parcel], at the merchant,

took it between a finger and thumb,
gazed again at both,

meditated a moment,

stepped out, and,
a few yards from the door,

called a black, who carried it behind him to its destination!"

Obviously, Black people weren't just working in Brazil as slaves.

There were free laborers, too.

After all, as we've already mentioned, even during slavery, there were huge numbers of Black people who'd already won their own freedom.

And those people were responsible for creating the country's first labor unions.

The union that's generally seen as the first in Brazil was founded under the Republic, in 1903.

It represented the stevedores at the port of Rio, who were mostly Black men.

Lucileide Mafra: Then I started working in people's homes, taking care of an old lady, cleaning up yards... and as a nanny. And since I had a knack for it, soon enough I learned how to cook. And at age 16, I was the head cook in one of the best restaurants in Altamira.

Tiago Rogero: The hallmark of the white, Portuguese, European contribution in all the centuries of Brazil's history,

the hallmark of their contribution
was, above all,

laziness.

The old story that slaves were lazy came out of a political attempt to discredit the Black population and legitimate immigration policies.

And the white elites were so lazy
that white mothers couldn't even be bothered to nurse their own babies.

And that's represented in the figure of
the wet nurse.

At the start, there was a belief that African women's milk was stronger.

Then, when the medical establishment solidified in Brazil, they started saying that Black women's milk was actually dangerous for white babies.

But the practice was so entrenched that white ladies kept on making enslaved women nurse their babies, just like Chica Xavier's character in *Sinhá Moça*.

It was a status symbol, having a wet nurse.

And it was a source of income, too: because when an enslaved woman got pregnant, she'd be advertised by her masters in newspapers, put out to rent.

The most valuable wet nurses were those who'd just given birth.

And you think those Black mothers were able to take their own babies along, to nurse them?

No way.

If a wet nurse came without her own baby, some white ladies would pay triple.

So, to make an even bigger profit,

lots of masters would get rid of those Black women's children.

Just get rid of them.

They'd sell them, leave them in the streets, drop them in the foundling wheel, where the Church took in abandoned children...

If you stop to think about it,
it's not that different from what happens today with nannies, right?

Not the part about getting rid of their kids, of course.

But how many nannies spend their whole lives taking care of other people's kids,

without being able to raise their own?

Or at least without being able to be as close to their own family as they'd like.

Lucileide Mafra: And that's when I came to Belém, to keep on studying and to work. Until I was 15, I couldn't even sign my own name, because my dad wouldn't let the girls go to school. And at age 16 I came to Belém and started, kept on learning, working in people's houses all the while.

Tiago Rogero: The nanny profession retains many elements from the era of slavery.

But it's not the only one.

In most cases, nannies also have to cook, iron, clean...

They even have to manage the household, the lives of the people who live there.

They're domestic workers.

A profession that by no means receives the remuneration

or the recognition

for taking on all those functions.

Danila Cal: The origin of domestic labor here in Brazil is slavery. During slavery, certain girls, certain women were set aside to work in the masters' house. And that work included domestic services, supporting the missuses.

Tiago Rogero: This is the professor and researcher Danila Cal.

Danila Cal: And that practice still bears vestiges of the colonial past. There's still a culture of servitude, that some ought to be served while others serve them. There's also a culture of delegitimizing that sort of work, as if it weren't honorable work that deserves to be well paid. It's as if this sort of work weren't even work.

Tiago Rogero: In Brazilian society, there are lots of vestiges of slavery.

Lots.

But it's hard to think of any professional relationship in which the bosses so thoroughly channel the master and missus

as in domestic work.

Danila Cal: There's a saying by Sueli Carneiro, who's a crucial researcher for our work. She says: domestic work is a heuristic element for us to understand social relations in Brazil. So, by looking at domestic work, you can understand a lot about social hierarchies and hierarchies of worth in our society.

Tiago Rogero: I don't know if there's anything more Brazilian than the middle-class and elite dependency on domestic work.

Danila Cal: There's another author who's key for us, Lélia Gonzalez. And she writes about women, how Black women tend to be seen in Brazil. And you've got the idea of the *mucama* [female house slave]. That's still a part of our imaginary. And besides that, you've got two relationships there. The Black woman is expected to serve the family within a culture of servitude and racism. But there's also related sorts of violence, sexual violence, for example. Thinking that this woman isn't just there to take care of the house and perform domestic labor, she's there to serve the family. In the broadest sense of the word.

Lucileide Mafra: And when I came to Belém I went to work in a house where I slept in the kitchen, in a hammock, and the boss would always harass me. When his wife went out, he'd come back and harass me, and I'd...

Tiago Rogero: Here again is Lucileide Mafra, who we've been hearing throughout the episode.

Lucileide Mafra: When dark fell, it was terrifying. And I couldn't say anything because she'd wake up, and I... I was afraid she'd fire me, and I didn't know what to do. Then one day I told the neighbor, and she said, 'Look, tell his wife.' When she got back, I told her. And she kicked me out. It was nine p.m., I didn't know anyone in town, practically. And she even kept my things. I only got some of my clothes, which she threw out onto the street. Saying I ought to be ashamed of myself, that I was making passes at her husband, that he hadn't done anything. I was 16. And I didn't have anywhere to go, I had to stay out there on the sidewalk.

And I went through that in lots of other houses. It wasn't just the one time. There were houses where I had to put the chest of drawers, or a sewing machine, up against the door because the boss did it to all of us. There were five of us maids, but we were paid a single minimum wage, divided by five. We couldn't sit on their couch. And I had to sit on a little stool because I couldn't sit on any chair except that wooden stool, so as not to contaminate them.

So I wouldn't say that domestic work is the worst job out there. But it has the worst bosses, that's for sure.

Tiago Rogero: And when people say that domestic labor is seen as something lesser,

something that's not even work, or considered as less of a job,

that's not just figurative. It's literal.

The CLT, the Consolidation of Labor Laws, which regulated labor relations in Brazil, was passed in 1943.

Domestic labor

was left out.

And it stayed that way for 70 more years.

70 years.

It was only in 2013, with the passage of the Maids' Amendment, which came under heavy attack from bosses, politicians, and the media,

that domestic workers finally got the same rights as other workers.

It took 70 years.

And it was only thanks to those women's struggle.

Elisabete Pinto: Just so we know that this victory for Black women, domestic workers, wasn't handed to them by a white man or a white woman. It was domestic workers themselves, Black women themselves.

Tiago Rogero: This is the professor and researcher Elisabete Pinto. She's the biographer of a woman who symbolizes that struggle.

Who started it all.

If it weren't for her,

domestic workers might not have those rights to this day.

Elisabete Pinto: Laudelina de Campos Melo is a heroine in our history. Not only did she make a theoretical contribution, she also intervened politically. She was ahead of her time, and on the front lines in multiple battles, in terms of labor, in terms of domestic workers... She was a woman who fought for her own dignity and for the dignity of Black people. Laudelina was brave, and she was brave enough to defend her own dignity and the dignity of her people.

Tiago Rogero: First, I'm going to explain why Laudelina de Campos Melo was revolutionary.

Think about the profession of a domestic worker today.

And I've been using the feminine form here because over 90% of them are women.

And of those, the majority are Black women.

Well, just think about that profession today.

Now, think about it 100 years ago.

Just imagine what the employer-employee relationship was like.

Elisabete Pinto: Laudelina was born into a family of maids. Like most of our ancestors, our great-grandmothers, our great-great-grandmothers... It was rare for any of them to have other opportunities. So Laudelina's mother was a maid.

Tiago Rogero: Once, Laudelina saw her mother being whipped by her bosses.

That was in 1914, nearly 30 years after abolition.

In 1936, Laudelina created what's considered to be the first maids' union in Brazil:

the Santos Association of Domestic Workers.

Elisabete Pinto: She was an extremely conscientious person. So she wouldn't stand for injustice or people being humiliated. When it came to work, she always worked, and always defended maids... In Santos, when she founded the first maids' association, she did it because they were in need. And seeing how they lived, she began to fight for maids and their rights, so that those women could have the same rights as other workers.

Tiago Rogero: Laudelina's story is so amazing that, check this out:

when World War II broke out, she enlisted and served in the Brazilian army.

She was in the patrol at a fort in Praia Grande, on the coast near Santos.

Then in the 1950s, Laudelina moved to Campinas.

Campinas, in case you don't know, is a city with an extremely racist past.

There were lots of coffee plantations,
and there are accounts of people being kept in slavery there up until 1920.

And in Campinas, Laudelina created another maids' association.

After the 1964 military coup, the association was shut down.

Elisabete Pinto: She was a woman among a bunch of men, struggling, putting the political pressure on. And she thought about education and health care too. She thought about things that even Black women in unions are only starting to think about now. For example, the health of domestic workers, and their mental health. She also addressed an issue that people don't talk about, which is the sexual harassment of domestic workers.

Tiago Rogero: She also put on dances,
because in the city's social clubs, Black people weren't exactly welcome.

At those dances, there were Black beauty competitions,
and debutante balls for Black girls,
when they turned 15.

Elisabete Pinto: Because Black girls from middle-families, from what you might call the Black elite in Campinas, couldn't take part in the white debutante balls.

Tiago Rogero: To think people say that racism in Brazil is less harsh than in the U.S. Here, we never needed laws to segregate people. Black and white folks were always separated, in practice.

Well, when democracy was reinstated, Laudelina's association reopened.

And after the 1988 Constitution, it was transformed into a union.

Laudelina died in 1991.

Before she died, she donated her house
to the maids' union.

It's the union headquarters to this day.

Tiago Rogero: Ok, we're rolling. First question for you all, so we can set the scene for the listener: where are we now?

Teresinha de Fátima da Silva: We're in Campinas... In Laudelina's house, where she lived for many years.

Tiago Rogero: This is Teresinha de Fátima da Silva.

Tiago Rogero: Did you know her personally?

Teresinha de Fátima da Silva: Yes. I knew her for about ten years, I think.

Tiago Rogero: And what was she like?

Teresinha de Fátima da Silva: You can't tell everything, right? I'm just going to tell the good parts [laughs]. In terms of the movement, Laudelina was extraordinary. I don't think that there's anyone in Brazil – or even in Latin America, because I went to all these workers' conferences – anyone who could speak like Laudelina could. She was a fantastic orator. And she had a temper, so she... people respected her. Wherever she went... She had the moral authority to dress us down, or any politician.

Tiago Rogero: And is that why you said you can't tell everything? That no-nonsense side of her?

Teresinha de Fátima da Silva: Yeah, that side was tough... (laughs)

Tiago Rogero: (laughs) How old were you when you met Laudelina?

Teresinha de Fátima da Silva: I was 20. About to turn 20. I'd never been to school, because my dad was the kind that was always moving from farm to farm, so you'd

enroll in school one day and move the next, drop out. If you put together all the days I went to school, it's probably about half a year (laughs). I felt really bad. And when I came to the association, it was a wonderful learning experience, talking to people, getting yelled at by Laudelina... that's how I was able to grow. That's when I got to go to school. I couldn't read, and neither could my parents. And I was able to study, as an adult, so I could dialogue on equal footing with everyone else.

She always said that schooling... the only thing nobody can take from you is knowledge. I went back to school because of the union, and I got a law degree. And that's why I'm able to support my fellow members.

Tiago Rogero: I'd already read the transcription of an interview with Laudelina, near the end of her life, for the Museu da Imagem e do Som in Campinas.

Laudelina was born in 1904. At the turn of the last century.

I'm always excited at the possibility of hearing the voice of a historical figure.

Because, unfortunately, that's a rarity in Brazil. If paper documentation's hard to find,

just imagine audio and video recordings.

Orestes Augusto Toledo: My name is Orestes Augusto Toledo. I've worked at the Museu da Imagem e do Som in Campinas since 1990. And my coworkers, the old-timers, one of them was Juvenal, the projectionist. He came and told me, 'Ah, out on the edge of town, there's an old Black lady who's a community leader.' I thought that was interesting. 'Let's go interview her.'

And when she received me, there were a few members of the board of the Domestic Workers' Union there. I hadn't spent 20, 15 minutes with her, when I realized that I was in the presence of a truly fascinating person.

Not just what she had to say, her experiences, her life story. What impressed me, and impresses me to this day, was her strength, her energy, her conviction. And that's important in video, because it's not just sound. You can see her eyes shining.

Tiago Rogero: Unfortunately, I can't show you Laudelina's shining eyes.

But her voice,

that, you can hear.

<<<< *tape recorder hitting REWIND, then PLAY* >>>>

Laudelina de Campos Melo: My name and birth: Laudelina de Campos Melo. Date of birth: October 12, 1904.

<<<< *tape recorder hitting STOP, then FAST-FORWARD, then PLAY* >>>>

Laudelina de Campos Melo: Maids had been left out of the labor laws. Because they thought, and they still think, that maids don't contribute to the country, that maids don't bring anything to the nation's economy. She might not contribute to the nation, but she contributes to her boss, because she's holding down the boss's wealth. She's raising the boss's children, taking care of the house, taking care of everything he has, and she's not entitled to anything. Most of the old-timers worked 20, 30 years, and died begging on the streets. Lots of them we took care of until their dying day, because they had nothing. No family, nobody. That's a vestige of slavery. Because they were all descended from slaves.

<<<< *tape recorder hitting STOP, then FAST-FORWARD, then PLAY* >>>>

Laudelina de Campos Melo: A maid, throughout her day, she does a bunch of jobs. When she works at a house, she washes clothes, she cleans up, she cooks, she irons, and everything else, right? And still she has no profession, she's not considered a professional. But she is a professional. She's a professional in the kitchen, she's a professional washing clothes, she's a professional making sweets, she's a professional cleaning the house, she's a professional taking care of the kids. When she's taking care of the kids, she's a nanny. When she's taking care of the house, taking care of the boss's things, she's a homemaker.

<<<< *tape recorder hitting STOP, then FAST-FORWARD, then PLAY* >>>>

Laudelina de Campos Melo: They only consider professionals people who have diplomas, who work in an industry, who have a name tied to a profession. But maids

aren't considered. They're relegated to a second class. Because they used to be your slaves. They didn't have a profession in your eyes, but they were born into the profession. Me, at age 7, I was already running a kitchen.

<<<< *tape recorder hitting STOP* >>>>

Lucileide Mafra: I remember that I worked at home in downtown Belém, and I'd buy those seven-day, seven-night candles, because I couldn't use the house's electricity to study.

Tiago Rogero: Again, Lucileide Mafra, whose story we've been hearing since the start of the episode.

Lucileide Mafra: They said I was aiming high, like a vulture over the fish market, and that maids are maids and nothing more. And that I'd never amount to anything. His wife was really nice, but she was really afraid of him. He was a retired officer in the reserves. And he'd stay home all day, pestering me. He'd make me wash the windows two, three times. My hands were raw from washing those windows. And when I got into college, I got into two colleges and brought him the paper, and I said, 'Look, I got in.' And his son didn't get in anywhere. He took the exam the same year I did, and he didn't get in anywhere.

I said, 'Sir, you know that saying, "May my enemies all live long lives, so they can watch me succeed?"' When I graduated, I made a point of inviting him. And I told the whole class, 'You know that story I told you all, about that boss of mine who said that maids were maids, and that I was aiming higher than a vulture over the fish market? Well, that's him, right in front of me, my guest of honor.' His face just dropped (laughs) down the ground. I know it was rude, but I had to say it, I just had to. Because I spent years just grinning and bearing it. He'd say, 'The only way for poor folks to move up in life is putting on high heels.' I said, 'I'm going to write my own story, ok? I'm not going to ask for anything. When I want something, I go and get it. I'm not waiting for anyone to do it for me.' I never let people grind me down. I always fought for what I wanted.

And ever since then I've been specializing, investing my salary in professional training, especially in gastronomy, which is a field I really like. And I've been improving my salary, always studying, of course. First I got a degree in business

administration, then in tourism. And now I'm studying law. A graduate program in teaching in higher education.

Tiago Rogero: Lucileide's story is incredible, right?

She got through all the classic trials and tribulations of being a domestic worker in Brazil,

and she came out victorious.

And how!

Right in her boss's face.

It's like that movie, "The Second Mother."

But in Lucileide's case, it wasn't her daughter who got into college.

It was her.

But there's more to this story.

Lucileide was one of the people directly responsible,
alongside many more of her fellow domestic workers,

for one of the most important labor laws in Brazilian history.

<<<<< TV flips on >>>>>

Voice 02: Good evening. The Senate has just unanimously passed the proposed constitutional amendment granting more labor rights to domestic workers.

<<<<< TV flips off >>>>>

Tiago Rogero: In 1972, a law was passed that gave domestic workers more protections.

Lucileide Mafra: Domestic workers had the right to a formal contract, 20 days of vacation... Of course we didn't have the same rights as *celetistas*, but we had some rights.

Tiago Rogero: *Celetistas* are workers protected by the CLT. And that still wasn't the case for domestic workers.

Lucileide Mafra: We couldn't even complain. No vacation, no end-of-year bonus.

Tiago Rogero: Then came the 1988 Constitution, which brought some advances. A mandatory minimum wage, paid maternity leave.

In 2006, they got the right to weekly remunerated rest on Sundays and holidays.

And just think: that was only in 2006.

Before then, it could be Monday to Monday.

But there was still so much to be done.

For example: they could be fired without cause and with no severance;
domestic workers had no unemployment insurance;
they had no set workday, much less overtime...

And then came the proposed constitutional amendment, the Maids' Amendment, in 2012.

That's when the controversy started.

Just think: the audacity of demanding rights for maids.
Of making them equal to other types of laborers in Brazil.

What now? Having to sign work contracts and pay taxes?

Only having a maid for 8 hours a day?

<<<<< *TV flips on* >>>>>

Voice 3: She's watching her soaps or something... folks finish up dinner, and after the soap she comes back and washes up... All of a sudden, that time she's washing up is overtime?

<<<<< *channel changes* >>>>>

Voice 4: So, what's the first thing? I'm going to fire her. I know lots of people who already did. Because I remember when I was a kid, the maids in my house, some came with me when I got married, my nanny came with me... I retired her, she died at age 80, she'd come in to get her little paycheck... She was part of the family. We'd fall asleep hugging her.

<<<< *channel changes* >>>>

Voice 5: In Tatiana's house, the nanny is paid R\$1,400 for 12 hours of work. The maid, who works from Monday to Friday, costs R\$1,000. Tatiana decided not to take any chances. Even before the amendment was passed, she fired her maid, who is now an hourly housekeeper.

<<<< *TV flips off* >>>>

Lucileide Mafra: What Romero Jucá tried to get out, what he said to the media was that there was going to be mass unemployment.

Tiago Rogero: Romero Jucá was the rapporteur on the Maids' Amendment in the Senate.

Lucileide Mafra: The congressmen started echoing him. We had a few problems at the start, with the maids themselves saying, 'I lost my job because of these rights you all thought we had to have.' I was in Brasília nonstop. I visited all 513 congressmen. Several times. There was one congressman I visited 118 times. He wouldn't see us. 'Until you vote for this bill for us domestic workers, you're going to see us around here.'

Tiago Rogero: In the Chamber of Deputies, the rapporteur was then-congresswoman Benedita da Silva,

a former domestic worker herself.

There were only two nays.

Two.

One was Vanderlei Siraque, from São Paulo, who later said he'd pressed the wrong button.

The other one... well.

To this day, the other one prides himself on voting against the Maids' Amendment.

And not only does he pride himself on it,
he used it in the 2018 campaign, multiple times.

Danila Cal: We have a president who was openly opposed to the Maids' Amendment. He was one of the ones saying that it would destroy families, that heads of household would no longer be able to take care of their families because they wouldn't be able to afford a maid.

Tiago Rogero: Here again is Danila Cal, who we heard at the start of the episode.

Danila Cal: In the public debate, there was this very strong narrative that this was going to destroy families. Because bosses would no longer be able to hire domestic workers, and so they wouldn't be able to carry out their functions properly. The household routine would be disrupted. Just think: a domestic worker wanting overtime. When you work in someone's house, there's no time, no coffee break, no dinner... And that's symptomatic of the resentment that left-wing governments in Brazil, especially the Lula and Dilma administrations, sparked in the middle and upper classes in relation to the ascent of the lower classes. The Maids' Amendment, which was passed under Dilma, is one of the elements feeding that resentment. That's a hypothesis of mine, anti-PT sentiment on the basis that this supposedly destroyed family culture. And considering the culture of servitude that goes back to slavery in Brazil, we know where that resentment comes from. 'What? What do you mean, nobody's going to serve me?'

Rosalyn Brito: Speaking of which, Danila...

Tiago Rogero: Danila put together a book about domestic work in 2021, alongside fellow researcher and professor Rosaly de Seixas Brito.

And we also sat down with Rosaly.

Rosalyn Brito: ...the Minister of the Economy, Paulo Guedes, puts that very clearly, in terms of 'now there's even maids going to Disney World.'

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Paulo Guedes: Tourism, everyone going to Disney World, maids going to Disney World, a big old party. But hold up. Not so fast. Go take a trip to Foz do Iguaçu, go to the Brazilian Northeast, there's all those pretty beaches...

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Rosalyn Brito: It's an elitist discourse. The elites, precisely because of that colonial heritage, they cherish the notion that they have to be served, pampered... The culture of hate that we're experiencing right now in Brazil, it's a culture marked, above all, by resentment.

Tiago Rogero: Now, if there's one thing our good old middle-class and rich folks in Brazil know how to do,

what those upstanding citizens really know how to do,

it's disobeying laws.

And that's what's happening.

Rosalyn Brito: It's clear that the amendment brought huge, huge benefits. And they're absolutely urgent in the task of making good on Brazil's historic debt to its domestic workers. But families continue to find ways to keep on relying on domestic work while skirting regulation. And I think that the pandemic just made it all worse.

Tiago Rogero: The first person to die of COVID-19 in the state of Rio de Janeiro was a domestic worker:

Cleonice Gonçalves, age 63.

She lived in Miguel Pereira, 120 km from the state capital.

And she worked in a house in Alto Leblon, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Rio.

Her boss had just gotten back from a trip to Italy.

I don't know if you recall, but there was a COVID outbreak there way before the disease came to Brazil.

And when Cleonice died, it made news across the world:

"A Brazilian woman got COVID on vacation; now, her maid is dead."

In May 2020, when there was no vaccine and even the scientists barely knew anything about this new virus, at least four Brazilian states had already put domestic work on the list of essential services, the kind that couldn't stop on account of the pandemic.

Voice 6: In Brazil, we had it made! Why? One person will do everything for you. Here? Ah, ironing? \$25 an hour more. You want me to fold things? \$25. Want me to stretch my arm out? \$10. So if you've got somebody in Brazil, just kneel down and thank Jesus, because things here in the U.S. are different. That's how it works, and when I first got here I went crazy. I went, 'Noooo, say it ain't sooo!'

Rosalyn Brito: Unfortunately, domestic work is one of the main sources of labor rights violations. Because the environment is ripe for it. It's a form of labor that's harder to monitor, because it takes place inside homes. When you hear about work akin to slavery in Brazil, that's what you see: how hard it is for inspectors from the Ministry of Labor to get into these houses, because they're sheltered from the eyes of supervisory institutions.

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Voice 7: An elderly woman was rescued from modern slavery in a wealthy São Paulo neighborhood. She had been working for a family for 20 years and hadn't been paid for the past nine. When she was found, she didn't even have access to a bathroom.

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Elisabete Pinto: Laudelina would be furious about all this...

Tiago Rogero: Here again is Elisabete Pinto, the biographer of Laudelina de Campos Melo.

Elisabete Pinto: ...she'd be furious at the president...

Tiago Rogero: They met dozens of times.

I asked Elisabete how she thought Laudelina would see Brazil today.

Elisabete Pinto: ...she'd be indignant at the poor Brazilians, the maids, who voted for the president. She'd be fighting and organizing to discuss the issue of maids, especially in the pandemic, maids being imprisoned in their bosses' homes. She'd also be naming names, because Laudelina called out bad bosses. Today, there are people who, to get around the law, sign a contract, but make the person clean two houses. For example: I'm your relative, we hire one maid, I register her as my employee, and she works two days a week at my house, three at yours. But she has to handle my house and your house. So that's exploitation.

You've got a maid, and you think she's your house slave. You make your maid buy your cigarettes, you yell at her to bring you water, if you have kids and they're fighting, you yell at her to break it up. And at the end of the day, after she's gone to the grocery store twice for you, which you were supposed to do; after buying cigarettes, going to the store, answering the door, bringing you your water, she couldn't do everything on her list. Then what do you demand of her? 'Ah, you really are lazy, you couldn't do your job.' So that's what Laudelina was fighting for. Domestic workers aren't butlers. They aren't governesses.

She wanted domestic workers to be proud of their work. And for them to be able to demand respect, because theirs is a job like any other. She fought for domestic work to be valued, and for maids to be able to do whatever they wanted.

A student of mine once said that she was really proud of me... I didn't understand why, because she'd stare at me... 'Does this girl not like me?' No. One day she said, 'I'm really proud, because you talk about your own story, you talk about your mom, with so much pride.' And my mom, Tiago, she was a maid. And I'm really proud of that.

Tiago Rogero: projeto Querino is supported by the Ibirapitanga Institute.

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On our website, projetoquerino.com.br, you can find all the information about the project, as well as additional content. Website design by Àiyé.

And I'd like to invite you to read the full suite of material for projeto Querino that's being published in *piauí* Magazine, on newsstands and on the magazine's website.

This episode drew on research by Gilberto Porcidonio, Rafael Domingos Oliveira, Yasmin Santos, and Angélica Paulo, who also ran production for the series.

The episode was edited by Lucca Mendes, with sound design by Júlia Matos, mixed by Pipoca Sound.

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See you next time.