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Julia Harnoncourt, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg:

Unfree labour relations in Brazil's Amazon region

Abstract:

According to Brazilian law, *trabalho escravo*, a type of unfree labour relation, has been considered a felony since 1995. In 2021, 1,959 workers were found to be working in conditions of *trabalho escravo*, which is the highest number in Brazil since 2013. As these numbers are rising, it seems important to look at the connections between this unfree labour relation and the recent changes in Brazilian politics: the coup against Dilma Rousseff (2016), the interim government of Michel Temer, and finally the ascendance of the right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro in 2019.

Unfree labour relations in Pará, a state in the Amazon region, that for years had the highest occurrence of *trabalho escravo*, are formed by local as well as global factors. It is thus important, to look not only at how this labour relation looks on the ground, at land grabbing and land concentration, the general violent situation and the power relations in the Amazon region, as well as at the changes in laws and governments, but also at the integration of the region into global capitalism. Finally, these unfree labourers are producing for the global market. Export products include beef, palm oil, iron ore and biofuel (sectors that grew especially during the Corona crisis).

The outcomes presented in this lecture are based on two series of interview studies, one done in 2014 and another in 2022, with experts working in the field, which allows us to closely research the impact that those political changes had on the labour system called *trabalho escravo*.

Bio:

Julia Harnoncourt completed her master's degree in history in 2012 at the University of Vienna. Her master's thesis, the outcome of extensive archival research, deals with population control in nineteenth-century colonial Algeria and was published in 2014. Her PhD thesis was also published. *Unfreie Arbeit: Trabalho escravo in der brasilianischen Landwirtschaft* (Unfree Labour: Trabalho escravo in Brazilian agriculture) is the outcome of an interview study done in Pará, a state in the Brazilian Amazon region. It is a labour history project that connects the local with the global. Furthermore, Julia Harnoncourt worked as a lecturer at the University of Vienna teaching Methods of Historical Research and Writing. She has published articles on racism, resistance movements against colonialism; more recent social problems, for example the living situations of refugees in Austria, as well as a book compiling different feminist texts. She also took part in international conferences for example in Brazil, Senegal, San Salvador, Germany, Greece and Austria. Since 2019, she has worked at the University of Luxembourg, where she researches Luxembourg's entanglements with colonialism as well as racism against people from overseas for the COLUX project.