

Humor and labor world: an analysis of the conflicts on labor relations in the "Ócios do Ofício" comics

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Abstract

The collection "Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício" brings together more than a hundred strips produced by cartoonist Gilmar Barbosa and published, among other newspapers and magazines, in the São Paulo newspaper Diário de São Paulo. Each strip in the "Ócios do Ofício" section critically and humorously portrays everyday work relations, revealing the contradictions, tensions and conflicts established between employers and workers within the scope of capital/labor relations. In this sense, the objective of this study is to analyze the strips produced by Gilmar in the "Ócios do Ofício" section and which make up the collection "Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício" launched in 2002 by Editora Escala, with the purpose of verifying the representation constructed regarding the Brazilian worker in the context of the capital/labor relationship. The analysis will follow the strip reading model proposed by Paulo Ramos (2011). Topics such as unemployment, salary issues, working conditions, as well as the effects of these realities on the family environment were explored through satire and irony. Exploring the specific resources to graphic humor, the strips also reveal some of the tricks used by workers to "survive" the challenges imposed in the context of the capital/labor relationship.

Key words: Comic strips; Labor World; Ócios do Ofício.

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Introduction

The comic strip “Ócios do Ofício”, produced by cartoonist Gilmar Barbosa, and was published regularly between the late 1990s and the early 2000s in the trade union section of the São Paulo newspaper *Diário de São Paulo*. The same strips were also published in several other newspapers and magazines – *Diadema Jornal*, *Você S/A*, *Profissional & Negócios*, *O Pasquim 21* and, even, in the newspaper *Vida Econômica*, in Portugal. In 2002, Editora Escala published a collection of some of these strips.

“Ócios do Ofício” is a strip that deals with everyday life in the world of work, mainly the tensions and conflicting relationships established between bosses and workers. Topics such as unemployment, salary issues, working conditions, tricks to deal with everyday problems, worker health, stress and violence, as well as some impacts occurring in the family environment as a result of conflicts in the workplace, were addressed by the cartoonist through satire and irony, characteristics typical of graphic humor.

Inspired by his experience as a cartoonist for the union press – mainly working as an illustrator for the newspaper *Tribuna Metalúrgica do ABC*, the official publication of the *Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos do ABC São Paulo* – Gilmar was the first Brazilian cartoonist to record the day in daily stories in the “mainstream press”. The daily lives of Brazilian workers in a critical and humorous way. In fact, the title of the strip is a pun on the expression “bones of the trade” which represents the hardness (“hard bone”) of working in the conditions imposed by labor relations in Brazilian society. In the author's own words, “the joke justifies the humor on a topic as serious as conflict in work relationships.” (Barbosa, 2004, p. 1).

We present the following question as a problem for this study: what is the representation constructed regarding the worker in their daily confrontations in the context of the capital/work relationship within Brazilian society in the strips of the publication “Ócios do Ofício”? Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze the strips produced by Gilmar in the “Ócios do Ofício” section – originally published in the newspaper *Diário de São Paulo* – and which make up the collection “*Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício*” launched in 2002. By Editora Escala, with the purpose of verifying and analyzing the representation constructed regarding the Brazilian worker in the context of the capital/labor relationship.

This collection brings together more than one hundred comic strips addressing general themes of everyday work relations. The analysis will follow the strip reading proposal developed by Paulo Ramos (2011, p. 145) which “starts from an analysis of the contextual aspects and then focuses on the verbal explanation of the elements of the narrative scene present in each of the comics”.

To delve deeper into the contextual issues that affect the capital/labor relationship –

¹ Translated by: Nicolas de Oliveira Santos.

particularly in the period corresponding to the turn of the century – we use, among others, the studies and reflections developed by François Chesnais (1996), James Petras (1997), Giovanni Alves (2000, 2001), Ricardo Antunes (2001, 2004); István Mészáros (1997, 2002) and Márcio Pochmann (2000). For reflections on the strip genre, in addition to Paulo Ramos (2011), we will count on the contributions of Maria de Lourdes Vinhal (2019) and Rozinaldo Antonio Miani (2023).

1 PRODUCTIVE REESTABLISHMENT AND THE PRECARIOUS WORLD OF LABOR

Conflicts involving employers and workers are a reality inherent to the logic of labor relations within capitalist society. This is because, on the one hand, the bosses – a generic name attributed to members of one of the fractions of the bourgeoisie, which is the business community – have as their objective the exploitation of labor to extract added value from the worker – a designation referring to each subject who, in labor relations, they are forced to sell their labor power for a salary – which, in turn, establishes an individual or collective struggle to avoid or minimize the processes of exploitation to which they are subjected.

In the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, during the last half century the world of work has been the scene of countless and significant changes that have had a resounding impact – and, in some situations, perversely – on the reality of workers. In Brazil, as it is a country that has occupied a subordinate position in the order of “globalization of capital” (Chesnais, 1996), the impacts were particularly severe and harmful.

More specifically, if we consider the period from the turn of the 20th century to the 21st century and up to the present day, we will see that, in Brazilian society, these times have been marked by intense transformations in the world of work, due to the process that became known as “productive restructuring” (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2004), causing significant objective and subjective changes in capital/labor relations.

This period has been commonly called “globalization”, because, in fact, we can say that we are living through the most planetary of capitalism’s stages. However, the word “globalization” suggests a univocity that, in practice, seeks to hide the contradictions inherent to capitalism (Miani, 2005). The use of this term as characterizing a new stage of development of capitalist society becomes, therefore, essentially ideological, as it intends to assert itself as the only possible perspective for current societies, established by the “single thought”, as well defined and criticized by Milton Santos (2000). In this sense, we agree with the perspective presented by Giovanni Alves in his statement:

Any reading (or analysis) of the phenomenon of globalization that does not seek to grasp its dialectical - and therefore, contradictory - meaning tends to be one-sided, not being able to see the phenomenon of globalization as either something progressive or regressive, or as a process civilization, as well as an advance of barbarism, and as the constitution of a “globe” to the same extent that it tends to contribute to the sedimentation of local and regional particularisms (Alves, 2001, p. 14).

It is precisely from this argumentative basis that reveals the inadequacy of the term “globalization” that we consider it more appropriate to characterize the current phase of development of the capitalist system as “globalization of capital” which has the “most advanced” field in the internationalization process in the financial sphere. Of capital metabolism, or as proclaimed by François Chesnais (1996, p. 239), “the financial sphere represents the outpost of the capital globalization movement”. Ultimately, this is a phase of capitalism that is defined by the supremacy of financial capital over all global economic dynamics, insofar as the hegemony of the capitalist accumulation process is based on the logic of capital that generates capital (rentism) without, however, producing wealth.

To lay the foundations of the process of globalization of capital, it was necessary to implement a new political doctrine of ideological support that could be capable of combining the most primitive capitalist interests of accumulation with the “modern” configurations of global society; It was then that neoliberalism (not without conflicts and contradictions) found its space for projection, dissemination and consolidation (Miani, 2005). Chesnais (1996) offers a solid argument to state that the neoliberal offensive – mainly exercised on peripheral countries – has become a decisive movement for the consolidation of the globalization of capital:

[...] without the implementation of deregulation, privatization and trade liberalization policies, international financial capital and large multinational groups would not have been able to destroy so quickly and so radically the obstacles and brakes on their freedom to expand to the desire and to explore economic, human and natural resources, wherever convenient (Chesnais, 1996, p. 34).

In an effort to understand the impacts of the application of the “neoliberal doctrine” in the Latin American reality in the last decades of the 20th century, as well as to explain its contradictions as a political doctrine, James Petras (1997), despite considering it merely as “a historical form of capitalism”, presents a very radical critique of neoliberalism. In this regard, the author states:

Neoliberalism must be understood as an ideology to justify and promote the reconcentration of wealth, the reorientation of the State in favor of the super-rich and the main mechanism for transferring wealth to foreign capital. [...] Neoliberalism as a doctrine of class struggle from above has a profound political, economic, social and cultural implication for the urban and rural working class, in all spheres of human life: it adversely affects the world of work and social and labor legislation; it affects the development of industry and production; he defines a foreign policy subservient to foreign capital; it undermines the foundations of education and public health; he promotes agribusiness against agrarian reform. Ultimately, its main beneficiaries are often part of the financial and banking oligarchy (Petras, 1997, p. 37-38).

The implementation of neoliberalism in Latin America was driven by the “Washington Consensus”, which was the result of a meeting held in the capital of the United States in November 1989, sponsored by the Institute for International Economics and attended by representatives of the US government and international organizations based in the US (IMF, World Bank and IDB), aimed at promoting the meeting of Latin American economists and representatives of governments in the region to report on experiences developed in their countries, with a view to discussing and evaluate the economic reforms undertaken so far in Latin America. Since then, the “Washington Consensus” resolutions have been taken as a “specific neoliberal prescription” for Latin American countries.

This entire context of consolidation of the process of globalization of capital and implementation of neoliberalism as a hegemonic political doctrine in the capitalist order was accompanied by a substantive change in the world of work, which was structurally affected by a series of mutations in the forms of organization of production and which was defined as a “productive restructuring complex”. Such changes were part of an offensive by capital to renew the historical conditions of capitalist accumulation, which required an adaptation in the relations between capital and labor. The circumstances and results of this adaptation, with objective and subjective consequences for the working class, are also at the basis of this phenomenon, which was consolidated worldwide during the 1980s (Miani, 2005).

Productive restructuring, understood as the offensive of capital in production and, therefore, intrinsically linked to the globalization of capital, involved a set of changes in the

productive system² that implied a reconfiguration of the way goods and services are produced in the world economy. This led to changes in business behavior, technological standards, forms of management, hiring and remuneration dynamics of the workforce, as well as promoting significant changes in the work process seen in the way workers relate to each other, with the company administration and with the machines themselves.

All the changes promoted by the productive restructuring complex were marked by a new pattern of capitalist accumulation, constituting a new rationality of capital in its globalization stage. This new pattern was substantially marked by the “flexibility” in the process of social organization of production and also in capital/labor relations. And it is within the workforce that this flexibility has become more evident, thus constituting the “predominant moment” of the productive restructuring complex. In this regard, Alves (2000, p. 25) asserts:

It is the flexibility of the labor force that expresses the imperative need for capital to subsume – or even, submit and subordinate – wage labor to the logic of valorization, through the perpetual uprising of the production (and reproduction) of commodities (even, and mainly, the workforce). This is why flexible accumulation is based, above all, on the flexibility of work processes, labor markets (and, also, products and consumption patterns). It is the flexibility of work, understood as the full capacity of capital to make the workforce tame, complacent and submissive, that will characterize, as we will see, the ‘predominant moment’ of the productive restructuring complex.

In Brazil, the application of new forms of organization of production and work was combined with the process of changes that occurred in the Brazilian economy and politics, implemented in the early 1990s, following the Collor government (1990-1992) and its neoliberal policy, which intensified throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, mainly with the neoliberal offensive sponsored by the FHC government (1995-2002) (Miani, 2005). Ricardo Antunes (2004) presents a good summary in this regard, highlighting the decline in employment levels and the intensification of the introduction of new technologies as perverse consequences for workers:

Therefore, from the 1990s onwards, with the intensification of the process of productive restructuring of capital in Brazil, under political guidance in accordance with the ideas and pragmatics defined in the Washington Consensus and followed here by the Collor and FHC governments, we witnessed several transformations, configuring a reality that includes both elements of discontinuity and continuity in relation to previous phases. This allows us to assume that, in the current stage of Brazilian capitalism, processes of enormous downsizing of the workforce are combined, in addition to socio-technical mutations in the production process and in the social organization of work (Antunes, 2004, p. 24-25).

In addition to the permanent introduction of new technologies, the new configuration of the production process derived from the productive restructuring complex consists of establishing strict quality control throughout the production system, in addition to promoting a centralization of the company in the core activity (final product), encouraging outsourcing practices in other activities of the production process. Regarding the organization of work management, companies began to encourage greater involvement and participation of workers in the search for solutions to

² Considering the logic of capitalism, the most appropriate responses to situations of productive instability at the time of the capitalist crisis in the second half of the 20th century were presented by the Japanese company Toyota. In addition to the introduction of new automation technologies, the adoption of techniques and innovations in terms of work organization was privileged. The set of these actions became known as “Toyotism” or “Ohnoism” (reference to the Japanese engineer Taiichi Ohno) (Miani, 2005). From this context came the “business ideological strategy” of starting to refer to the worker as a “collaborator” and, with this, intensifying the subsumption of the worker’s subjectivity to the interests of capital, to the extent that the worker comes to believe that his role in company is one of collaboration when, in fact, it continues to be subjected to the most drastic conditions of exploitation. The original strip, obviously, presented the frames in a standard reading sequence, that is, from left to right; however, as the strip was adapted to the format of the collection, in this case, reading must be done from the highest position on the page, following a sequence in the following order: right, left, right and left.

problems encountered in production, through Quality Control Circles (CCQ's³), promoting changes in the hierarchical structure, with the elimination of leadership functions to allow greater agility in decision-making, and also began to encourage the formation of a multi-purpose worker (not necessarily qualified), with a cooperative spirit and subjectively integrated and submissive to the interests of companies and employers, based on of the manipulation and capture of the worker's subjectivity by the logic of capital (Miani, 2005).

In the concrete reality of workers, the offensive of capital in production was perverse, resulting in numerous disastrous consequences, mainly chronic structural unemployment (Mészáros, 1997, 2002), the ultra-precariousness of jobs and wages and the violation or elimination of historical achievements of workers obtained from their union struggles (Pochmann, 2000). Regarding chronic structural unemployment, perhaps the most harmful effect among all the consequences of the process of globalization of capital, István Mészáros (1997, p. 152) states:

Chronic structural unemployment constitutes an unprecedented historical phenomenon and is characteristic of the current phase of the capital system. The social metabolism control system has reached a stage where it is necessary to expel hundreds of millions of individuals from the social reproduction process (from the work process itself). A reproductive system cannot condemn itself more emphatically than when it reaches the point where people become superfluous to its way of functioning. This is not a projection for the future, even if we were referring only to the most advanced capitalist countries. It is the glaring global reality and the negative and inescapable direction of the advancement of capitalism.

As previously mentioned, the increase in chronic structural unemployment – fundamentally, in the productive sector – is due to the impact of the introduction of new technologies, first as a mere automation movement and, later, as robotization, not to mention the possible current developments of evolution of artificial intelligence.

All these reflective considerations presented correspond to a generic understanding of the current stage of development of world capitalism, on the rise since the last quarter of the 20th century, and which reflect, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the region or country under analysis, the reality concrete of current times. The metabolism of capital adapts (impositively) to different specific realities and, as has already been demonstrated, is capable of facing its own crises and overcoming them, “renewing” itself in its forms of domination to guarantee the perpetuation of the process of capitalist accumulation.

On the other hand, we cannot neglect the fact that this entire historical movement of consolidating the process of globalization of capital and implementing neoliberal doctrine was met with a lot of resistance from the working classes. Social struggles were decisive in confronting the ills produced by the socio-metabolic system of capital; in particular, in the context of capital/labor relations, union struggles were fundamental in preventing exploitation processes from reaching even more intense, violent and inhumane levels.

Considering that our purpose in presenting these reflections aims to offer historical-contextual elements that will support our analysis of the strips produced by Gilmar Barbosa, it is worth highlighting that the iconographic production to be analyzed is dated, precisely, from the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, the most intense period of the neoliberal offensive in Brazil and the consolidation of the productive restructuring complex within the scope of the organization of production and work in the Brazilian productive sector.

It is also worth highlighting that Gilmar Barbosa was a cartoonist for the union press, working at the Metalworkers Union of ABC São Paulo between 1990 and 1996, and that it was

³From this context came the “business ideological strategy” of starting to refer to the worker as a “collaborator” and, with this, intensifying the subsumption of the worker's subjectivity to the interests of capital, to the extent that the worker comes to believe that his role in company is one of collaboration when, in fact, it continues to be subjected to the most drastic conditions of exploitation.

precisely his activity as an illustrator for the newspaper “Tribuna Metalúrgica do ABC” that gave him the inspiration for the production of the strips in the “Ócios do Ofício” section, as the cartoonist himself stated: “It was where I found my path and drew inspiration for the work I do to this day. It was the Union that triggered my entire career.” (Barbosa, 2004, p. 1). In fact, the strips were published in the union section of the São Paulo newspaper *Diário de São Paulo* and, in this sense, were predominantly aimed at working readers.

2 A CRITICAL AND GOOD HUMORED DEPICTION OF THE LABOR WORLD

As a cartoonist for the union press for more than a decade, Gilmar Barbosa accumulated very satisfactory knowledge about the daily universe of workers, their challenges, their conflicts, their dramas, their struggles. His production aimed at the union press was, fundamentally, cartoons, conceived as a form of graphic humor (Miani, 2023). In this context, their productions invariably met the union's political objectives, offering a communicative strategy of an iconographic nature to denounce, with playfulness and humor, the impasses and conflicts in the capital/labor relationship, or even, to express political-ideological positions. Of the respective union board on topics related to the world of work or the national and international socio-political situation.

On the other hand, Gilmar Barbosa boosted his career as an illustrator by producing for several other organizations and, mainly, developing an authorial career with emphasis on the production of cartoons and comic strips. In this context, Gilmar was awarded in the main humor salons in the country, among them, *Salão Internacional de Humor de Piracicaba*, *Salão Carioca de Humor* and *Salão Nacional de Humor de Ribeirão Preto*, in addition to being elected “Best Brazilian cartoonist of the year” for the HQ Mix Trophy (2003). Gilmar also received the Vladimir Herzog Amnesty and Human Rights Award in the “Arts” category (2006) and had his caricature “Charlie Hebdo” ranked third in the Khartoum Festival Award (2015). Among his authorial works, we highlight: *To Read When the Boss Isn't Looking* (Devir, 2004); *Pau Pra Toda Obra* (Devir, 2005), *Caroço no Angu* (Devir, 2009), *Mistifório* (Boitatá, 2014) and, obviously, “*Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício*” (Barbosa, 2002), the object of our analysis (Gilmar, 2017, p. 1).

Regarding the strip “*Ócios do Ofício*”, Gilmar Barbosa published regularly in the newspaper *Diário de São Paulo* between the final years of the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s. Of the several hundred strips produced, around 120 were selected to compose the collection “*Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício*”. In this sense, it is necessary to demarcate that the nature of our object of study is a cartoon production, in the format of a comic strip, and that its production context is publication as a collection (Miani, 2023). Therefore, the analysis will not address the intertextual elements relating to the original moment of its publication, but only the intertextualities inherent to the condition of strips published in a collection, as explained by Rozinaldo Antonio Miani when dealing with cartoons, but which is entirely valid for the specificity of the strips in question:

Regardless of whether a given cartoon was originally published in a specific newspaper or magazine, [...] the intertextual relationships to be necessarily considered in the analysis must start from its condition as a “selected” and “gathered” cartoon in an autonomous editorial production, which has its own historicity and intentions (Miani, 2023, p. 105).

“*Ócios do Ofício*” are strips that predominantly fulfill the discursive-narrative purpose of the cartoon. These are stories set in or making reference to situations or themes relating to the world of work, preferably exploring the worker's perspective or explaining the employers' intentions in relation to their interests to the detriment of workers' rights. To this end, generic characters are used, exploring stereotypical elements that, in several situations, end up being repeated, but which do not constitute fixed characters, with the exception of the dog Rex who,

despite generally appearing as a supporting character, has a recurring presence in the stories.

In general, we can define “Ócios do Ofício” as a comic strip because it meets the two main characteristics of the aforementioned type of graphic humor, as presented by Paulo Ramos (2011), namely, the format, as it is a constructed story due to the sequence of a few comics, and the fact that it constitutes a “humorous narrative with an unexpected outcome” (Ramos, 2011, p. 97). Originally, the strip “Ócios do Ofício” appeared on the newspaper page in a horizontal sequence, as highlighted by Ramos (2011) as characteristic of the comic strip; however, to adapt to the structure of a collection, the comics from each strip appear in the work “Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício” distributed on a specific page of the publication according to the best organization of the story and, also, to streamline the layout and facilitate reading. Still regarding the recognition of “Ócios do Ofício” as a comic strip, it is worth highlighting the characterization presented by Maria de Lourdes Vinhal (2019, p. 41):

The strip is a media text that took on a life of its own in autonomous magazines, consolidated itself on the pages of newspapers, provoking reflections on both trivialities and serious issues in the world, with its characters that imitate us, bringing entertainment, questioning, denunciation and even self-criticism, on the pages of magazines, newspapers or on the Web, through social networks, websites, blogs and others.

In order to analyze the strips published in the collection “Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício” the methodological procedures presented by Ramos (2011) will be considered as the main reference, with some considerations due to the limitations established for the production of this article. For the aforementioned author, reading strips requires, beforehand, that the historical contextualization of the respective text to be analyzed be explained, as well as identifying which is the “dominant text”. Next, to complete the process of constructing meaning, an analytical explanation of the verbal and non-verbal elements contained in the narrative scene must be carried out, considering the elements of “articulation of signs within the comics and between one comic and another” (Ramos, 2011, p. 145).

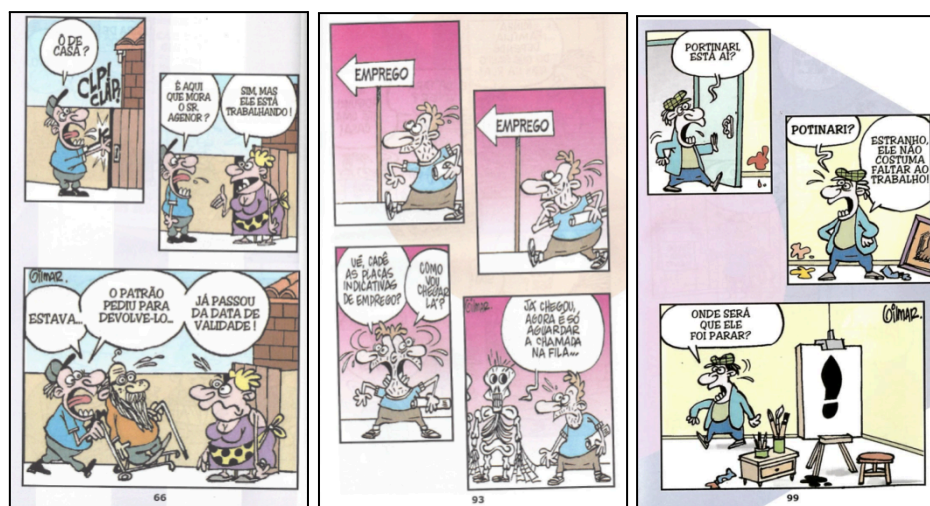
In relation to historical contextualization, all strips selected for analysis must consider the elements of the socio-political, economic and cultural situation already developed previously, in which we present the corresponding configuration of the world of work that was portrayed in the production of Gilmar's strips, as well as the fact that they are strips by a single artist selected to compose a collection, therefore, fulfilling a function, predominantly, of a “historical source” (Miani, 2023).

To characterize the “determinant of the text”, we will consider the specific themes to which each of the strips refers, recognizing that, contextually, they concern the consequences of the process of “productive restructuring” that intensified the ultra-precariousness of the world of work; therefore, we will have strips related to the theme of unemployment, the impact of new technologies on the work environment and worker health.

Considering the stages of the strip reading method proposed by Ramos (2011), we will refrain from describing the visual and verbal elements inferred from each strip, at the level of detail suggested by the author, just for the sake of optimizing the space available for the production of this article, but we recognize that this is a pertinent step in the logic of the proposed method.

The first set of strips to be analyzed presents the theme of unemployment as the “dominant theme of the text”, whether as a result of arbitrary dismissal committed by the boss or exploring the perverse situation of those looking for a job.

Figure 1 - Sequence of comic strips about unemployment



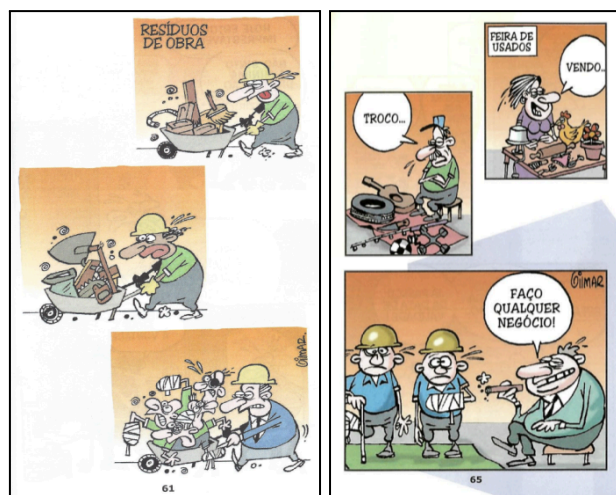
Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 66, 93, 99).

In the first strip, the scene begins with a person knocking on the door of a house and then being greeted by a woman who, when asked if that was where Mr. Agenor responded saying he would be working. The unexpected outcome occurs when that person reveals himself to be a delivery man who arrives pushing Mr. Agenor in a manual loading cart and informs that it was being returned by the boss because it was past its “expiration date”. In the next strip, we see a sequence of two frames with very similar images of a person walking guided by a sign indicating “employment”, which indicates that he is an unemployed worker; in the third frame, this person appears “disoriented” as he no longer sees the aforementioned job board. The unexpected outcome is portrayed by the image of the worker amazed at seeing the skeleton of a person informing him that he had arrived where he intended, but that he should “wait for the call in line”. Finally, in the last strip of this sequence, the story begins with the arrival of a person calling for someone they know (Portinari) and, subsequently, reinforcing the call and appearing surprised by his absence knowing that he didn’t usually miss work, This is related to artistic activity. In this case, the strategy used to end the story was to show a symbol that is very peculiar in the everyday world of workers, that is, the sole of a foot in reference to the expression commonly known as “foot in the ass”; the aforementioned symbol refers to “one of the most common iconographic representations to indicate the presence of unemployment in the daily lives” of workers (Miani, 2005, p. 320).

The perversity of unemployment is portrayed in these strips either by explaining the arbitrariness committed by countless employers who simply dismiss workers for the most spurious reasons possible, as in the case of the first strip which shows a worker who was fired due to his old age, or for showing the dramatic situation of job seekers who, sometimes, spend months or even years in search of a job opening that is, at least, compatible with their respective qualifications or experience and also that is worthy in terms of meeting your real needs.

Dumping workers into unemployment is just one of the consequences of conflicts in capital/labor relations. The fact is that the treatment given by certain employers in the face of the levels of exploitation imposed becomes absolutely inhumane, leading such employers to promote the “discarding” of workers after squeezing their work capacity to the maximum, as portrayed in the sequence of strips below.

Figure 2 - Sequence of comic strips about the “Dumping’ of workers



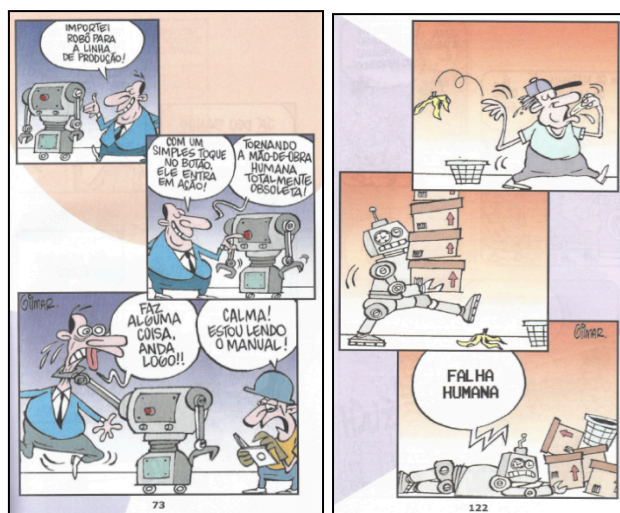
Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 61, 65).

In the first strip of this sequence, we see a construction worker wielding a wheelbarrow loaded with construction waste, an image repeated in the second panel in which another worker performs the same type of action. Finally, in the last frame, the scene is repeated, however, this time, the residue to be discarded are people looking “destroyed and in pieces”, bruised and injured, supposedly as a result of the overexploitation suffered, and whoever pushes the wheelbarrow has the appearance of a boss, based on his clothing and, mainly, because he is wearing a tie. In the next strip we have a portrayal of scenes related to the famous practice of “second-hand fairs” where people offer their products for sale or exchange; This is precisely what we see in the first two frames. In the final picture, however, the unexpected thing is that the “business” offered is injured workers and their seller, the boss, announces that he will do “any business”.

These strips represent more than the human disrespect practiced by certain bosses against workers; they explain the meaning of disposable merchandise attributed to workers who, for various reasons, are no longer of interest to bosses, offering the reader, in a playful and humorous way, an opportunity to reflect on the ills of capitalism.

In the context of productive restructuring, one of the most significant changes in the forms of production seen since the end of the 20th century was the introduction and dissemination of new microelectronic-based technologies and, more recently, robotization. In this sense, “the use of automated and computer-controlled machines and equipment, including robots, represented a transfer of work capacity from man to machine” (Miani, 2005, p. 361). This situation was also portrayed by Gilmar in some of his strips.

Figure 3 - Sequence of comic strips about the introduction of new technologies



Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 73, 122).

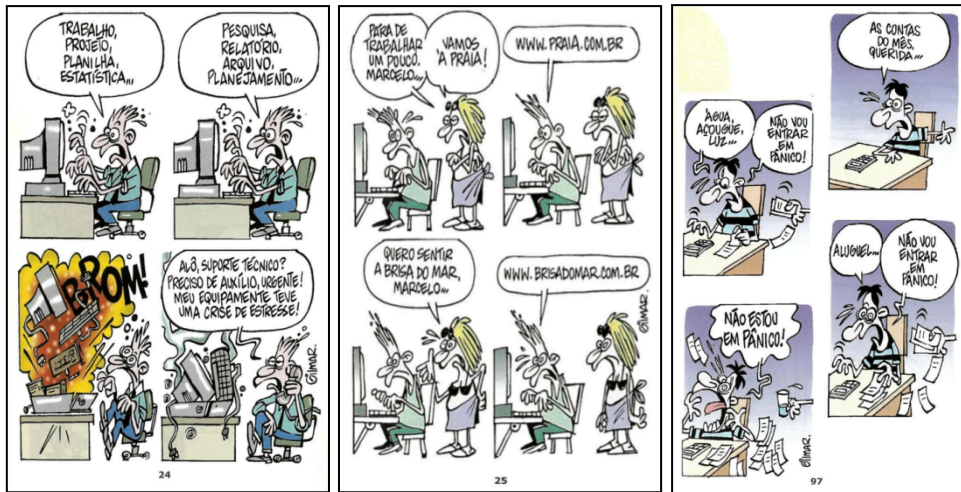
The problem of new technologies is portrayed in the first strip of this sequence, especially in verbal discourse; In the first frame, we see a boss commenting that he had imported a robot and, continuing his reasoning in the second frame, states that in addition to being simple to use, it would also make “human labor completely obsolete”. The unusual outcome is that, when activated, the robot held the boss by the neck insinuating that it would discard him as something “obsolete”. In the next strip, we see a worker eating a banana and carelessly throwing away the peel; In the next frame, a robot moves holding a stack of boxes and does not notice that the banana peel is thrown on the floor. In the final frame, the robot appears fallen, evidently having slipped on the banana peel, and announces that it was a “human error”.

The disposability of human beings in the face of the introduction of robots, especially in the context of social relations of production, represents a contradiction in relation to the importance of developing productive forces in the service of social interests; This is a typical aspect of the socio-metabolic system of capital, which even attributes the occurrence of any failures or problems arising from the use of these machines to human beings themselves.

It is worth noting that, in the first strip of the sequence, Gilmar Barbosa calls into question the idea that only workers will be affected – that is, considered “obsolete” – with the introduction of robots (and, we can also include artificial intelligence here). The destructive logic of capital does not exempt even those who position themselves as its defenders and can, in this sense, turn against anyone and anything that presents itself as an obstacle to its unbridled advance in search of the intensification of capitalist accumulation processes.

All the implications resulting from conflicts in the capital/labor relationship manifest themselves, in some way, in the daily lives of workers. Among the most serious, we highlight the impacts produced on the physical and psychological health of the worker and also on the dynamics of their family life; this is the “dominant text” in the strips to be analyzed in the next sequence.

Figure 4 - Sequence of comic strips about the impacts on workers' health



Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 24, 25, 97).

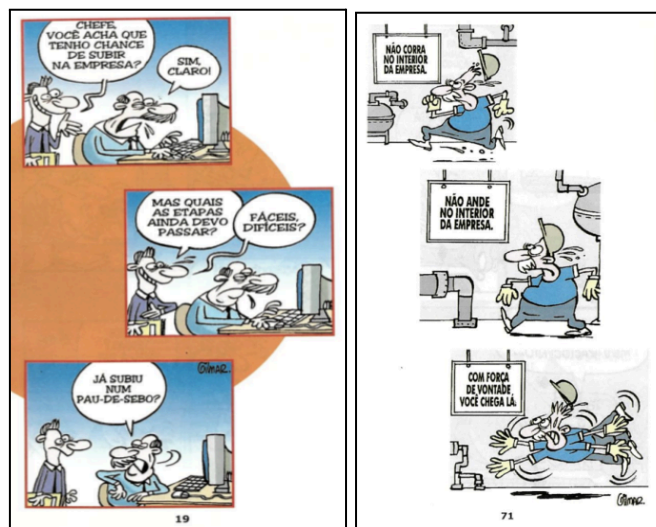
The first strip of this sequence shows, in its first two frames, a worker in a complete state of agitation, at his work table, reporting out loud his demands to be fulfilled; apparently, he shows distress in the face of so much work and carries it out very quickly, as can be seen from the duplicated representation of his hands in movement. In the third frame there is an explosion on his computer that could represent a reason for absolute despair; however, the unusual outcome occurs when the worker makes a call to technical support informing that the computer (and not he, the worker) had a “stress crisis”. In the next strip, apparently the same worker is also portrayed in a work situation, only this time in a family environment; while he works, a woman in a swimsuit tries to convince him to leave work and accompany her to the beach. In this strip, the comic outcome occurs in two stages, at the end of each attempt to remove him from work; By identifying the two central terms in the woman's speech, the worker associates it with the need to locate them as internet sites (www.praia.com.br and www.brisadomar.com.br), implying that he was, in an alienated way, doing some research work on the internet.

In these two strips, the apparent state of agitation, tension and stress of the worker was the comical way that Gilmar used to explain the “irrationality” that has taken over the environment or work demands, causing stress, depression and other attacks against the general health of the worker, both physical, mental and psychological, mainly due to the high levels of exploitation and pressure suffered in daily work.

The worsening of this exploitation has a violent impact on the family reality, as low wages and the high cost of living impact on the psychological health of a worker who, upon finding himself unable to pay all his debts, invariably tends to enter into in panic, causing even more effects on their mental health. This is the “dominant theme of the text” evidenced in the last strip of the sequence in figure 4, where we see a worker carrying out his monthly accounts and, upon realizing his dramatic reality, tries to convince himself that he should not panic. , but who, in the final frame, contradictorily appears in a panic situation while verbalizing that he is not panicking; including this painting that brings a paradox between the verbal and visual elements that give the unusual ending to the strip.

The new forms of production management, as a result of the implementation of the productive restructuring complex, were producing objective conditions for taking the worker's subjectivity to the interests of capital through discourses based on the ideas of cooperation and collaboration. This had repercussions on workers' actions to increasingly place themselves at the disposal of employers' interests. In this sense, the subsumption of the worker's subjectivity to the socio-metabolic system of capital is “the dominant feature of the text” in the two strips presented in the following sequence.

Figure 5 - Sequence of comic strips about the subsumption of worker subjectivity to the capital



Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 19, 71).

In the first strip of this sequence we see a worker questioning his boss about the possible chances he would have of “moving up in the company”; which has a positive response in return; In the second frame, the worker insists on knowing what steps he would still have to go through and whether they would be easy or difficult. At the end of the strip, the boss turns to the worker and offers the answer to the question: “have you ever climbed a tallow stick?” Obviously, this is contradictory to the initial response and produces a comical effect, in that facing the climb on a tallow stick, which is one of the most challenging attractions at folkloric festivals or gymkhanas, generally results in frustration or disaster. With this, the meaning is that the worker would have almost no chance in achieving his goals. In turn, in the second strip we see, in the first two frames, a sequence in which a worker finds himself “controlled” by instructions spread throughout the company indicating how he should behave “within the company”. In the final picture, however, breaking the expectation created previously, the message changes focus and concerns the level of commitment that the worker must have in order to achieve his goals, that is, to do so, he demands to demonstrate “willpower”. In this sense, Miani (2005, p. 100) highlights:

“The enticement by the feeling of autonomy, which externally creates an appreciation of self-esteem, becomes, at the same time, the tormentor of his own subjectivity: the worker's soul exposes itself as the target of a dispute by capital in the same movement carried out to establish increased control over work”.

Although we point out the problem of manipulation and capture of the worker's subjectivity by the logic of capital as the theme of the strips in the previous sequence, presenting passive or obedient workers, it is necessary to consider that the production conditions of the strips indicate that the discourse crossed by the narrative is much more pertinent as a denunciation of such a situation than as a mere exercise in entertainment.

Finally, as the last sequence of strips to be presented, three stories were selected that present as the “dominant text” some representation that explains a contesting attitude of the worker in relation to the situation faced.

Figure 6 - Sequence of comic strips about workers' objectionable attitudes



Source: Gilmar Barbosa (2002, p. 18, 91-90).

In the first strip of this sequence we have a worker who appears to be distressed, who reveals to a co-worker that he was stressed and who receives the comment that he should do something to feel better; the dialogue continues in the next table with the worker wanting to better understand whether his understanding was correct, to which he received a positive signal. The ending of the strip shows an unusual attitude of the worker destroying his colleague's computer, thanking her for the suggestion, and then showing a facial expression of relief and satisfaction. In the next strip, we have a sequence of three frames showing a worker carrying boards, nailing them and, finally, sawing one of them, always driven by a commanding voice saying “do it!” The unusual outcome presented in the last painting shows the worker with an indignant look, holding the saw in the position of use and, with the other hand, holding the finger at the ready that he was pointing at the entire time while giving orders; the immediate impression that derives from the image is that that worker intended to saw off that finger in reaction to the saturation suffered due to the orders received, even under the threat of another order, this time, “don't do that!”.

Finally, the last strip selected offers one of the most intriguing characteristics of the different types of graphic humor – in particular, those of an essay nature such as the cartoon, the cartoon and the comic strip – which is its ambivalence. The strip shows a relaxed atmosphere at work, when having coffee, and begins with a worker's comment to his colleague stating that professional success depends on what the person thinks as soon as they wake up; the logic of that reasoning continues in the second table, stating that it was an “excellent moment to reflect and make the most important decisions”. The unusual outcome is established when, in the last frame, that co-worker appears in his home, in bed, supposedly just as he was waking up, thinking about a decision to make in relation to a fly on the ceiling, that is, whether he should or don't kill her.

The ambivalence in this strip is established to the extent that the scene in the last panel could be a kind of flashback regarding what that worker thought that day or a previous day, which would lead him to become anguished and reflective in the face of his colleague's arguments. On the other hand, it is possible to consider that that scene in the third frame could have happened after that moment of conversation and, as a result, what would remain for the reader is an attitude of contempt for that type of thought expressed by the colleague, demonstrating resistance towards the attempt to be co-opted by the corporate interests of the company he works for.

Ultimately, there is unimaginable potential in a modest collection of strips – what can we say about the totality of strips published in the original section of “Ocios do Ofício” – when it presents itself as an object of study to unveil or understand the complex processes that involve the conflicts in the capital/labor relationship within a society marked by the logic of capitalist processes and values.

FINAL REMARKS

From the reading and analysis of the strips published in the collection “Cartuns & Humor: Ócios do Ofício” it was possible to verify that the work explores the multiple conflicts that exist in capital/work relations, expressing the contradictions and tensions in the relations between workers and employers, with emphasis on the difficulties faced by workers in the face of unemployment and/or other situations arising from the precariousness of their working and existence conditions. The strips also discussed the impacts on workers' health and their consequences in the family environment, as well as portraying some of the solutions and tricks found by workers to face daily challenges and to resist their condition of exploitation. All of this was permeated by satire and irony, exploring comedy and humor as constitutive elements of graphic humor modalities, particularly in this study, based on the comic strip.

Through the “Ócios do Ofício” strips, the main representation constructed of the Brazilian worker in the context of the capital/work relationship within capitalist society is that of a “survivor” subject, exhausted, stressed and passive in the face of multiple conditions of exploitation and domination to which he is subjected. The visual and verbal elements explored by Gilmar Barbosa, through multiple generic characters and lean scenic elements, collaborated in the construction of comic situations and/or helped to understand and problematize conflict situations in capital/labor relations as a phenomenon of an essentially social, permeated by the determinations of the socio-metabolic system of capital.

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